

Office of the Superintendent
Acton Public Schools
Acton-Boxborough Regional School District
<http://ab.mec.edu>
(978) 264-4700 x 3211

TO: Acton Public School Committee Members
FROM: Stephen Mills
ON: February 17, 2011
RE: **ADDENDUM**

APS SC MEETING:

3.0 APPROVAL OF MINUTES

3.1 December 16, 2011

7.0 FOR YOUR INFORMATION

7.1 Superintendent's Updates, *Steve Mills*

7.1.4 Race To Nowhere Panel, March 15 at 7 p.m. in High School Auditorium

<http://www.racetonowhere.com/home>

7.8 Correspondence from the Community

7.8.4 "Waterfall Cascade?"

3.1.
(A)

**ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Draft Minutes**

**Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School**

**December 16, 2010
7:30 p.m.
(Gates School chorus to sing at 7:15)**

Members Present: Herman Kabakoff, Xuan Kong, Michael Coppelino, Sharon Smith McManus, John Petersen
Members Absent: Terry Lindgren
Others: Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Amy Bisiewicz, Deborah Bookis, Liza Huber, Stephen Mills

The Gates School chorus entertained the Committee with some wonderful holiday songs prior to the start of the meeting. The Chair thanked them for starting the evening off on such a nice note.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by Chair John Petersen.

CHAIRPERSON'S INTRODUCTION

The Department of Revenue (DOR) approved Acton's tax rate, resulting in it being \$293,000 under the allowable Proposition 2 ½ level. The School Committee was thanked for their efforts.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of November 18, 2010 were approved as written. John Petersen abstained because he was not at the meeting.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

Warrant #201112 dated December 14, 2010 in the amount of \$145,202.57 was signed by the Chairperson and circulated to the Committee for approval.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

EDUCATION REPORT – Enrollment Projections, *Marie Altieri*

- 5.1 Recommendation for Numbers of Sections
- 5.2 Class Size Charts
- 5.3 12/2/10 AB SC Presentation Slides, *Peter and Mary Ann Ashton*
- 5.4 Enrollment Projections – Acton, Boxborough and Region
- 5.5 October 1 Enrollment Report

Marie Altieri explained that the Ashtons have historically done our enrollment projections, as well as NESDEC. NESDEC data was received an hour before tonight's meeting. The two projections are very close with slight differences in kindergarten.

The Administration recommends 16 sections based on the projections. It is assumed that there will be 6 "staff" students next year. This is a contractual deadline that is actually the kindergarten registration date, so the number will not be confirmed until March. John Petersen commented on the difficulty of making enrollment projections and said that they have been very close in the past. He asked if once 16 sections are set up and the numbers become firmer, would the Committee be able to reassess (especially 1st grade) whether 16 sections are really needed. He emphasized that it is not just a one year cost increase, but really a long term cost that flows through all the grades. Marie replied that you really do get more kids in 1st grades, historically. If a school has 4 sections of students, you will have to get them down to 3 sections. This is doable but very difficult. Xuan Kong emphasized that adding a section really is making a 6 year

Materials for this meeting are posted on the schools' website at <http://ab.mec.edu/about/meetings.shtml>.

commitment. Marie will talk again with the principals in March after registration. She said that if we have 294 kindergarten students, then the Administration would want to keep the 16 sections. More discussion is needed to determine what number below that would trigger a smaller amount of sections.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. ALG Report

John Petersen reported that the ALG spreadsheet has been updated. There has been some philosophical conversation about where the focus of ALG should be in terms of specific programs, such as the COPS program in the schools, and how these should be managed. The waterfall question was discussed as the Regional School Committee voted to change the assessment. The state budget is still a variable. For example, if a certain amount for transportation is assumed and it comes in higher than expected, it will impact the tax rate. The rate will be \$293,000 below the limit this year. Progress is being made on Minuteman Tech's budget and how it impacts our own total municipal budget.

2. Acton Finance Committee Report

Xuan Kong reported appreciation expressed to the School Committee for helping to make property tax relief a reality to tax payers.

3. BOS Update

Herman Kabakoff reported on the Dec 6th meeting. The Selectmen will present their budget on Jan 8. The Caouette property was closed on so the Town now owns it. The tax rate has been set and Acton citizens are going to get a \$293,000 break. The building permit fee was raised by about 5% to \$14.75/\$1000, making it more expensive to build a house in Acton.

