



## 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

September 21, 2023 Open Meeting 7:00 p.m.

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

---

### APPROVED MINUTES

Members Present: Ben Bloomenthal, Tori Campbell, Lakshmi Kaja, Adam Klein, Vikram Parikh (7:02 p.m.), Leela Ramachandran, Yanxin Schmidt, Andrew Schwartz, Rebecca Wilson

Members Absent: Liz Fowlks, Ginny Kremer

Others: Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Sherri Matthews, Beth Petr, Andrew Shen

---

1. **CALL TO ORDER (7:00)**

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairperson Adam Klein.

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

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

a. Public Participation

The Committee announced a change in the process for Public Participation. All comments regardless of whether they are on or not on the agenda will be heard during the public comment section of the meeting. This is still in line with Policy BEDH. This will allow the public to make comments and ask questions prior to any presentation on the agenda and it could allow for the committee to consider and/or address that during their deliberation. It was also mentioned that this will facilitate a more efficient meeting. Adam welcomed feedback about how this process was working.

Comments from the public included:

- More discussion by Committee members and less from the public during the meetings would be better to ensure the Committee can fully discuss issues.
- Regarding the battery boxes, there are always risks involved but they are manageable with Nexamp's oversight. The battery storage system is an important part of eliminating carbon from the atmosphere. It was clarified that tonight's vote was only to extend the lease that had already been voted by the Committee. A member of the public felt the Committee did not have all the necessary information to make decisions.
- Mike Balulescu - Acton parent and President of the AB Educators Association (ABEA) called attention to the lack of air conditioning (AC) at Blanchard, Conant

and the Junior High during the recent very warm weather. Students struggled to learn effectively and staff had a hard time teaching. As a public school, it is our duty to provide safe, healthy conditions for students and teachers. The need for universal AC cannot be ignored. We must find a way to fully fund our schools. Frank conversations with our taxpayers are needed.

b. Superintendent's Update - *Peter Light*

Mr. Light shared information on: ParentSquare texts/emails delivery, Yom Kippur holiday, Hispanic & Latinx Heritage Month, DiwaliFest, Mental Health Webinar for Families and Caregivers: Addressing School-Related Anxiety and School Avoidance - October 4, ADL Walk Against Hate - October 15, Seal of Biliteracy, ABRHS Special Olympics Designation, School Visits for Committee members, School Committee Items Through January 2024, AB Resource Center Ribbon Cutting, and Community Coffees with the Superintendent and School Committee Chairperson.

3. **GUESTS & PRESENTATIONS**

a. [Staffing Update](#) - *Andrew Shen*

Seven new administrators were hired, including new principals for Douglas, Gates and Merriam. Two senior admin positions were eliminated as part of the FY24 budget. Forty five new certified staff members were hired. Despite a goal that by September 2024, educators who identify as non-white would account for 10% of our certified staff, we are less diverse than we were one year ago, hovering at 6% non-white educators. Next steps include: Spotlight on retention strategies - gather feedback from former and current staff, expand the role and scope of BIPOC Affinity Group and related activities, and continue with expanding recruitment strategies (MPDE membership).

4. **ONGOING BUSINESS**

a. School Committee Communication Goal Update - *Adam Klein*

- Two more members are needed for the Committee's table at Oktoberfest 9/30
- Members need to check their AB email at least once every other day.
- The recent memo was shared with local boards and committees as well as Boxborough and Acton Newspaper Initiative.
- Attendance and timely arrival at subcommittee meetings is crucial for the quorum. A good part of the Committee's work happens at these meetings. Someone should be assigned to take minutes using the template provided.
- The Walk Against Hate is October 15th.

b. [Extension of Lease Option](#) Deadline for the Battery Storage System at Boardwalk Campus - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*

Mr. Light noted that the proposed update to the Lease Option is found in pages 1-6. The remaining information was voted by the School Committee in June 2022. This aspect of the project is critical to achieving the district and community's net zero goals. The signed Solar and Energy Storage Services Agreement (SESSA) governs the production and sale of electricity from Nexamp to the District. Counsel and the

Superintendent recommend that Nexamp's Lease Option Agreement (LOA) be extended to December 4, 2023. When the original contracts were signed, the building was under construction and the rooftop and canopy areas were not ready for geotechnical work or equipment installation. The original LOA expired on August 3, 2023. This geotechnical work was performed in August and the District is waiting to review the testing results. If site conditions are not satisfactory, changes to the Project's design regarding location or size may need to be considered. The proposed First Amendment to the LOA would allow Nexamp and the District to review the results of the geotechnical work and any required changes in Project design before moving forward. Nexamp is also going through the required permitting processes with the Town of Acton right now and the Board of Health has requested additional information. The District has contracted with the Energy Safety Response Group to review our safety plans and respond to any incidents.

Committee members' significant questions and comments included,

- It is very difficult to vote to extend the lease when the geotechnical results are not in and the safety evaluation is not completed.
- What is the probability that the proper footings won't be found? Mr. Light replied that about 20 spaces are being checked. It is not just one area.
- A no vote on this lease extension would stop Nexamp from moving forward. Right now the District buys electricity from the grid at full price and significantly higher than what we would pay when this project is completed.
- Financial costs if the Board of Health requires future modifications, or for support energy if the grid goes down, cannot be estimated yet.
- These projects are critical to achieve net zero carbon. We have made a commitment to the community that this will be a net zero school building. It is very difficult to not have all the information right now, but the State is stringent on regulations. Acknowledging the "very real concerns", many processes are in the works and people are looking at the issues. A member was "not comfortable stopping that process". Several members strongly encouraged a YES vote.
- Would not extending the lease bar the District from tax credits? It would kill this portion of the project, but it does not mean it couldn't go in a different direction.

