

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES (approved 12/3/09)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High

October 1, 2009
7:30 pm

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

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm by Sharon Smith McManus.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

The Superintendent welcomed the new ABRHS School Committee representatives: Lily Wang, Henry Neale, Ellery Pruett, Akash Shah, Devrie Stellar, and Betty Yang.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of August 6, 2009, #1 of 5, were unanimously approved as presented. Xuan Kong and Maria Neyland abstained because they did not attend the 8/6/09 meeting.

The minutes of August 6, 2009- Exec Session, #2 of 5, were unanimously approved as presented. Xuan Kong and Maria Neyland abstained because they did not attend the 8/6/09 meeting.

The minutes of September 3, 2009 were unanimously approved as presented. Jonathan Chinitz abstained because he did not attend the 9/3/09 meeting.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

The following warrants were signed by the chairperson and circulated to the rest of the Committee for signatures: Warrant #10-006 in the amount of \$1,681,853.47 and #10-007 in the amount of \$1,893,137.45.

John Petersen noted that if it seems like the warrants are being signed without review, it is because they are now being circulated electronically prior to the meeting. He thanked Tess Summers for making the warrants available electronically.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

EDUCATION REPORT

The Junior High and High School will do 10-minute quarterly reports instead of one annual report this year.

Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Principal Alixe Callen highlighted:

- Blue Ribbon School Award – Dr. Mills congratulated Dr. Callen and her staff, students and families on this very prestigious award. On Nov 2 and 3, she will go to Washington, D.C. with Jerry McDonald, the SWAP Coordinator and English teacher, who is very dedicated to this program and process.
- NEASC – An intensive self study is the next step. Class size and teacher load will be a concern. AB’s site visit is Oct 3 – 6, 2010. All reports will be public and will be shared.
- Class Count Summary - Dr. Callen said, “Classes are too large.” There is a difference depending on the course, level, and pedagogy so it’s hard to say what is ideal. Our average English teacher has 108 students. It takes 50 hours to grade one assignment. National Science Teachers say there should be no more than 24 kids in a science class. We have 31 classes over that number. World Language classes are similar. AE and honors classes are larger and we have decided that that is a choice we have to make. There are 522 students currently in 11th grade as well as over 500 in the 8th grade. We are using almost every classroom every period right now. Deciding how many sections of what levels of a subject is the challenge.

Dr. Mills referred to the NEASC handout (page 20) and said that the visiting committee will mention bullet #8: “The community and the district’s governing body shall ensure an adequate and dependable source of revenue to provide and maintain appropriate school programs, personnel, services, facilities, equipment, technological support, materials, and supplies for student learning.”

Dr. Callen explained that teaching is no longer about sitting in a classroom. It’s about critical thinking, arguing, coming to conclusions, and communicating in all subjects. This really impacts what teachers can do. Teachers can go elsewhere and teach less students in other towns.

John Petersen said that school safety has to be paramount. He asked if there have been any safety issues. Dr. Callen said that a piece of sodium metal went missing from a classroom last year. There have been some accident reports in science, but it’s hard to say if they were related to class size, but it probably does have an effect. Outside organizations are telling us what the class size numbers should be, particularly in science, and we are not close.

The RJG Junior High School report was postponed due to illness.

At 8:10 p.m. Xuan Kong, chair of the Acton Public School Committee, called the Local Committee to order to begin the **JOINT MEETING**.

JT APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of August 6, 2009 #4 of 5, were unanimously approved as written. Xuan Kong and Maria Neyland abstained because they did not attend the 8/6/09 meeting.

The minutes of August 12, 2009 (JT Executive Session) were unanimously approved as written. John Petersen abstained because he did not attend the 8/12/09 meeting.

The minutes of August 27, 2009 were unanimously approved as amended to include Jonathan Chinitz as attended. Bruce Sabot abstained because he did not attend the 8/27/09 meeting.

The minutes of August 27, 2009 (JT Executive Session) were unanimously approved as amended to include Jonathan Chinitz as attended. Bruce Sabot abstained because he did not attend the 8/27/09 meeting.

The minutes of September 3, 2009 were unanimously approved as written. Jonathan Chinitz abstained because he did not attend the 9/3/09 meeting.

APS STATEMENT OF WARRANT

Warrant #201006 in the amount of \$257,103.95 was signed by the chairperson and circulated to the rest of the Committee for signatures.

JT UNFINISHED BUSINESS

8:25 1. Solar Panel Plan

J.D. Head has completed the bid and bid evaluation process and presented his recommendation that APS and ABRSD move forward with two projects as proposed by NexAmp, a solar vendor from N.Andover (<http://www.nexamp.com>). No capital investment will be required from APS or ABRSD. PV panels will be installed on our buildings by NexAmp and they will own and maintain the system. We will purchase the electricity produced by the panels at a discounted rate. A conservative estimate suggests that we will save annually on average over the term of the contract \$12,000 in APS and \$12,500 in ABRSD. This would be a 20 year commitment if we agree to this.

