



## Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road Acton, MA 01720

978-264-4700

[www.abschools.org](http://www.abschools.org)

### Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting

March 7, 2024

Executive Session at 6:45 p.m./ Open Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Annual Budget Hearing at 7:05 p.m.

Return to Business Meeting at 7:20 p.m. (approximately)

Administration Building Auditorium To view only: <https://www.youtube.com/actontv1>

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### APPROVED MINUTES

Members Present: Ben Bloomenthal, Tori Campbell, Liz Fowlks, Lakshmi Kaja, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Vikram Parikh, Leela Ramachandran, Yanxin Schmidt, Andrew Schwartz, Rebecca Wilson

Members Absent: none

Others: Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Sheri Matthews, Andrew Shen

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1. **CALL TO ORDER** (6:45)

The ABRSC was called to order at 6:45 p.m. by Chairperson Adam Klein.

Members of the public who wished to watch the meeting online were invited to use Acton tv's youtube channel. Adam announced that the open part of the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website at actontv.org

Adam Klein stated the need to meet in Executive Session to be convened under MGL Ch 30A, sec. 21 (A) Purpose 3. To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Acton-Boxborough Education Association, the Acton-Boxborough Office Support Association, and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local#1703 if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares. He stated that the Committee expected to return to open session at approximately 7:00.

Vikram Parikh made the motion and Tori Campbell seconded. The Committee unanimously, **VOTED by roll call**: to enter executive session for the reason given.  
(YES: Bloomenthal, Campbell, Fowlks, Kaja, Klein, Kremer, Parikh, Ramachandran, Schmidt, Schwartz, Wilson)

2. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

### RETURN TO OPEN MEETING

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME** - *Adam Klein*

Members of the public were invited to watch the meeting online using Acton tv's youtube channel. It was stated that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website.

The Superintendent's Update was taken next, out of order, given the time.

### **FY25 BUDGET HEARING** (see separate agenda)

- Call to order (7:05)

The FY25 Budget Hearing was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Chairperson Adam Klein.

#### 2. **Chairperson's Introduction**

The public was encouraged to review the budget material posted for the February 15, 2024 School Committee meeting at

[https://www.abschools.org/school\\_committee/budgets/f\\_y25\\_budget](https://www.abschools.org/school_committee/budgets/f_y25_budget). It was noted that a vote on the proposed FY25 Budget and Assessments would be done at the next ABRSC meeting.

#### 3. **ABRSC FY25 Budget Overview - Peter Light**

Mr. Light gave a brief overview of the proposed budget noting that the B budget would only be considered if the override does not pass at the Acton Town Election.

The override is a 2 step process:

1. Acton Annual Town Election (Override Vote) is Tuesday, April 30th. It is a ballot vote.
2. Annual Town Meeting Approval in Acton on May 6th and Boxborough on May 13th.

#### 4. **Budget Feedback and Public Participation**

Gary Kushner, Boxborough Finance Committee asked that the Committee change their guidelines. A multiple year budget is needed for financial planning. Boxborough is at their levy limit and needs an override next year. Adam agreed and said that finance committee members will be invited to the next Budget Subcommittee meeting to discuss this.

John Petersen thanked Henry Morris and his AFSCME colleagues, Anne Chandler and the OSA members and Mike Balulescu and the ABEA teachers for working so hard with the administration to help figure out the Health Insurance Trust and financial issues so quickly.

#### 5. **Budget Hearing is Adjourned**

Ben Bloomenthal moved, Tori Campbell seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to adjourn the annual Budget Hearing at approximately 7:20 p.m.

### **RETURN TO BUSINESS MEETING**

#### 4. Discussion of ABRSD FY25 Preliminary Budget - *Adam Klein*

(FY25 Final Budget and Assessments Vote to be taken at next meeting on March 21, 2024)

Committee members had no further comments or questions about the A Budget.

#### 5. **CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME (7:30) - Adam Klein**

a. ABRHS Student Representative Update - Molly Norris '25, Julia Zhou '26, Diksha Mhatre '26, Nikhil Nomula '26, Jadon Yang '26 - none

The reps report monthly at meetings and share some student perspective on current events at the High School per policy JIB - Student Involvement In Decision-Making.

