

**ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School

March 5, 2009  
7:30 p.m.

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*Members Present:* Jonathan Chinitz, Brigid Bieber, Michael Coppolino, Heather Harer, Xuan Kong, Sharon Smith McManus, Maria Neyland, John Petersen, Bruce Sabot

*Also Present:* William Ryan, Susan Horn, Marie Altieri, Liza Huber, citizens

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The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by Jonathan Chinitz, chairperson.

**CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION**

- Jonathan Chinitz announced that 'Issues of the Committee' would be discussed first.

**ISSUES FOR THE COMMITTEE**

- Letter from the Acton Education Association  
Jonathan Chinitz read a letter from AEA President, Marc Lewis, regarding AEA's interest in 'engaging in a dialogue with the you about ways our membership can be part of the (economic) solution.' Heather Harer thanked Marc and the AEA executive board for offering to help. The committees will discuss a response during executive session later this evening.
- Administrators Benefit Package Review  
Michael Coppolino referred to the minutes of the Administrative Benefits Review Subcommittee meeting (1/17/09) and proposed language changes to the Administrators Benefits Manual: 1)modifying Article 2 - Vacation Time, 2) a proposal to remove Article 3.3 regarding longevity bonuses, and 3) proposed changes to Article 7.1, Professional Development and Educational Improvement.  
Discussion: Heather Harer asked what other surrounding, comparable districts offer. Michael Coppolino referred to spread sheets about this from MASC. He doesn't recall any such bonuses, such as Article 3.3. John Peterson asked about the Superintendent's role in determining administrators' salaries. Bill explained that when Ed Reform came in, Unit B (administrators bargaining unit) was disbanded. That is when Article 3.3 came into existence, and the language is probably taken from the Unit B benefits manual. The School Committee does have authority as to what is in the Administrators Manual. But practically the Superintendent determines administrators' salaries. Marie Altieri added that some of that language is taken from teachers' contract, as well as some M.G.L. language. She has some administrators' manuals from other towns, if anyone is interested. Limited sick leave buy back is common. Several have longevity bonuses for administrators. John Petersen asked that the language be cleaned up in the Administrators Benefits Manual re: responsible parties. John also asked about the value of having December 1 as the retirement notification date vs. an earlier date. Marie said it was very valuable to have a early date, maybe October 1 is even better, so we can start the hiring process early and get the best people. John Petersen suggested having a better incentive for those staying over 10 years, and he hoped to hear administrators input on that. We need to have appropriate compensation from the point of view of both parties.
- Catherine Suess spoke on behalf of the elementary school principals, noting that other comparable districts have assistant principals, and it seems that our elementary principals are doing double duties. She added that she hates to see removal of any benefits.
- Bill Mullin, a member of the subcommittee, commented that he hoped the Committee would endorse the proposed changes. Many towns they surveyed had no retirement benefits in the administrative contract. We don't want people to retire. He noted that with all the leaves, vacation times and holidays, the contract is very favorable. We have a covenant to take care of children and our employees. We also have a covenant that is paramount - with our taxpayers - without them we have nothing. He said we need to try to control our costs. These changes in the contract would be a strong, tangible message to taxpayers that we are being conscious of hard times.

- Brigid Bieber said she looks at this as a package deal and it is what administrators buy into. It is not right to make bilateral decisions without input from other parties.
- Michael Coppelino said they met with several administrators recently to hear some of their concerns. He reported that they were more concerned with the reduced salary raise (3.75% to 1.5%).
- Heather Harer felt the changes were less of a problem with new hires, but difficult to change the contract for existing administrators. It would be a mistake to quickly endorse the changes, and we need more process.
- Sharon McManus agreed. She was concerned about the course reimbursement piece – she suggested not giving a dollar amount, but allow people to take one course a semester, for example. She was OK with the vacation section. She was concerned about attracting new people to the system.
- Bruce Sabot observed that this is not a forever contract, and the committee can review it and make changes. He said that administrators get the same increase as teachers. They are doing very well. Most people don't get pensions anymore. He was in favor of incenting people for doing a good job. He felt the vacation and professional development proposals were fair.
- Bill Ryan noted that changes in the manual could be made anytime, but should be changed by July 1 in any given year. Each administrator has a 2 or 3 year rollover contract.
- Marie Altieri said that anyone who would have gotten a bonus with his or her current contract would still be eligible to get it.
- Xuan Kong stated that the changes are appropriate and he thanked the subcommittee. He urged completion of the changes by June 30.
- Michael Coppelino said that taxpayers dollars should be spent on students, not on administrators' bonuses. It is not just that times are tough – this was also brought up in good times. It is not his intent to hurt individuals, just trying to help taxpayers.
- Heather Harer and Brigid Bieber said they had no problem with new employees but need to bring in current administrators to negotiate changes.
- Jonathan Chinitz felt that the focus of benefits to administrators should be to create a positive, rewarding working environment that they can be proud of and would encourage them to seek long-term employment with us. At seven years, we should try to keep those administrators for another seven or eight years. Current language is skewed in the other direction. We need to restructure the manual so it works for both of us. There is an arbitrary cutoff now, due to Ed Reform coming in. We need to fix it and we will. He finds restricting vacation time to one year too restrictive. Regarding course reimbursement, it is probably not good to have a number that is not tied to anything. Administrators are not abusing the privilege and we want them to take courses. Jonathan proposed that we put changes to the contract on a fast track (in 2 weeks or before Town Meeting) and try to sit down with administrators and address some of these issues and work new language into the manual, with appropriate benefits going forward. We owe it to the taxpayers before the new budget year starts. Jonathan, Marie and Bill will pull together a group of administrators. Marie Altieri thought all the material gathered by the subcommittee should be shared with whole committee. She noted that an important piece of this is the teachers' contract, since the two contracts do relate, and we should consider both before finalizing, and there should be full Committee executive session about the teachers' contract. Jonathan Chinitz asked that the packet of information gathered by the subcommittee be sent out as soon as possible – electronically, where possible. Maria and Sharon asked for paper copies. Further discussion will be held at the March 26 joint executive session. Jonathan Chinitz and Sharon McManus volunteered to work on this issue.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of February 5, 2009 were approved as read.

### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** - None

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

#### **1. ALG/Acton Finance Committee Report**

- Sharon McManus reported on the FinCom meeting. The CPC proposal is on warrant, and the FinCom approved all items. The Acton Voters Group presented resolutions and warrant articles for Acton Town Meeting. Sharon said it would be good for school committee members to review, also

copies of the FinCom's reserve policy doc. should go to all school committee members. The capital articles were approved for town meeting, and next week the FinCom will vote on the school budgets.

- Jonathan Chinitz reported on ALG – they will lower the collective use of reserves down to \$2M, and lower our budgets as well. ALG meets again on March 9. Jonathan referred to two ALG models – 3.5% and 4% increases. He said that for FY'11 and FY'12, if we used no more than \$2M of reserves, and external revenues remain constant, and budgets go up 3%, we would have \$3M in reserves in FY'13. This does not take into account any increase in Chapter 70 or stimulus money. More discussion on this topic at next ALG. They will also discuss what pots of money will be used by Town Meeting.

## 2. **BLF Report**

- No report - the FinCom Fin will meet on March 14<sup>th</sup> to make budget recommendations and the School Committee will meet shortly thereafter.

## 3. **FY'09 Budget Update**

- Bill Ryan reported no significant changes – expects to turn some back to E&D at the end of the year.

## 4. **FY'10 Budget Discussion**

- Bill Ryan reported on the EDCO meeting he attended. Every district is using the House 1 budget assumption (level funding of Chapter 70) for budgeting. By March 18, we should have concrete guidelines on SPED IDEA – stimulus money K-12. The money is available over a two-year period. There will be stimulus money for school construction. The feeling is that it is unfair to use stimulus money to fund SBA projects in cue, as there is already a system to do that. General sense is that money should be used to fund other than SBA projects. Looking to invest in things that will make a difference. They are talking about promoting regionalization as a cost saving measure. Bill said we have reduced our budgets by \$200K (less out of our reserves/E&D). Now the AB budget is up only 1.9%, lowest in many years. Assessments remain the same, but we are using less E&D. The state is giving towns more money for SPED IDEA, and also to support SPED in general at a higher level.
- Bill Ryan asked the Committee to vote the revised AB budget recommendation

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

**VOTED:** The Administration recommends that the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010 be set at \$37,400,504 and that member towns be assessed in accordance with the Education Reform Law and the terms of the Agreement and amendments thereto as follows: Acton \$23,417,707, Boxborough \$6,130,091, remainder to be accounted for by the Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$6,517,912, Anticipated Charter School Aid in the amount of \$39,300, Transportation Aid, Chapter 71, Section 16C in the amount of \$768,337, a transfer from E&D in the amount of \$450,000, a transfer from the Junior High School Project Premium on Loan in the amount of \$658, and a transfer from MSBA Reimbursement for Legal Services in the amount of \$76,499.

## 5. **Health Insurance Trust Report** – no report

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### 1. **Recommendation regarding Participation in School Choice, 2009-2010**

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

**VOTED:** To approve the administration's recommendation to participate in School Choice for 2009-2010 by accepting only siblings of existing Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools' Choice students, and current 6<sup>th</sup> grade Choice students from the Blanchard School in Boxborough, who will be entering RJGrey Junior High School.

**2. Recommendation to Approve ABRHS Trip to Spain, April 10-24, 2010**

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

**VOTED:** To approve the ABRHS Trip to Spain, April 10-24, 2010.

**3. Recommendation to Approve ABRHS Varsity Baseball Trip to Cape Cod, March 27-28, 2009**

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

**VOTED:** To approve the ABRHS Varsity Baseball Trip to Cape Cod, March 27-28, 2009.

**4. Recommendation to Approve ABRHS Band Trip to Orlando, FL, December 28-31, 2009**

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

**VOTED:** To approve the ABRHS Band Trip to Orlando, FL, December 28-31, 2009.

**FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

- The Superintendent referred to several items.

**NEXT MEETINGS:** March 26, 7:30 pm, JH Library  
May 7, 7:30 pm, JH Library

The AB meeting continued in Joint Session at 9:40 pm.

The Committees went in to Joint Executive Session at 10:45 pm

At 11:50 pm, the Joint Executive Session was adjourned, and the Committee returned to open session to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sarah T. Lawton, Secretary