Adam concluded that the Superintendent and the Building Committee and consultants have worked hard on all of the questions. He and Peter have talked at length about all of these issues and the Administration is actively working on them. Per the goal of being open and upfront, letters went out to all abutters to keep them as informed as possible.

Lakshmi Kaja moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was,

**VOTED**: to approve the First Amendment to the Lease Option Agreement and authorize the Superintendent to sign it.

(YES: Bloomenthal, Campbell, Kaja, Klein, Parikh, Schwartz, Wilson

ABSTAINED: Ramachandran, Schmidt)

c. Subcommittee and Member Reports

i. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) - *Rebecca Wilson, 9/7/23*

Members discussed what the town of Acton is facing in terms of balancing the budgets for both the Town and the District going forward. The possibility of an override and the timeline of deciding if one is needed were key topics. Community members will be notified asap if an override is coming, hopefully a year ahead of time. We also need to know what an override looks like, and how it impacts the citizens and taxpayers of Acton. Members will continue to work closely together to make sure they are both fiscally responsible and doing their duty to our community members. Next meeting will be October 2nd at 8:30am at the Town Hall in a hybrid setting.

ii. Health Insurance Trust (HIT) - *Andrew Schwartz*

Yanxin Schmidt was welcomed. End of Year finances were reviewed:

- Following a trend of the last 3-4 years of losses, we anticipate an end of year loss of around \$1.82 million
- Still dealing with the Harvard Pilgrim data breach
- Starting to realize the benefit of a revised method for acquiring rebates and discounts from our prescription benefits manager

Looking to the future, both long and short term, a presentation for additional cost savings was provided by our partner Gallagher Benefit Services that included PBM optimization, Medicare migration, and cash management optimization. A First Responder Prevention Program was introduced that would provide preventative care and services for the community's first responders. Next meeting will be September 28 at 8:15AM.

iii. School Resource Officer (SRO) Subcommittee - *Rebecca Wilson, 9/12/23*

Members discussed the information gathered and plans for the presentation at the School Committee meeting on December 7th. Each member was responsible for researching a particular aspect of the SRO program and sharing it with the larger group. Discussion included community surveys, historical data, current trends, and possible alternative approaches. We are analyzing this information, and will bring a recommendation for the School Committee to vote on in January. Next meeting will be October 10th at 6pm at the Administration Building, room 23, in a hybrid setting.

iv. Policy Subcommittee

No meeting due to lack of a quorum.

v. Budget Subcommittee - *Rebecca Wilson, 9/18/23*

An FY24 update centered on the continued need to fund and support special education and ELL students, as this population of students grows. This will be tackled with careful use of Circuit Breaker funds.

FY25 will be another challenging budget. Although investment revenues are increasing due to rising interest rates, several curriculum coordinator positions have been cut at the admin level, and there is a real need to maintain the ones that remain to continue work around literacy goals and MTSS. Maintaining level services in FY25 will not be easy. To fulfill our promise to the children in our two towns, and support the staff that facilitate these necessary programs, we need to find a way to bring in more money. The school funding model is fundamentally broken. Members discussed that a multi-pronged approach of organizing to push for change at the state and federal level, as well as clear and open communication with the citizens of Acton and Boxborough will be necessary. The recently released Annual Report clearly details the budget challenges, as well as the changes to the community in terms of demographics. Next meeting is October 2nd at 3:30pm on Zoom.

- vi. Capital Subcommittee - *Ben Bloomenthal, 9/20/23*  
Discussion focused on key aspects of capital infrastructure, as well as the 2024 capital budget, addressing crucial allocations for school buildings and improvements. The implementation of electrification projects, the installation of air conditioning systems in schools and Conant's asbestos remediation were also considered. These initiatives underscore the subcommittee's commitment to enhancing the learning environment for students while ensuring efficient resource allocation in the coming year. Next meeting is October 11<sup>th</sup> at 7:30am.

- d. Consent Agenda/Action Items - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*
  - i. Approval of [ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 9/7/23](#)
  - ii. Annual Authorization-[JH Student Activity Funds/Clubs & Activities](#)
  - iii. [CT Douglas PTO Projected Spending/Donations for 2023-2024](#)Leela Ramachandran moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the consent agenda.
- e. [Statement of Warrants](#) and Recommendation to Approve - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*  
Rebeccah Wilson moved, Tori Campbell seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the warrants (see motion language in memo)

## 5. **ADJOURN**

Ben Bloomenthal moved, Vikram Parikh seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to adjourn the ABRSC at 8:37 p.m.

## FYI

- Monthly Student Enrollment Report, [9/5/2023](#)

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: agenda, agenda item summary pages, Staffing Update memo from A. Shen 9/21/23 and presentation slides, Boardwalk Campus Battery Storage Lease Option Extension memo from P. Light 9/19/23, Extension of Lease Option Agreement for Solar Contract for Douglas Gates Elementary New Building from J. Wall (Anderson Kreiger) 9/19/23, Draft First Amendment to Lease Option Agreement for ABRSC Review 9/19/23, Solar Contracts for Douglas Gates Elementary New Building memo from J. Wall (Anderson Kreiger) 6/13/22, Solar and Energy Storage Services Agreement Execution Copy June 2022, Draft Minutes of ABRSC meeting on 9/7/23 B. Petr, Annual Authorization of Student Activity Funds/RJGJHS memo from J. Marcotte 9/11/23, C.T. Douglas PTO Projected Spending Donations for 2023-2024, Statement of Warrants memo from S. Matthews 9/1/23 (Note: The warrant memo from the previous meeting was inadvertently read.), Monthly Student Enrollment 9/5/23

NEXT MEETINGS: October 5 & October 19 at ABRSC at 7:00 p.m. in the Administration Building Auditorium