- b. Public Participation  
Per School Committee Policy BEDH, members of the public are invited to speak for up to 3 minutes regarding items that are not on the agenda. Two students spoke in support of the High School Resource Force's Climate Resolution and requested the School Committee's endorsement.
- c. Superintendent's Update - *Peter Light*  
Mr. Light updated the Committee on: Women's History Month, National School Breakfast Week, March Holidays, School News, FY25 Budget and the AB Resource Center - Suicide Prevention Training.

6. **GUESTS & PRESENTATIONS (8:00)**

- a. Culturally Responsive Practices - *Jennifer Faber*
  - i. Curriculum Update
  - ii. Teacher Leaders
  - iii. AB Resource Center - *Katie Neville*

Jen Faber began the presentation stating that In the District's ongoing commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment, it is imperative that we embrace culturally responsive practices in our instructional approach. This teaching acknowledges and respects the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of our students, ensuring that our instructional methods are effective and relevant to all learners. For the past two years, we have established a distributive equity leadership model with our Culturally Responsive Teacher Leaders (CRTL) to champion these practices at their schools. Currently, we have 20 CRTLs throughout the elementary and secondary levels and have focused our learning and application on key instructional practices from Zaretta Hammond's Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain. By embracing these and many other culturally responsive practices, as well as implementing instructional strategies that support the diverse needs of our students, we can create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment where every student has the opportunity to feel their own sense of belonging and success.

Committee members were very appreciative of this important work. There were questions and concerns about the impact if the override is lost. For this program to be effective, adults must listen to what the kids are saying, not necessarily asking their parents. How is success being measured? Surveys are sent to children and their families that focus on a sense of belonging. Even though some people look the same, their cultures can be very different. We need to expand our definition of "culture" because everyone has one. It's what makes people special. The Committee can help the community understand what this work is about. Not using culturally responsive practices actually creates barriers to academic achievement for students based on brain research. A member noted that people need to be paid appropriately to do this type of work.

Katie Neville, Executive Director of the AB United Way, updated members on the 6 month old AB Resource Center. The Center is open to all Acton and Boxborough residents, not just school families. Multilingual volunteers are available to assist. AB Exchange offers all kinds of clothing and other items with over 2,000 pieces distributed so far. Two drop off bins are outside the Admin Building for donations. AB Exchange is on the left and Textile Recycling is on the right for items the Center cannot accept. The Facilities department was thanked for their ongoing assistance. Members were extremely

appreciative of this important effort. The return on this investment for our families has been “tremendous”.

b. Student Opportunity Act (SOA) Plan - Initial Discussion - Dr. Deborah Bookis

Deb Bookis presented on behalf of the entire Leadership Team. The SOA requires districts to address a subset of initiatives, focused on evidence-based programs and strategies, that

- improve the educational experiences and outcomes of students, and
- focus on rapidly improving outcomes of students with low academic performance

SOA Planning and Timeline:

- December 2023: 2024 SOA Plan submission guidance launched to all districts
- January 2024: 2024 SOA Plan addendum guidance launched to priority districts (Not applicable for AB)
- February 2024: Link to online plan submission form shared with districts
- March 2024: School Committee must vote on the 2024 SOA Plan prior to plan submission April 1, 2024

We are required by DESE to do this every three years and do not receive any additional funding. Our 2021 SOA Plan focused on Early Literacy. For 2024, the Leadership Team identified “Chronic Absenteeism” as a priority area and selected the following student groups to focus on: Hispanic/Latinx, Black, Economically Disadvantaged, Multilingual, and Students with Disabilities. Members appreciated that chronic absenteeism was being addressed. This includes excused and unexcused absences for an entire day. While the State’s chronic absenteeism trended down after covid, AB’s has continued to go up. Junior High and High School are where we are seeing the most absenteeism. The Leadership Team is starting to talk with and learn from other districts/peers. Adam noted that this is another unfunded mandate (although extremely important) from the State because AB is in “hold harmless” status. We should reach out to our legislators about this lack of funding. Noting that the Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC) is an advisory committee to the District, Adam welcomed Amanda Bailey, SEPAC Co-chair to comment. Amanda pointed out that the District is “starting from behind” regarding chronic absenteeism because a driver for chronic absenteeism is trauma. Recent cuts as well as those included in next year’s budget involving supports for chronic absenteeism are very concerning.