JD hopes to have the High School and Junior High running by the end of November. Douglas' panels would be installed after a new roof is done in July. John Petersen will draft a letter with JD for the Committee's review to send to our legislators saying that it makes no sense for us to pay a distribution charge when we own the equipment.

Acton-Boxborough School Committee:

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To approve the solar panel project as proposed by the NexAmp proposal dated 9/24/2009 and authorize the administration to enter into a power purchase agreement with NexAmp not to exceed 25 years with the purpose of providing solar generated power to the RJ Grey Jr. High School and Acton Boxborough Regional High School.

Acton Public School Committee:

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To approve the solar panel project as proposed by the NexAmp proposal dated 9/24/2009 and authorize the administration to enter into a power purchase agreement with NexAmp not to exceed 25 years

with the purpose of providing solar generated power to the Douglas Elementary School.

2. ALG Report /Acton FinCom Report

We have a \$600,000 problem for FY10. ALG is projecting FY11 state aid, and will assume a 10% cut of state aid to this year's funding. The shortfall was due to the decline in the cherry sheet numbers, local fees and excise tax per Marie.

3. Acton BOS Update

Bruce Sabot requested that items that are just Acton, please be kept to the Acton Public School Committee meetings.

4. BLF Report

The next meeting is Tuesday night so an update will be given at the next meeting. November 16 is Boxborough's Special Town Meeting.

5. FY'10 Budget Update – Steve Mills

In order to close the FY '10 budget gap, Dr. Mills presented the School Committee with \$494,400 in reductions to the ABRSD budget that was presented to Acton and Boxborough at the Spring Annual Town Meeting. Dr. Mills thanked Marie Altieri, Tess Summers, and Sharon McManus for their efforts.

Included in the reductions is \$104,000 that had to be added since the DOR informed us this week that we are not able to use the full transportation aid that we received in FY '09. Instead, that money has been closed out to E&D.

Jonathan Chinitz pointed out that while we are reducing the budget, we are also reducing expenses by cutting \$253,000 out of the expense side, and moving an additional \$241,000 from our expense line items into grant line items. These line items do not show up in Table 6.

John Petersen is concerned that we are using too many non-recurring revenue sources. Jonathan Chinitz disagrees and says that we should use some of our strong reserves. Terry Lindgren wants a plan for the next few years to minimize and understand the effect of what's coming. "It's not just about this year."

- 9:15 Amendment to the Regional Assessment

Acton-Boxborough School Committee:

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: That the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year of July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010 be set at \$36,906,104 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 \$23,111,857, Boxborough \$6,048,037, remainder to be accounted for by the Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$6,370,593, Anticipated

Charter School Aid in the amount of \$80,123, 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.

The Acton-Boxborough RSD Revised Analysis of Assessments shows the FY09 Adjusted Assessment for the Gross Budget 2009-2010 to be \$28,739,300. Xuan Kong created a valuable Stimulus Use Summary chart.

6. FY'11 Budget

Dr. Mills referred to the Assumptions and emphasized the importance of conducting negotiations with the unions to produce fiscally responsible settlements, reviewing existing and new user fees, and protecting teachers.

7. Health Trust Report

John Petersen reported:

“Annual rates for MHP are:

Individual	\$12,648
Family	\$28,572

‘Under the Baucus plan, insurers selling a plan costing more than \$8,000 for an individual and \$21,000 for a family would have to pay a 35 percent excise tax on the excess amount.’

NYT 20sept09 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/21/health/policy/21insure.html>

So the answer is yes, if we were defined as an insurer (note that public non-profits could be separated from private insurers). Per the above, tax would increase our annual cost by \$1630 for an individual (13%) and by \$2650 for a family (9%). Our HMO plans would not be subject to tax (but note that if limits were not indexed for inflation, it would not take long for our HMO’s to reach these limits (2-3 yrs at 5-7%).”

The next meeting is Thursday, Oct 22.

JT NEW BUSINESS

9:30 1. School District Goals, 2009-10

Dr. Mills presented his SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Related to Student Outcome, Time-Bound) Goals for 2009-2010. He emphasized that we all work on all of the goals, not just the “point person”. He would welcome a public evaluation in June based on these goals. The A is for attainable, although you don’t have to bat 1000 on everything. We need to try to measure and attain our goals. Progress will be recorded in an additional column on the right.

Terry Lindgren pointed out that culture in Acton is changing. Liza Huber said that looking at these cultural groups will be included in goal 1. Mike Coppolino asked about the survey results that will be coming out regarding our changing demographics. Xuan Kong thinks there needs to be a stronger way to incorporate the changing demographics into curriculum development.

