

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Minutes (approved 1/12/17)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

November 17, 2016
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Amy Krishnamurthy, Maya Minkin (7:05 p.m.), Paul Murphy (7:05 p.m.), Kathleen Neville, Maria Neyland, Kristina Rychlik, Eileen Zhang
Members Absent: Deanne O’Sullivan
Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Glenn Brand, Clare Jeannotte, Beth Petr

1. **Chairman’s Introduction**

Chair Mary Brolin called the ABRSC to order at 7:01 p.m.

2. **Statement of Warrant & Approval of Minutes**

2.1. ABRSC Meetings of 10/20/16 and 11/3/16 (*next meeting*)

2.2. The warrants were reviewed and signed by the Committee members. See attached list.

3. **Public Participation - none**

4. **FY17 School Improvement Plans Presentations**

4.1. *Acton-Boxborough Regional High School –*

Principal JoAnn Campbell presented with Associate Principal Beth Baker, Counseling Department Chair Jen Gabel, teacher Michael Csorba, parent Ken Olson, and students Sela Matarese and Heather Zambarano. Amy Krishnamurthy appreciated that High School Administrators are looking at alternative assessments and considering different learning styles. Eileen Zhang asked about homework. Andrew Shen said that in the Junior High, homework is the same across the wings, with all classes sharing homework online. Eileen commented that in the High School, different teachers give different homework and assessments. For example, in her opinion, the 3 honors classes should give similar homework so it is standard according to the levels. High School teachers also have very different assessments. Brigid Bieber appreciated hearing requests to help with time management, because this has so much to do with the stress. Kristina Rychlik thanked the team for a terrific presentation. She appreciates that they are looking at practices at the High School but also teaching students skills to learn how to deal with the real world. She stated that not all stress is bad and there is stress in the real world that people have to handle. It was noted that if there are fewer assessments, the ones that are used are weighted more.

4.2. *Gates School –*

Principal Lynne Newman and Assistant Principal Priscilla Kotyk presented.

Eileen Zhang said that her children benefited from the structure at Gates and were very well prepared for the Junior High. She hopes that with homework changing now, and the focus on reading, students will still be prepared. She disagrees with no homework, especially at the 6th grade level. Lynne Newman replied that the School Council includes a Gates 6th grade teacher and they talked a lot about homework. All homework is posted on a shared document so all teachers can see it. The staff was shocked that children reported spending 1 – 4 hours per night on homework in a survey done last year. This year math homework is optional. Teachers are not seeing any decline in achievement with no required math homework, and that was surprising. Teachers want to be sure the rigor is done in the classroom. If students are given rigor via homework done at home, and they need the teacher, they do not do well because they do not have the same support. Kristina Rychlik said that that an example of the schools’ report cards would be helpful. Lynn will share hers.

5. **FY16 ABRSD Auditor Report** – *Clare Jeannotte, Richard Sullivan, Powers & Sullivan*

5.1. Management Letter, 6/30/16

5.2. Report on Examination of Basic Financial Statements for Year Ended 6/30/16

5.3. Reports on Federal Award Programs for Year Ended 6/30/16

Auditor Richard Sullivan presented. Because this was Powers & Sullivan’s first year working for the District, a lot of time was spent talking with staff and learning our systems. He appreciated how cooperative everyone was and felt that the process went very smoothly. The business office was “audit ready” when he came in. Clare Jeannotte and Margaret Dennehy were focused on the questions and issues. Mr. Sullivan reviewed the Basic Financial Statements Report and said budgetarily all was sound. The Report on Federal Awards reviews all federal grants. The ABRSD was determined to be a “low-risk auditee”.

Mr. Sullivan described the Management Letter as always “critically constructed”. While there are no instances of internal control issues, they cited several opportunities for strengthening internal controls and operating efficiency. Two of them are informational – additional Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) statements for pensions and OPEB are coming. They recommended that an effort be made to synch the two personnel systems currently used by HR and payroll to eliminate some of the manual effort now required. They suggested capital asset accounting could be simplified. Since 2013, more emphasis is on fraud risk assessment, so they recommend that all of their clients look into all of the key elements of their organization where there might be a concern and ask, “Is our risk tolerance acceptable?” A Fraud Risk Assessment Program should be established. The letter recommends monitoring aging outstanding checks, including creating a written policy concerned uncashed checks based on current State laws. Given new Federal grant requirements implemented last year, the District agreed to ensure that grant requirements are properly documented in the District’s procedures manual.

