

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

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

December 1, 2016
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Maya Minkin (7:02 p.m.), Paul Murphy, Kathleen Neville, Maria Neyland, Deanne O'Sullivan, Kristina Rychlik, Eileen Zhang (7:02 p.m.)
Members Absent: Amy Krishnamurthy
Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Glenn Brand, Clare Jeannotte, Beth Petr, many members of the public regarding the school calendar

1. **Chairman's Introduction**

Chair Mary Brolin called the ABRSC to order at 7:00 p.m.

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

- 2.1. ABRSC Meeting minutes of 10/20/16 and 11/3/16 were approved as written by the Committee. Minutes from the meeting on 11/17/16 will be reviewed at the next meeting.
- 2.2. The warrants were reviewed and signed by the Committee members. See attached list.

3. **Public Participation - none**

4. **FY18 Budget Pres. #1- "Setting the Stage/Superintendent's Budget Overview – Drivers & Priorities" – Glenn Brand, Clare Jeannotte**

In response to the significant projected increase in workmen's compensation for FY17 and FY18, Mary Brolin asked if the two towns' workmen's compensation premiums were significantly decreased since regionalization. Clare Jeannotte has been following up on this. Marie Altieri thanked Clare for her efforts to work through this situation. Marie believes the FY15 and FY16 numbers were artificially low and now this could be catching up. There were costs that should have been included this year that were not per Marie. Brigid Bieber asked if that means the District has a problem this year to absorb the FY17 projected amount compared to budget. Clare confirmed that that is true and she is reviewing it. The District may be able to spread it out over a few years, although she would rather not do that. She hopes that health insurance savings may be able to absorb this hit. (See slide 20)

Regarding Slide 11, Clare stated that as of 12/1/16, the E&D amount of \$2.7M was certified and is not an estimate. Dr. Brand thanked Marie for slide 25 showing K-12 Enrollment. Referring to slide 26, they emphasized that there are definitely more students in our schools from economically disadvantaged homes, not just low income, now and the District must address this change. A change in this definition affected the numbers somewhat.

Paul Murphy referred to slide 29 showing Three Year Projections for Budget Annual Growth. He asked if in projecting 2018, 2019 and 2020, after hearing about the increases in Out of District placements, is there any kind of accounting for that kind of phenomenon? Clare responded that this was an outlook based on a lot of assumptions. Some students have moved back into our district, or been able to stay in-district, who may have had to go out of district in the past for their required services. There are also some students that age out during the year. The administration tries to track this closely. Projections for the FY18 budget are based on the FY17 budget. Slide 29 is just a model.

Kristina Rychlik asked what the rationale for the 3 year time frame of \$250,000 short term capital funding increases was. Dr. Brand said there was nothing specific about 3 years, other than full recognition that short

term capital needs are now viewed as a liability and reinvestment in capital needs to be enhanced in a measured way. The \$250,000 figure is an arbitrary number right now and needs to be fully discussed by the School Committee. Kristina stated that given where the District is now with the capital budget and where they need to be, the Committee might consider moving this from 3 to more years. She emphasized that it would be so much better if the District could pay with cash in hand as opposed to bonding. Dr. Brand reminded the Committee that in the next couple of months, they will know if the District is invited into the MSBA process that will determine a lot in this area. Clare confirmed that the suggested increase is \$250,000 per year, going from \$250,000 to \$500,000 to \$750,000 for the 3 years.

Paul Murphy said that after seeing JD Head's Capital Report, he thought there was a priority to, rather than build the budget on assumed numbers, the District should look at JD's spreadsheet and use those numbers (tied to specific projects), not arbitrary numbers like in tonight's document. Dr. Brand responded that this has been a multi-year effort and the intention is to do this in a manageable way. The District can't work with arbitrary numbers, Paul is right, but we are trying to do this in an incremental way that is manageable.

Mary Brolin asked if the Administration has let the Town of Acton know about the cut to their budget regarding Minutemen Technical School, that will come back to them through the assessment. Finance Committee member Steve Noone spoke from the audience saying that they know.

