

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES (approved 11/19/09)

Library
Merriam School

October 15, 2009
7:30 p.m.

Members Present: Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Terry Lindgren, Sharon Smith McManus,
John Petersen
Absent: Jonathan Chinitz
Others : Susan Horn, Liza Huber, Stephen Mills, Beth Petr, Tess Summers, citizens

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm by Xuan Kong.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of September 17, 2009 were unanimously approved as amended.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

Warrant #201007 dated 10/6/09 in the amount of \$207,586.05 was signed by the chairperson and circulated to the Committee for approval.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

EDUCATION REPORT - Merriam School - *Principal Ed Kaufman*

Ed talked about three significant themes/issues:

Goal #1 Integrating Technology

Student laptops (Macbooks) were used for 5th and 6th grade projects. Interactive white boards (Smartboards), smart pens, In-Focus projectors, Alphasmart keyboards, "Elmos", and Teacher laptops are also being used by various grades. A new school website was developed with accessibility as a focus. It has been enthusiastically received.

Goal #2 Promoting Social Skills and Decreasing Bullying Behavior

Proactive (Open Circle) and reactive (case study work) efforts are being used, with an emphasis on solving conflicts and working things out in a group. This is being coordinated with the District Committee headed up by Liza Huber and Dr. Mills.

Goal #3 Collaboration Between Merriam and McCarthy-Towne Schools

Merriam has a lot of collaboration among teachers, but much collaboration also goes on with the two schools that share the building. This happens informally as well as in Committees (such as the Peaceful Coexistence Committee and the Steering Committee). A question was asked about shared resources, including instructional staff. The School Psychologist, PE teacher, and Library resource people work as a team. Food Service staff and custodians are also shared.

A school committee member said that he'd like to see how technology is shared and used among the other schools, as well as how the technology is helping us in regard to special education and different learning styles.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. ALG Report/Acton Finance Committee Report

The ALG Meeting scheduled for 10/14/09 was postponed to 10/21/09.

Dr. Mills presented at the FinCom meeting on 10/13/09, see slides posted at <http://ab.mec.edu/pdf/FinComOct13-2009.pdf> FinCom wanted to know how the stimulus money will be used. To avert the need for a Special Acton Town Meeting, we cut \$494,000 from this year's school budget. The cuts implemented were not to essential services yet, but any future cut will most likely impact essential services. This will be a community conversation as we move forward. A yearly point of view document will be drafted by Bill Mullin in mid December. This will focus on contingency areas of the budget. Reason for having the school and town come to present was so Fincom could understand what priorities both boards are considering for FY11. Mary Ann Ashton hopes to have a report from the Cost Saving Committee at the next meeting.

3. FY'10 Budget Update

Dr. Mills attended a New Superintendents' meeting on 10/14/2009 and all anticipated more 9C cuts very soon. We should probably prepare for more cuts in January. DESE person said 10% across the board cuts will mean that it will vary from community to community. Wealthier communities (like Acton) will be cut more than the poorer. Sharon McManus asked if they talked about changing the funding formula. Dr. Mills said that they did not. John Petersen and Terry Lindgren are liaisons to our state representatives. John asked if Xuan is asking them to communicate to the Representatives that "We don't want to see any cuts disproportionately to our community." Terry disagreed about us not picking up more slack in the deficit. Mike agrees with Terry. Sharon wants to keep the formula as is so maybe in the future we will catch up. John appreciates the points, but he feels pretty strongly that if we took a \$5 million hit, the pain we would feel would be substantial. He wants us to represent that we have significant needs financially. Xuan added that "We're looking for fairness, not equality."