7. **ONGOING BUSINESS**

a. **VOTE** to withdraw from the Acton Health Insurance Trust effective July 1, 2024 and transition to MIIA Health Benefits Insurance Trust - *Adam Klein*

i. Health Trust - *Andrew Schwartz, March 1*

Mr. Light referred to the memo in the packet. He thanked members of ABEA, OSA and AFSCME for their efforts. Andrew Schwartz updated on the Health Insurance Trust.

Vikram Parikh moved, Tori Campbell seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to move to approve the withdrawal from the Acton Health Insurance Trust effective July 1, 2024 and transition to Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA) Health Benefits Insurance Trust.

- b. **VOTE** to approve the Memorandum of Agreement with ABEA, AFSCME and OSA regarding transition to MIIA Health Insurance Trust - *Adam Klein*

Ben Bloomenthal moved, Tori Campbell seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to approve the Memorandum of Understanding with ABEA, AFSCME, and OSA regarding transition to MIIA Health Insurance Trust.

Mr. Light noted that although the vote to withdraw from the HIT would dissolve the Trust as of July 1, 2024, there would be a dissolution process of a minimum of 6 months but perhaps a year or two to fully pay out all the claims for HIT. We have a \$600,000 contingency fund set up for FY25 to cover this. Hopefully the rate increase will be sufficient.

- c. School Committee Communication Goal Update - *Adam Klein*  
Office hours have been held in the Acton Memorial Library and the Town Hall. Publicity will be increased. More coffees will be held, as well as joint sessions with the Selectboards. Rebecca held a meeting at the Acton Senior Center with SelectBoard member David Martin.
- d. Subcommittee and Member Reports
- i. Budget Subcommittee - *Rebecca Wilson, March 4*  
Continued talking about budget and revenues and the B Budget plan. Will be connecting with Selectboards and Finacoms of both towns to invite them to meetings.
  - ii. Acton Leadership Group - *Tori Campbell, Rebecca Wilson, March 4*  
The Selectboard decided to put the override on the ballot for April 30th. Discussed keeping \$1M in untaxed levy capacity of the \$6.6M override to hopefully avoid another override in the near future.
- e. Consent Agenda/Action Items - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*
- i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of [2-29-24](#)  
Ben Bloomenthal moved, Tori Campbell seconded and it was unanimously,  
**VOTED**: to approve the ABRSC minutes of 2/29/24.
- f. Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve **3-7-24** - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*  
Rebecca Wilson moved, Tori Campbell seconded and it was unanimously,  
**VOTED**: to approve the warrants (see motion language).

8. **ADJOURN** (9:30)

Ben Bloomenthal moved, Tori Campbell seconded and it was unanimously,  
**VOTED**: to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:30 p.m.

**FYI-**

Student Enrollment - 3-1-24

Community Coffee 3-15-24 8:30 a.m. (virtual)

[Acton](#) and [Boxborough](#) Town Election Calendars

NEXT MEETINGS: March 21, 2024 and April 4, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. in the Administration Building Auditorium

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: agenda, agenda item summary pages, Budget Hearing slides, Culturally Responsive Practices Memo and slides, AB Resource Center memo and slides, Student Opportunity Act Plan memo and slides, Requested Vote to Withdraw from Acton Health Insurance Trust and join MIIA memo, Memorandum of Agreement between ABEA, AFSCME, OSA and the ABRSD, Draft ABRSC meeting minutes of 2/29/24, Statement of Warrants dated 3/7/24, Student Enrollment 3/1/24, Acton and Boxborough Town Election Calendars