

JOINT
ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES (Approved 10/1/09)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

September 3, 2009
7:30 pm

Members Present: Sharon Smith McManus, Xuan Kong, Brigid Bieber, Michael Coppolino, Terry Lindgren, Maria Neyland, John Petersen, Bruce Sabot
Absent: Jonathan Chinitz
Also Present: Marie Altieri, Susan Horn, Liza Huber, Stephen Mills, Sharon Summers, Beth Petr, citizens

The joint meeting was called to order at 7:40 p.m. by Sharon McManus and Xuan Kong, respective Committee chairs.

They mentioned how hard it can be to hear the meeting when viewed on TV from home. Members were asked to be sure that their microphone is turned on and that they speak clearly. Terry Lindgren asked what it would take for us to solve the audio problems.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

- New Teacher Orientation took place 8/26. Steve Mills welcomed 25 new certified staff and lots of support was visible. Some Committee members came for lunch. Steve thanked all who contributed to the successful day.
- First Day of School Report – an exciting start to the school year. Steve Mills visited all of the schools and many classrooms by the end of the second day. It was a very smooth opening, thanks to all.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

APPROVAL OF MINUTES - none

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

UNFINISHED AND NEW BUSINESS

1. Special Education Presentation on 2008-09 School Year & PAC Survey Report

Nancy Sherburne and Bill Guthlein, SpEd PAC Co-Chairs, presented. They referred to the blue folders distributed to Committee members at the last meeting on 8/6/09, as well as to a new overview of this year's plans. The SpEdPAC goals are similar to last year. Some new fundraising will be tried in an effort to help with the tight budgets. They will work with Liza Huber on this.

Two principal findings resulted from the PAC's recent survey: 1. The families with children with autism are substantially less satisfied. 2. Those with clearly identified disabilities were very pleased. Bill noted that it seemed like when these two groups were combined, most people were pretty happy. Parents of younger kids were less satisfied than those with older children. Bullying questions continue to be high priority. Parents really care about a more comprehensive program to address it. Concern regarding bullying and the autism group's dissatisfaction were the two key survey findings. Liza Huber has produced an action plan.

There is some excitement about a focus group for autism families. The PAC appreciated how seriously Liza took the survey results.

John Petersen thanked Nancy and Bill for providing their report in advance, and for the quality of their analysis. Mike Coppolino and Xuan Kong are willing to continue serving on the Sped PAC board.

2. FY'09 Final Budgets

Steve Mills talked about closing out the fiscal 2009 budget. The regional budget was able to turn back \$524,000 to E&D and the local school budget turned back almost \$400,000 to free cash. Bill Ryan realized the storm was coming and tried to prepare for it. Several cost saving measures were also implemented for this year: 1. Freezing of positions unless approved by the Superintendent. 2. All supplies, materials, and discretionary spending accounts had a 5% spending freeze. 3. New co-pays and additional health insurance migration provided significant savings. The total region and local saved \$924,000. He's concerned about this year and the Governor's budget. Steve thanked Bill and the staff for how they so prudently closed the books last year.

3. ALG/FinCom Update

Sharon McManus reviewed:

- Minutes of June 15 and July 29, 2009
- September 2 ALG Meeting Packet

Yesterday's ALG meeting was postponed. Marie talked thru the orange addendum DRAFT spreadsheet for FY10. Bottom line is a \$600,000 deficit. Marie and Steve met with town officials and they thought they'd go into meeting with a \$200,000 adjustment in overlay and potentially decreasing the Regional assessment by \$400,000. Terry Lindgren wanted to start talking about FY 2011 and 2012. These big picture numbers are very volatile at this time and will be discussed at ALG next week.

4. FY 10 Budget

Steve Mills discussed the Budget Deficit for FY 2010 and said that he needs School Committee members' thoughts. He has eliminated one position in Central Office already. Given the history of the health insurance accounts we hope to save some money budgeted to actual there. Also the ARRA orange handout shows the following "FY'10 Recommended Use of ARRA Federal Fiscal Stabilization Grant (Chapter 70)" for APS = \$203,458. for ABRSD = \$247,120 for a total of \$450,578 (K-12). Applications must be submitted to the government by November 2, 2009. The funds can be spent in FY 10 or the first three months of FY 11 through September 30, 2010. He proposed to solve the school side part of \$500,000 per his purple memo.