Brigid Bieber summarized that looking at the big budget drivers, aside from capital, there really isn't anything brand new, except for the workmen's compensation issue. The District has to do capital and maintenance work and other issues like OPEB, E&D, etc have to be dealt with, but she asked everyone to keep in mind that there are no new educational initiatives being proposed.

5. **FY18 Revolving Budgets and Fees – First Read**

5.1. **Athletics** – *Steven Martin – no fee change proposed*

Paul Murphy asked if the drop in participation was across the board. Steve Martin replied that it is a different sport that drops each year, with seemingly no reason to him. Deanne O'Sullivan appreciated that fees will stay the same and asked what Steve's goal for hitting the family max was. He can provide a spreadsheet for that.

5.2. **Carole Huebner Preschool (Early Childhood Program)** – *Dawn Bentley - 3.5% increase proposed* This program has not had an increase since FY14. The Committee appreciated the comparison data.

5.3. **Occupational Development Program (ODP)** – *Dawn Bentley - 3.5% increase proposed* The proposed increase represents anticipated staff salary increases.

5.4. **All Day Kindergarten (ADK)** – *Marie Altieri – no fee change proposed*

All Day Kindergarten was handled by Community Education until this year. It is now handled by the Human Resources department. Marie Altieri explained that complex planning that goes into this program, including anticipating how many families will want All Day Kindergarten and what schools have space for the classes. Flexibility in planning is very important.

Kristina Rychlik noted that ADK expenses now cover 64% of the students. She asked if Marie could extrapolate the cost if the District wanted to do universal Kindergarten for all students. This would be a significant budget addition. Paul Murphy asked the Committee to keep in mind that not all parents want to send their children to kindergarten for a full day. Clare Jeannotte confirmed that the ADK revenue surplus is a special revenue account restricted to the ADK purpose.

6. **Class Size and Section Planning Report**

6.1. **Elementary Schools** - *Marie Altieri*

Marie Altieri emphasized this is a plan and some numbers may shift based on actual student enrollment. FY17 average class size K-6 is 22.4 students, however the following grades are over Elementary Class Size Policy this year: kindergarten, grade 2, grade 3 and grade 6. Two proposals for next year are to add a 1st grade class,

and move the Blanchard ½ Mixed Grade to full 2nd and full 3rd grade classes. There are space concerns about how to address the large 3rd and 4th grades.

Diane Baum appreciated the growth per grades data. Marie noted that some of the growth was unusual. Peter Ashton's data re the housing turnover was surprising and that affected this grade information. Our policy has a range of students, due to this kind of thing. Kristina Rychlik stated that it is unfortunate that despite all the work re class size guidelines, we are still above them in four elementary grades. The tag line of declining enrollment is that we need to change this class size problem and our overcrowded schools. Dr. Brand said that the space issue is significant and needs attention. Capital concerns are important, but space for programs is as well. We have an increased number of smaller programs over the years and this requires space. Brigid Bieber asked for the numbers, back to FY07 when there were 36 sections across the schools and class size numbers were higher too. She would find this helpful if it was not too much trouble.

6.2. High School – *JoAnn Campbell, Principal*, Tina Vanasse, ABRHS Data Manager, Larry Dorey, Associate Principal

Deanne O'Sullivan appreciated all the work that went into all of this data. She suggested that doing the averages for the levels as a range instead would be clearer, even though it is shown lower down in the documents. Larry Dorey agreed. He said more than anything, the four 47 minutes lunches really affect class size because it then pushes many kids to periods 1, 2, and 8. Maria Neyland agreed with Deanne's point of class range. The School Committee has to justify not making cuts and they need averages and the ranges. People outside of the school community, who are funding the budgets, need to know this. Larry said that a lot of this is educating parents around course selection as well. Administrators try to predict those changes the best they can, but it is much better to be able to appropriately place students at the beginning. It's just one more piece of this complicated puzzle. The Committee discussed the issues of placements, overrides and expectations. Maria suggested that Challenge Success may help with this. Kristina said that statistics for kids who override and are successful might be helpful to publicize to Junior High families. Larry would include "and what correlates to that success". An example is overriding one class instead of 4 or 5. He stated that it is a good thing to challenge yourself as a student, but it's about balance.