4. FY'11 and FY'12 Budget Update

- a. FY'12 Operating Budget Assumptions/Key Decisions
 1. Discussion of numbers of elementary sections
 2. Personnel needs not yet included in FY12 Level Service Budget
(*in priority order*):
 - K-6 Mathematics Assistants
 - K-6 Classroom Assistants
 - (1) K-6 Mathematics Coach / Specialist
 - (1) K-6 ELA Coordinator / Literacy Coach
 - (1) K-6 Certified Librarian / Media Specialist
 3. Professional Development
 4. Non-Union compensation
 5. AEA compensation
 6. Prepaid Expenses: ERI, Out-of-District Tuitions, other
- b. FY'12 Expenditure Issues
 1. Fee changes including school lunch (January packet), music
 2. Capital
 3. Technology
 4. Textbook Replacement Plan
- c. FY'12 Revenue Issues
 1. ARRA IDEA/Edu Jobs allocation
 2. Chapter 70 Update
 3. ALG Funding of APS Debt/COPS/\$96,000
- d. Budget Timeline
- e. FY'12 Operating Budget Assumptions/Key Decisions and Revenue/Expenditure Assumptions

Dr. Mills reported that because we were cautious we are well positioned and can conservatively plan for level service next year. The proposed budgets presume using \$2 million in reserves and

no more than 2% in expense increases per year. At some point in the near future, not increasing expenses above 2% is simply not feasible. Sharon McManus asked if the APS debt of \$309,000, is included in the slides. Dr. Mills said that it is included in the \$4 million.

Xuan Kong requested that the Committee talk about how the town would use a \$2 million reserve and emphasized that the Schools have stimulus money that will not be available in the future. He would like to see more detail about the expenses outside of these "extra" funds to see what we can do when we are not "offsetting" costs. He stressed the importance for the public to understand the total costs that we incur to educate our children. He suggested that sensitivity analysis would be helpful to show how changes affect the bottom line. For instance, knowing how a 1% change in the health insurance corresponds to \$100,000, would show more clearly how that translates to our budgets.

Regarding the class size issue, it was asked what adding a math assistant means in terms of professional development. Xuan asked how many of our current classroom assistants have received rigorous training. Deborah Bookis said that it varies among the schools - some are certified teachers, others are not. More meeting time is needed with the teachers and the classroom assistants. The \$43,000 would apply to that need as well.

Herman Kabakoff said that the cost to add all of the positions mentioned ("Personnel Needs Not Yet Included in the FY12 Level Service Budget") is an additional \$300,000/year which would be driven by inflation at 3%/year. Those extra costs would use all of the Ed Jobs funding, so we would have to use up all of our reserves with nothing left to go forward. Dr. Mills recommends spending just the EdJobs money, but we do need to spend money on technology and textbooks as they have been neglected. In March, if we have money, we will look at personnel needs. He emphasized again that this is not a wishlist, it is a needs list. Herman asked for a prioritized list of needs. He stressed that it is incumbent upon the Committee to be fairly confident that new hired staff will not have to be fired the next year if money is not there.

Dr. Mills said that it is realistic and wise to purchase textbooks and technology now, and that it may be possible to enhance the current staff's hours (classroom assistants, etc) if the budget improves. The principals all agree that the immediate goal is that we have the level service budget. Herman agreed that some of the textbooks are over used and out of date and that that needs to be corrected.

Mike Coppelino asked that packet/addendum items be set up as memos so the author is clear. He reminded the Committee that during the summer workshop, a few of them thought it was important for professional development to be targeted at existing personnel that need it. If the \$47,000 needs to be increased to get consulting assistance to figure this out he would agree with it. Herman stated that \$43,000 is a small percentage of the budget and that type of decision should not be stressed. He supports spending it.

John Petersen asked Dr. Mills what feedback he would like from the Committee. Dr. Mills said that he would like to know if the Committee supports his recommendation and that if we wait until March to see if funds are there, that they would support purchasing textbooks and technology. John asked if the Committee was in support of moving ahead with textbooks. Herman asked for an explanation of what is priority in case there is not enough money for everything.

Xuan asked about phase 1 of the textbook purchase plan. Deb Bookis said that the science program is aligned with the common core and we need to make sure that the textbooks are appropriate. The Administration is recommending that if Phase 1 is completed in FY'12, we implement Phase II right after that, although it is not essential.

John asked about moving ahead with technology. Mike Coppolino does not want to pay for technology for everyone unless they will use it effectively. He does not believe all teachers will use SMARTboards. He asked if there is any educational research explaining growth in student learning based on this delivery of instruction. The ratio of students to computers, does not matter to him. Herman: wants to make sure that there is an educational benefit as to why technology is being used. John Petersen stated that the Committee is not in support of pushing SMARTboards down into the lower grades if clear educational impacts cannot be identified.

Acknowledging that the recommendations were initiated by the principals and technology director, and that she was not necessarily questioning them, Sharon McManus asked for more descriptions in the future. Dr. Mills said that he asked the principals to find the biggest educational bang for the buck. The slides come after many hours of meetings and discussions about priorities and cost.

Amy Bisiewicz talked about white boards and the different types of interactive white boards. This purchase would complete the third phase of the technology implementation. Some teachers have SMARTboards and some do not. Teachers have the same instructional tools across the district. These are needed now to level the playing field. Karen Sonner, grade 1-2 teacher at Merriam School described her SMARTboard as "the most effective tool in my classroom" and "the most engaging tool in my 17 year career". She is the only primary teacher in the district who has a one.