Two big reasons not to cut people/staff now is that it is very disruptive to students, and the staff members would not have enough notice to find other jobs. This results in unemployment costs which we'd like to avoid by cutting positions, not people as long as we can do so. Steve will be finalizing these plans with the School Committee over the next few months.

5. Acton Finance Committee

Acton Finance Committee member, Bill Mullin presented "Interim FinCom *Point of View* with Respect to FY 2010 or "The 97% Solution". He invited School Committee members and the public to comment.

The Acton Finance Committee believes that in order to weather the upcoming financial uncertainties:

- The operating entities should implement programs so as to operate at a level of 97% of the approved FY10 budget (the 97% solution).

They are highly confident that local aid will be cut, and if it is not the savings allows for a flow through to free cash. By planning ahead and acting now, this lead time can minimize sharp reductions that could otherwise be required when the financial cuts are announced.

This recommendation was voted on unanimously by the FinCom. It is something that we can do to make sure education is delivered in the most appropriate way. Bill acknowledged the great work that our staff is doing and how difficult this is to do.

John Petersen appreciated that Bill came to express the gravity of the situation. He agrees that this isn't a one year issue. "We need to think about 3 years, at least, where we should expect very significant cuts."

Terry Lindgren agreed with John and asked that Dr. Mills share his thoughts in October about what general things the Committee should start to consider.

Brigid Bieber appreciated the big picture presentation, but cautioned about hitting the panic button. She noted the benefit to have Steve looking at this situation with fresh eyes.

Sharon McManus said that at the next meeting the Regional Committee will be asked to revote the original budget to cut \$500,000 in order to reduce the Acton assessment by \$400,000.

Tess Summers checked the law and noted that this does not require another Town Meeting vote because the budget is being reduced.

ISSUES FOR THE COMMITTEE

1. Response to Open Meeting Law Complaint

The Committee will respond within the time limit to address the latest complaint dated 8/27/09.

2. Approve and Charge Negotiating Subcommittee

Acton-Boxborough:

It was moved, seconded, and unanimously

VOTED: That the Acton Boxborough Regional School Committee appoint a joint negotiations subcommittee consisting of three voting members: School Committee members John Petersen, Terry Lindgren and Brigid Bieber, as well as non-voting member Director of Personnel and Administrative Services Marie Altieri. The joint negotiations sub-committee is charged with acting as the School Committee liaisons during the upcoming negotiations process with the School Collective Bargaining Units. The joint negotiations subcommittee will report back to the School Committee on a regular basis.

Acton:

It was moved, seconded, and unanimously

VOTED: That the Acton Public School Committee appoint a joint negotiations subcommittee consisting of three voting members: School Committee members John Petersen, Terry Lindgren and Brigid Bieber, as well as non-voting member Director of Personnel and Administrative Services Marie Altieri. The joint negotiations sub-committee is charged with acting as the School Committee liaisons during the upcoming negotiations process with the School Collective Bargaining Units. The joint negotiations subcommittee will report back to the School Committee on a regular basis.

3. District Comparison

Mike Coppolino shared information that he compiled from the Dept of Education website regarding district comparisons. He emphasized that just looking at per student expenditures doesn't tell you everything. School choice adds transportation costs. It could be worth spending some time on software to look at bus rates. Westford funds their own transportation, even for Out of District students. The professional development costs on the last page are interesting. John felt that the small amount that we spend on Professional Development is "embarrassing". Terry said MASC provides lists of competitors that could draw on staff applicants. Mike will give us more information next month on this.

Xuan agreed that it's important to really look at our cost model and be sure we are comparing "apples to apples". Brigid asked what the goal was. Members agreed that there are two goals - 1) to identify 8 or so communities that look like us for real comparison with regards to contract negotiations and 2) to see what "best practices" are being used by other communities to achieve lower costs. Mike volunteered to work on this activity and ask a few others to help, including Terry.

4. Internet Safety

A letter was sent to the School Committee members from the Acton Education Association (AEA). In it, Marc Lewis requested the Committee to craft a policy to address the "growing issues of slander and harassment over the Internet".

Steve Mills talked to Marc and volunteered to be on the committee himself. Sharon also volunteered. This is a taskforce established by the superintendent and led by Liza Huber, as it fits perfectly with her anti-bullying goal and must be a coordinated effort. Electronics have raced ahead of our policies. The school system has no tolerance for this type of outrageous behavior that is hurtful to students as well as staff. This task force can address these elements.

NEXT MEETING: September 17th - APS SC at 7:30 p.m. at the Gates School

At 9:27 p.m. the joint committee meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr,
Secretary