6.3. Junior High – *Andrew Shen, Principal*

RJ Grey enrollment had been declining steadily since 2009-2009 until this year. Currently there are 911 students. Another increase is expected next year, and then another decrease is anticipated. Because of the teaming structure, it is sometimes hard to compare class sizes. Andrew Shen described the changing profile of his students, including those with mental illness, those receiving general education support and the growing Emergent Bilingual students and their levels of need.

7. **Minuteman Technical High School Update (MMT)** – *Mary Brolin*

7.1. 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 – **Second Read - VOTE** – *Mary Brolin, Andrew Shen*

Andrew Shen clarified the difference between Acton and Boxborough R.J. Grey Junior High students who are interested in a technical high school because Acton belongs to the MMT region and Boxborough now does not.

Diane Baum moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was,

VOTED: that the ABRSC acknowledge that the Boxborough Board of Selectmen's preferred technical high school options for vocational education for Boxborough students are Assabet Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School, Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical High School, and Nashoba Valley Regional Technical High School and further that the Acton Boxborough Regional School District will provide information and support the application process for Boxborough students for these three designated schools commencing with the 2016-2017 school year. (Kristina Rychlik abstained.)

7.2. Intergovernmental Agreement Between MMT and ABRSD – *Glenn Brand (next meeting)*

Because the District's counsel has not seen this revised agreement proposal yet, this will be discussed at the next School Committee meeting. MMT has signaled how they want to proceed to ensure the program continues at our Junior High and they have given Dr. Brand the numbers needed for budgeting.

8. **Recommendation to Approve FY18 ABRSD School Calendar – *First Read* – Marie Altieri**

8.1. Calendar Survey and Recommendations Memo

8.1.1. Spring 2016 Survey Results

8.2. Proposed FY18 School Calendar DRAFT #1A (no school on Good Friday & Rosh Hashana) and #1B

8.3. Proposed FY18 School Calendar DRAFT #2A (no school on Good Friday & Rosh Hashana) and #2B

8.4. Acton Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) Contract Language

8.5. Massachusetts and Federal Legal Holidays 2017

8.6. Discussion of "Indigenous Peoples" Day vs. "Columbus Day" on 10/9/17

8.7. Acknowledging Religious Holidays, Policy and Procedures, File: ACD

Marie Altieri reviewed the options. She has a side letter signed by the ABEA if needed. The recommended start date is Option 1. The variations in the two calendars are about the religious holidays. Mary Brolin asked the Committee to consider: 1. Start date 2. Religious holidays 3. Whether or not to change the name of "Columbus Day" to "Indigenous Peoples' Day".

1. Start date

There was much consensus for Option 1 given that it addresses the choppy start to the school year that has been an issue in the past. Kristina Rychlik voiced appreciation for the teachers' flexibility and all of Marie's work.

2. Religious Holidays:

Virtually all School Committee members expressed views on this topic. Comments included:

- There are many different religious holidays that our students and staff celebrate.
- No one is asking for all of the religious holidays off, it depends on the nature of the observance.
- Too much staff would be missing if we had school on Good Friday and the Jewish holiday(s). Not enough substitutes would be available for coverage because they are also observing the holidays. A member felt the School Committee should not let staffing determine how they vote on this.
- If school were held, it would not be a meaningful educational experience due to absences.
- By having school on these days, it levels the playing field for all students.
- Much frustration that this amount of discussion has to occur every year about this topic.
- Several members stated they could relate to both sides of this discussion.
- Several members asked what appropriate ways to acknowledge all of the religious holidays might be. They cannot all be listed on the actual school calendar. A list from the state is currently referenced on our calendar and the list is supposed to be distributed/posted with it.
- The Committee often hears from families who do not want kids to miss a day of school. It's important for students to learn how to advocate for themselves and explain why they are missing.
- Practicing one's faith is part of mental health and wellness.