Mr. Richards emphasized that the Committee should be comfortable that his firm looked at the fiscal operations and found a high level of competency. He stated that Director of Finance, Clare Jeannotte, was doing an excellent job as far as the audit areas were concerned. It was his “unqualified opinion” that the Committee should be proud of the results of the audit.

When asked by a Committee member to repeat such a positive comment, Mr. Richard stated, “You are trying to balance the \$80 million in funding that you have, with the services you want to provide. These results mean whomever is putting together the budget, they are nailing it.”

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to accept the auditor’s FY16 report as presented.

6. **FY17 1st Quarter Financial Report** – *Clare Jeannotte*

Overall, revenues are tracking fine against the budget, assuming \$200,000 E&D as voted. A net increase of \$31,358 is expected in grant revenue. As of 10/31/16, 81.4% of budgeted expenditures were expended or encumbered. Clare is watching workers compensation and has some concerns. In response to a question, she said no information has been received yet on savings from the Net Metering Agreement that was signed last year. It is supposed to be built in early spring.

7. **FY18 Budget** – *Glenn Brand, JD Head*

7.1. FY18 Budget Planning Calendar (no changes from previous version)

7.2. Capital Planning

7.2.1. Update Memo from the Superintendent – *Glenn Brand*

7.2.2. ABRSD Capital Requests – *JD Head*

JD Head and Dr. Brand presented on the short term, medium term and long term capital needs that the District has been studying. The District’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) has identified over 800 items to be addressed. Some of the items on the CIP Summary Sheet have already been completed. The District

does a lot of regular maintenance that helps with many of these items. The summary breaks down the \$121 million price tag as estimated by Dore & Whittier. On the Solid Projects by Location chart, the Douglas, Gates and Conant expenses (with exception of the Conant corner issue) would not be needed if a building project was done to address those schools.

At this time, JD Head is focused on the FY18 Short List, which does not include Administrator requests. All of these short list items are priority #1. JD mentioned the gym floor at the Junior High as an item that the community has identified as needing replacement, but after inspection, Dore & Whittier listed it as priority 2.

Amy Krishnamurthy is concerned about the surface on Leary Field being beyond its life expectation, and possibly making kids more prone to injury. Maria Neyland asked why Leary Field lights are not on the short list. After last year's inspection of all light poles (after one fell over unexpectedly), she asked about the life expectancy of the poles that remain. JD responded that none showed any signs of immediate rot, but the District was told that it is time to replace them. Ideally he would like to package them together and address but he is not sure where to go with it right now. He is confident that they are safe, although you don't know about how weather can be. Maria is concerned because it is safety issue. Dr. Brand replied that the structural integrity of all of the poles was tested and compared to the other priority items, it was decided not to include it as a priority #1.

Kristina Rychlik was at the Department of Public Works Building recently for a meeting (where buses go for gas) and noted that the space is big enough to bring a large vehicle in. JD agreed to talk to the Town of Acton to see if perhaps a shared agreement could be considered. She appreciates signage on the school campus that is clear and consistent.

Diane Baum asked whether some of the Administration Building renovations could trigger code requirements. JD said the number in the chart is to bring the Admin building up to code. Eileen Zhang asked where playground equipment fit into these categories. JD acknowledged that there has been much talk about this for years and playgrounds often fall into grants, PTOs, volunteers and other funding sources. Due to priorities, and sources, they are typically not a regular budget item. This budget recognizes this liability and has some funding in it, but just for maintenance, not for new structures or improvements. Eileen noted that students play on the playgrounds every day and Conant has been raising money for years for their playground. The Gates student council is raising money to fix their basketball court right now. She wants to see playground equipment inside the budget. JD agreed that it would be wonderful to do that but because there are other funding sources for these kinds of items, the District tends not to budget for them.