Acton-Boxborough School Committee:

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To accept the school district goals for 2009-2010 as presented.

Acton Public School Committee:

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To accept the school district goals for 2009-2010 as presented.

3. School Committee individual and “shell” email addresses

1. All members now have a standard school *First Class* email address for the public to communicate with them. This will help with archiving Committee communications. Bruce Sabot said that Boxborough did this two years ago and it has worked well.
2. The School Committee email shells will be revised to include only the six APS members plus Dr. Mills for the local, and the nine AB members plus Dr. Mills for the regional shell. Previously, a message sent to a shell included Committee members plus Dr. Mills, Beth Petr, and the Central Office Administrators (Marie Altieri, Susan Horn, Liza Huber and Tess Summers). Members felt it is important to be very clear who the message is going to when someone uses a School Committee shell address.

Members’ addresses and phone numbers will also be removed from the website, leaving only their name, term, school email, and town.

4. AB Sped PAC Board Meeting Report (9/9/09)

Mike Coppolino will report on this next month.

10:00 JT CONSENT CALENDAR

1. Recommendation to Appoint Stephen Mills as ABRSD Representative to CASE, 2009-10
2. Recommendation to Appoint Stephen Mills as APS Representative to CASE, 2009-10
3. Recommendation to Appoint Stephen Mills as ABRSD Representative to EDCO as a Voting Board Member
4. Recommendation to Appoint Sharon Smith McManus as Acton Representative to EDCO as a Voting Board Member

Acton-Boxborough School Committee:

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To approve the Consent Calendar as presented.

Acton Public School Committee:

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To approve the Consent Calendar as presented.

JT FOR YOUR INFORMATION

10:02 1. Records Request from a Citizen

- Email from Allen Nitschelm

- Response from Steve Mills

Although committed to providing all appropriate records to the public, Committee members felt strongly about the extraordinary amount of staff and legal time being spent on the many requests for information over the past year from Mr. Nitschelm.

Former School Committee member Becky Neville spoke from the audience and said that she had expressed outrage the last time this citizen asked for extensive information and she feels the same now. She does not want Boxborough dollars paying for these kinds of requests.

The unanimous consensus of the Committee was that if it is easier to provide a spreadsheet of names and dollar amounts than to redact the W2s for the latest request, then a spreadsheet should be provided. This records request was described as “an onerous burden on the staff.”

2. Quality of audio at meetings

(This item was taken out of order at 8:15 p.m.)

Many members of the public who have complained have Verizon cable service, not Comcast. Rick Degon (Comcast) and the Cable Advisory Board feel that it is a Verizon technical issue. Rick and Brendan Ahearn will continue to work on this with them. Rick will provide copies of the broadcast on a disk to us. If you know of someone having an issue, tell Rick who it is and where they live so they can track down the problem. Rick’s email is Richard_Degon@cable.comcast.com Terry Lindgren wants us to consider new equipment. Sharon McManus will start a group to look at this issue.

At 10:13 p.m. the APS Committee meeting was adjourned.

The Regional Meeting RESUMED at 10:13 p.m.

ISSUES FOR THE COMMITTEE

1. Regionalization with Maynard Discussion

Dr. Mills was contacted by Maynard Superintendent Mark Masterson. The consensus of the Committee was that there is no capacity to add Maynard students to our school system.

CONSENT CALENDAR

1. Recommendation to Approve ABRHS Field Trip to American Youth Foundation Program at Merrowvista Education Center in N.H. 2/10/09 - 2/12/09
2. Recommendation to Approve ABRHS Field Trip to Art Appreciation – 10/23/09
3. Recommendation to Accept Donation from AB Community Ed
4. Recommendation to Accept Gift from the Dan Rinaldi Heart Fund

Acton-Boxborough School Committee:

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To approve the Consent Calendar as presented.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

3. Pupil Services Info

Dr. Mills invited everyone to attend the Acton/Boxborough Youth Advocacy Community Symposium on Oct 7 at Beth Elohim. The theme is “Advocating for our Youth by Strengthening the Connection Between our Schools and our Community”.

5. MCAS/AYP Reports

Dr. Mills said that overall our districts continue to perform very well on MCAS/AYP. There are however some subgroups that need attention.

8. Invitation to Forum

Terry Lindgren invited everyone to “The Future of Education in Massachusetts”, a panel discussion on Nov 9 at 7:30 p.m. in the JH Auditorium. Jeff Wulfson (Deputy Commissioner of the Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education) and Jonathan Chinitz (AB School Committee) are on the panel. This event is sponsored by the Acton Democratic Town Committee and Representative Jen Benson.

NEXT MEETING:

November 5 - 7:30 pm, at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School

At 10:22 p.m. the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee adjourned.