Marie said that they won't actually know about the staffing level until it happens. If over 100 teachers were out, that would be significant. The Administration would do their best but it would not be a strong educational day. Mary Brolin read comment from Amy Krishnamurthy in her absence.

Rabbi Lewis Mintz from Temple Beth Elohim in Acton spoke from the audience. He appreciated that the Committee was taking this question so seriously. For him the prime issue is not to look upon having no school on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur as somehow showing unequal recognition of one faith community over others, or even of the significance of a particular holiday, but rather the nature of the observance of the holiday and the impact it has on the schools. People will make the choice of whether to send their child to school or not, but due to the nature of the observance of certain holidays, they have to be with family and in

temple or church. It has nothing to do with the sanctity. These holidays are observed during the day and therefore do impact the school day. He suggested that if a holiday does not impact school, like Hanukkah or the month of Ramadan, the school does not need to consider it. Rabbi Mintz concluded by suggesting that the administration should publicize the Acknowledging Religious Holidays policy and procedures so all understand it. Another member of the public stated that to have a level field, you would have to go to school on Christmas. He moved to town because Acton gives the Jewish holidays off for his family. He reiterated that the Committee needs to look at the observance level of the holiday because that is what is important in the discussion.

3. Indigenous Peoples' Day

Kathleen Neville explained her proposal. Brigid Bieber had not really thought about this before, and said there is a lot of information about it now. Schools and even states are starting to recognize it. She supports this as a good idea. Paul Murphy agreed. Mary Brolin works at Brandeis and this year for the first time they had an indigenous teaching day. It was "incredibly" well received by the students. They are learning more and more about the real history. Some of the details of this resolution are painful, but she supports this change saying that "it opens up opportunity for more education". Diane Baum had never heard of this but learned that the United Nations General Assembly designated August 9th as this day. Seattle and Portland have added this to Columbus Day to create a more complete picture, rather than replace "Columbus". Kristina Rychlik stated that it is still called Columbus Day on the Massachusetts Secretary of State's Legal Holiday list, and the Federal list, so we are required to have it off. She suggested that the Committee could still call it something different.

Deanne O'Sullivan asked about the survey results that said that 50% of parents wanted to go from two weeks of school vacation to one week. Due to the issues around testing schedules, the Committee had decided not to discuss this. Marie Altieri added that there is contract language that says staff vacation has to be the February and April weeks. The staff survey said 80% – 20% that they wanted to leave vacations as is.

9. **ABRSD Long Range Strategic Plan – Third Read - VOTE – Glenn Brand**

9.1. Memo and Proposed Plan, September 2016 (revised 11/21/16)

9.2. June 2016 Survey Results

9.3. Long Range Strategic Plan 2011 – 2016, updated Spring 2014

Minor edits had been made to the wording since the last meeting. Diane Baum noted that currently only the mission statement appears out in public, not the values and vision. The District has not had a vision but once this is finalized, Dr. Brand will publicize all of it.

Paul Murphy moved, Kathleen Neville seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the Long Range Strategic Plan.

10. **ABRSD Master Plan Study Update – Glenn Brand**

11. Establishment of "District Master Plan Review Committee (DMPRC)" as a School Committee Subcommittee, *see 11/15/16 memo – VOTE*

Dr. Brand proposed this new subcommittee to review the options in the new District Master Plan Report, and provide recommendations to the School Committee by the March 2, 2017 meeting. If the District is invited into the MSBA process, within 60 days a Building Committee will have to be established. If the School Committee decides to put this DMPRC in place, this could become the Building Committee.