8. **Recommendation to Approve FY18 ABRSD School Calendar** –*moved to 12/1/17 meeting– Marie Altieri*
 - 8.1. Calendar Survey and Recommendations Memo
 - 8.2. Proposed FY18 School Calendar DRAFT #1A (unchanged, no school on Good Friday & Rosh Hashana) and #1B (NEW)
 - 8.3. Proposed FY18 School Calendar DRAFT #2A (unchanged, no school on Good Friday & Rosh Hashana) and #2B (NEW)
 - 8.4. Spring 2016 Survey Results
 - 8.5. Acton Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) Contract Language
 - 8.6. Massachusetts and Federal Legal Holidays 2017

Marie Altieri urged the Committee to review the material in the packet and said the ABEA has agreed to a side letter if needed. It was agreed to discuss this item at the next School Committee meeting.

9. **ABRSD Master Plan Study Update** – *Glenn Brand*
 - 9.1. Master Plan Study Report Presentation Flyer – rescheduled from 11/9/16 to **12/8/16** at 7:30 p.m.

9.2. Grade Configuration Memo - Deborah Bookis

The research is not straight forward so it is somewhat limited. She recommended review of Wayland and Weston's reports. There is no universal optimum plan for grade configuration. Mary Brolin noted that the last comment from the visioning group was spot on about 6th graders fitting into elementary schools at the start of the year, but shift to junior high mentality about half way through the year. Paul Murphy asked if on page 3 of the memo, those who favor the split and those that do not, be separated out, specifically the 6-8th grades. Kristina Rychlik appreciated the articles saying that when people start talking in the community about these options and topics, this research will be needed to explain and "sell" the ideas, if appropriate.

9.3. Updated Working Group Memo – Glenn Brand

Dr. Brand stated that the next stage is "What to do with the final report". If the District is invited in to the MSBA process, (will know by February), we will have until April for clarity regarding which options the community has no interest in pursuing. He proposed an option for how to pull together this new subcommittee and proposed timeline for this next stage. He referred the Committee to the form from the MSBA that outlines how the Building Committee must be formed, when it gets to that stage. It could be a cross over with the Working Group instead of two different groups.

If invited into the MSBA process in February, the District will have to have made a grade configuration decision because if the decision is made to do something outside of the current configuration, that could change the trajectory with the MSBA. An example would be if there was a strong belief in doing a middle school project, and the District had submitted an elementary school project. That would be an issue. Kristina noted that everyone should be aware that the District Master Plan is aggressive, overlaps with the budget, and involves the administration heavily in both. She advocated for one group, not a Working Group and a separate Building Committee.

Mary Brolin feels the proposed March deadline is very aggressive. Dr. Brand explained that this was based on the School Committee meeting calendar. Meetings could be added for more time. The Committee agreed to discuss and decide on the proposed District Master Plan Review Committee (DMPRC) at their next meeting.

9.4. Update on Final Report from Dore & Whittier – *by end of this month or beginning of December.*

9.5. Recent articles in the Press:

9.5.1. *MSBA Officials Visit Douglas Elementary School*, The Beacon, 10/27/16 page A8

9.5.2. *School District Master Plan: A Breakdown*, The Beacon, 11/3/16 page A3

10. **Recommendation to Approve Gift Agreement between Acton Boxborough Youth Lacrosse (ABYL) and ABRSD for an Outdoor "Bounce Back Wall" – VOTE**

Dr. Brand recommended that the Committee pass over this item until the next meeting. He feels the donor and the District are in a place of agreement but the revised Memorandum of Understanding was just received and the Committee needs to see what has changed and needs time to process it. He would like to vote it at the next meeting so work could begin before the winter weather. Mary Brolin noted that in the current proposal, if the agreement were terminated in the first 15 years, ABYL would need to restore the site. She would like that deadline extended to avoid liability to the District.

11. **Recommendation to Approve Gifts from Booster Clubs to ABRHS Athletic Department – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

Paul Murphy moved, Maria Neyland seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve these gifts from the Booster Clubs

12. **Recommendation to Approve Gifts from Danny's Place Youth Services and AB United Way for the Family Learning Series - Mental Health: Keeping Our Kids Safe Presentation – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

Paul Murphy moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was

VOTED: to approve the gifts for the Family Learning Series as presented. (Amy Krishnamurthy abstained.)

13. **Recommendation to Approve High School Nordic Ski Team Trip to Quebec – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

Paul Murphy moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the High School Nordic Ski Team Trip.