Dr. Mills outlined some of the cuts already enacted this year, including one Central Office staff person cut saving \$35,000, a cut in materials and supplies, The Lamplighter newsletter is going electronic only, and custodians will not be filling in for each other when one is out to reduce over-time pay. Costs will be evaluated based on "Need to do vs. Nice to do". A lot more of that is coming. Essential things will get done. JD Head talked about energy savings including a "Demand Response Program" that allowed us to sell back at three times the cost during one event in August. As a few special education students have become more independent, their services have been lessened. Tess Summers pointed out that health insurance is reduced because we moved a few people into the Food Services budget. We budgeted for 17 enrolling in our health insurance programs, but only had 14 so that was helpful. This was a 10% budgeted increase that actually was only 6-7%.

Xuan Kong thanked Dr. Mills and his staff for putting more details behind the cut numbers.

4. FY'11 Budget

Dr. Mills is looking at all expenses with fresh eyes, including the large revolving accounts. One example is the operating budget for athletics which is \$150,000/year. Many towns have higher charges for some athletic programs. The hockey program, for example costs \$35,000 for a small number of kids. He was very successful in getting appropriate corporate advertising for athletics in Worcester. Dr. Mills will present similar ideas regarding technology and other areas. The Committee agreed that we need to consider all options before we start laying people off.

5. Youth Advocacy Community Symposium Report

The Beacon did a nice story on this today. Connectiveness is important, not just communication. Participants talked for an hour after the gathering about how they could help. Liza Huber thanked Beth Elohim for the use of their building free of charge. She also thanked the local business owners, social service organizations, school staff, and others who all came with a shared common purpose to think of the obligation to our children.

6. West Acton Boardwalk Project - <http://www.boardwalk.westacton.net/>

Pat Easterly and Christine Phillips (Gates and Douglas parents) gave an update. A state grant was submitted with Susan Horn. They also applied for two other grants. More active participants and fundraising are needed. A Walkathon with the two schools raised \$5000.

7. October 1 Enrollment Report

Although enrollments were expected to drop, they are increasing. Class sizes are a growing issue.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Recommendation to Approve FY'10 Integrated Preschool Tuition Rate (*addendum*)

The Committee would like more information and will vote on this next month.

CONSENT CALENDAR:

2. Recommendation to Accept Gift from Conant School PTO
3. Recommendation to Accept Gift from Douglas School PTO
4. Recommendation to Accept Gift from Gates School PTO
5. Recommendation to Accept Gift from McCarthy-Towne School PTO
6. Recommendation to Accept Gift from Merriam School PTO

John Petersen moved that the PTO gifts totaling \$486,000. be accepted. He pointed out that this is 1.9% of the aggregate budget and acknowledged the extreme generosity of our parents' money and time. "We owe the parents a tremendous amount for helping out like this year after year." Mike Coppolino asked about the amount that is from Douglas at Dawn/Dusk and asked if it was fundraising plus daycare from Douglas. Conant's after school program is coordinated by Community Education and Erin Bettez runs that program, so those funds do not all show in Conant's total.

Acton Public School Committee:

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To approve the Consent Calendar as presented.

7. Recommendation to Approve Douglas Field Trip

It was moved, seconded, and unanimously

VOTED: to approve the Douglas Field Trip to Nature's Classroom on April 26 – 28, 2010

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

1. Flu Update

There has been an uptick in the number of High School students home with the flu. It is strongly recommended that everyone get the seasonal vaccine. Liza Huber has met with the Board of Health and they do not know when the vaccine will arrive.

At 9:11 pm, Sharon Smith McManus called the Regional School Committee to order.

At 9:12 pm, the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee was polled and voted unanimously to go into Executive Session (Joint School Committee) according to Chapter 39 Section 23A Paragraph 3, "To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the governmental body."

At 9:12pm, the Acton Public School Committee was polled and voted unanimously to go into Executive Session (Joint School Committee) according to Chapter 39 Section 23A Paragraph 3, "To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the governmental body."

At 10:40 pm, the Joint meeting resumed.

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting adjourned at 10:41 pm.
The Acton Public School Committee Meeting adjourned at 10:41 pm.

NEXT MEETING - November 19, 7:30 pm at McCarthy-Towne School

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr
Secretary