Mary Brolin agreed that it is a good idea to have this develop into the Building Committee because there will be a lot of information to process and finding volunteers with architectural/engineering and construction experience could be hard. Kristina Rychlik asked if thought had been given on how to gather input from community members. This will be complicated and cannot all be done using a survey.

Diane Baum moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the new subcommittee as proposed.

Volunteers will be solicited and it is hoped that membership can be voted on at the next School Committee meeting.

- 11.1. Master Plan Study Report Presentation Flyer – rescheduled from 11/9/16 to **12/8/16** at 7:30 p.m.
- 11.2. Update on Final Report from Dore & Whittier

12. Recommendation to Approve Gift Agreement between ABYL and ABRSD for an Outdoor "Bounce Back Wall" – VOTE - Glenn Brand

Mary Brolin asked that “November” be changed to “December” in the first sentence. On page 2, Mary asked for clarification about what happens after 15 years (the “Term of the project”). Brigid reported that JD Head said that the District should take over maintenance on the wall after 15 years. Mary had misunderstood thinking it meant the wall would come down. Eileen Zhang asked if after 15 years, this project could end up like some school playgrounds where parents/PTOs have to take care of it. Mary replied that the cost after 15 years would be minimal per what Brigid said, and it should be in the school budget.

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

VOTED: to approve the Gift Agreement between the ABYL and ABRSD as amended.

13. Recommendation to Approve Donation from Littleton Electric Light Department to Blanchard School – VOTE – Glenn Brand

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

VOTED: to approve the donation from Littleton Electric Light Department with gratitude.

14. Recommendation to Approve Grant from Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Agency (MIIA) – VOTE – Glenn Brand

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

VOTED: to approve this grant from the MIIA.

15. Recommendation to Appoint Beth Petr as ABRSD Public Records Access Officer and Marie Altieri as Records Custodian – VOTE – Mary Brolin

- 15.1. Updated Public Records Laws, effective 1/1/17 - <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prenotice.htm>

Paul Murphy moved, Kathleen Neville seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to appoint Beth Petr as ABRSD Public Records Access Officer and Marie Altieri as Records Custodian.

16. Subcommittee Reports

- 16.1. Budget – *11/9/16 meeting – Maria Neyland (oral)*
- 16.2. Policy - *Brigid Bieber - none*
- 16.3. Outreach (including PTO Co-chairs) – *Kristina Rychlik – no meeting*
 - 16.3.1. November 2016 Update

17. School Committee Member Reports

- 17.1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) –
 - 17.1.1. Minutes of 11/10/16 meeting
- 17.2. Acton Board of Selectmen – Eileen Zhang reported that Chair Peter Berry said the community will work with the schools to do whatever they can regarding the recent student tragedies.
- 17.3. Acton Capital Improvement Planning – Kristina Rychlik reported that they are meeting at 7 prior to next Thursday night’s Master Plan Presentation.

18. Superintendent’s Report/Updates – Glenn Brand

- 18.1. Director of Finance Search Announcement

Clare Jeannotte has announced her plans to pursue other opportunities at the conclusion of the school year. As ABRSD Director of Finance, Dr. Brand noted that Clare has played a key role in supporting the District and the Finance Department through the regionalization transition, as well as being instrumental

in helping to establish the internal operations of the department for the PreK-12 region. Dr. Brand has engaged the New England Staff Development Council (NESDEC) to help oversee the search for her replacement.

In light of recent vandalism in Harvard, MA, Dr. Brand was asked if he has seen an increase in bullying or that kind of behavior. He has not. There is a public gathering of support on Sunday in Harvard.

19. FOR YOUR INFORMATION

19.1. Family Learning Series Presentations:

19.1.1. 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

19.1.2. 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 10:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: See agenda and list of warrants

NEXT MEETINGS:

- December 15 – ABRSC Meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library (packet posted December 9)
- January 12 – ABRSC Meeting at 7:00p.m. in the Jr High Library (packet posted January 6)
- January 21 – ABRSC Budget Saturday Meeting in the Jr High Library