14. **Recommendation to Acknowledge the Boxborough Board of Selectmen's Preferred Technical High School Options for Vocational Education for Boxborough Students Commencing with the 2017-2018 school year – First Read – Mary Brolin**

Mary explained that the Town of Boxborough will provide transportation to these three schools if students choose them. The DESE requires that the Regional School Committee vote the preferred schools. There were a number of schools considered and three recommended schools were chosen by the Boxborough Board of Selectmen.

15. **Subcommittee Reports**

15.1. Budget – 11/9/16 meeting – Maria Neyland reported on the latest meeting.

15.2. Policy -

15.2.1. Head Injury Management, File: JJIF – Second Read – **VOTE** - Dawn Bentley

Brigid Bieber moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the Head Injury Management policy revision as proposed.

15.2.2. Staff Ethics/Conflict of Interest, File: GBEA – Second Read – **VOTE** Marie Altieri

Maria Neyland moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the Staff Ethics policy revision as proposed.

15.2.3. Gifts to and Solicitations by Staff, File: GBEBC – Second Read – **VOTE** - Marie Altieri

Marie intends to distribute this information broadly to families and staff to help them understand the rules around gifts, particularly at this time of year.

Paul Murphy moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the Gifts to and Solicitations by Staff policy revision as proposed.

15.3. Outreach (including PTO Co-chairs) – 11/16/16 meeting - Kristina Rychlik

A survey monkey will be sent to see what people think about the monthly updates. Many of the School Committee liaisons have been asked to come to PTO meetings so outreach developed slides (based on the Acton TriBoard Meeting for them to use. Beth will provide paper copies if that form is better.

Deanne O’Sullivan and Diane Baum met with the PTO cochaIRS. They reviewed the last monthly update, which was very popular.

16. **School Committee Member Reports**

16.1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) – Amy Krishnamurthy, Paul Murphy

16.1.1. Meeting on 11/10/16

16.1.2. Acton Three-Board Meeting on 11/15/16 – Amy Krishnamurthy

including Acton Finance Committee’s Point of View Document (POV)

16.2. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) – Mary Brolin

BLF would like a TriBoard meeting scheduled.

16.3. Minuteman Technical High School (MMT) Update – Diane Baum

16.3.1. Intergovernmental Agreement Between MMT and ABRSD – Preliminary DRAFT

With Boxborough leaving the MMT District, this program will be funded differently in FY18.

Dr. Brand stated that the intention is to provide this program to all of our students, no matter what town they are from. The assessment will come directly to the District, not the Town as it does now. This would increase our budget but it would be cost neutral to the Town. Clare

Jeannotte suggested that tuition be paid quarterly. On page 1, #1, the word “All” was questioned as not every student participates, although virtually all do. Dr. Brand will share these comments with MMT.

16.4. Acton Capital Improvement Planning (CIP) Update – *Kristina Rychlik*

See comments under Capital discussion. Kristina shared the bucket slide with this group and a general list of the high priority items. She asked the members to look at this posted School Committee packet.

17. Superintendent’s Report/Updates – Glenn Brand

17.1. Superintendent’s Wellness Committee & Safety Task Force Updates –

Dr. Brand reported on these groups as well as the new Superintendent’s Council that met that day. Minutes are being taken and will be shared.

17.2. Letter to Commissioner Chester re MCAS 2.0 – Second Read - **VOTE**

Maria Neyland moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve and send this letter as presented.

A Committee member asked about the “Start Times” discussion and when it will be brought to the community. Dr. Brand responded that he was given the mandate to bring it forward in the fall. Amy Krishnamurthy voiced frustration that this change may not happen for another year and a half. Kristina Rychlik felt our timeline was very ambitious.

18. FOR YOUR INFORMATION

18.1. **Family Learning Series Presentations:**

December 1, 2016, 7:00 - 8:30 PM with Presenter: Michelle Icard

Topic: *Middle School Makeover: Improving the Way You and Your Child Experience the Middle School Years*

Location: ABRHS Auditorium Audience: Grades 4-8

December 14, 2016, 7:00 - 8:30 PM with Presenter: Jessica Minahan

Topic: *Reducing Anxiety in Students*

Location: RJ Grey Auditorium Audience: Grades PK-12

The ABRSC adjourned at 9:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda, list of warrants

NEXT MEETINGS:

- December 1 – ABRSC Meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library (packet posted Mon, November 28)
- December 15 – ABRSC Meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library (packet posted December 9)