Amy Bisiewicz talked about the purchasing of new curriculum materials and that publishers assume classrooms have these capabilities. John Petersen stated that Acton is Apple centered in the classroom making the iPad the only tablet compatible for us. Learning potential is there right off the bat. He asked that this be something to consider with regard to computer to student ratio. Xuan talked about balancing needs. If we equip a classroom with a SMARTBoard, then we may have to cut a teacher. The other grades have familiar learning tools. He suggested that students switch classrooms to use the SMARTBoard. Xuan wants to commit resources at a slower pace to be sure that they are needed for this tool.

Lynne Newman, Principal at Gates School supported Karen Sonner's comments. When she arrived, she put a SMARTBoard in the library so all teachers could use it. She said that her job is to advocate for her teachers and students. Primary teachers enthusiastically want this tool.

John Petersen asked the Committee for feedback as to what the school leaders need to work on or does the Committee accept the recommendation as is.

Marie Altieri pointed out that textbooks and technology are one time costs, but personnel is a different matter because those costs are usually recurring.

John is concerned about the upcoming years but supportive that we have to add some of these personnel needs to the budget. The track record at the schools is demonstrably conservative, and we have not had layoffs. We talk a lot about making teachers successful but they cannot be successful without the right support. While he understands that there is a risk, he strongly agrees with adding personnel.

5. Health Trust Report

John Petersen reported on the 12/16/10 meeting. The draft audit report was reviewed. Considered were various factors in projected rate of increase in FY12 (health care migration, target reserve levels, co-pays) and family coverage to adults under 26. Trustees recommended budget expect 8% increase (originally thought it would be 9%, saving us \$100,000). Don Aicardi made a good suggestion that they review rates on February 3rd (preliminary meeting). This gives time to

reflect on budget implications before voting and eliminate "scramble". The Trust will meet February 3, no meeting in January.

6. Subcommittee Updates

- a. Class Size – no update
- b. Long-Term Planning
Xuan and Dr. Mills have met several times and have identified an Executive Board. They spoke with Brookline schools Superintendent. The goal is to figure out a way to identify what we really value and construct a long range strategic plan by next year. The Strategic Plan will filter down to each department's world.
- c. Policy – has not met

7. Policy Revisions

- a. Recommendation to Approve Revised School Committee Policy on the Kindergarten and First Grade Entrance (File: JEB) – **SECOND READING**
Marie Altieri confirmed that a child turning 5 on September 3rd would not be permitted to attend kindergarten under this new policy. Xuan asked if the district can enforce the 1st paragraph wording regarding withholding a child, if it is not required by the law. Marie said that the district could.
It was moved, seconded and
VOTED – to approve the revised School Committee Policy on Kindergarten and First Grade Entrance (File: JEB) to be renamed "Kindergarten Entrance Policy (File JEB)".
There were 4 yes votes. Xuan Kong abstained.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Recommendation to Accept Gift from Raytheon
It was moved, seconded and unanimously
VOTED – to accept with gratitude and congratulations the gift of \$1000 from Raytheon Company to the Merriam School. This was a matching grant that was part of a Math Moves U Middle School Scholarship won by student Aidan Pavao.
2. Recommendation to Accept Anonymous Gift
It was moved, seconded and unanimously
VOTED – to accept with gratitude a donation valued at \$3,222 from an anonymous donor to the Gates School.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

1. 2011-2012 School Calendar
2. ESL Student Enrollment Report – December 1
3. FY'11 Monthly APS Financial Reports
4. December 1, 2010 Student Enrollment Numbers/Class Size Info
5. Curriculum Update (*see 6.4.a.2*)
6. Pupil Services – On Team, November 2010
7. 2011-2012 Kindergarten Registration Schedule
8. Assistant Principal's Summary Report: Sept – Dec 2010, *Matthew McDowell*
9. Value Added/Lost: Specialist History, *Deborah Bookis*
Deb Bookis was thanked for doing two jobs during this transition year

Xuan Kong asked when the COPS program funding would be discussed. John Petersen said that police services are not in the school budget. The COPS started out being funded by the state, but it is not now. The town is looking for the schools to pay for this. John said they would pursue this in more detail at ALG. He felt that separating the budget responsibility from the resource, creates a big problem. BOS chair Lauren Rosenzweig spoke from the audience saying that she doesn't recall a vote taken last year

about this issue. She thinks it should be voted on by School Committee and then the town will have to accommodate and work it out. John said another discussion will take place at our next meeting so we can move forward with ALG.

Xuan asked about the CASE cost structure, particularly for transportation. Liza Huber said that this expense continues to be an issue for discussion. It may be incorporated into the January presentation after looking at tuitions. Xuan said that his position is that CASE has to change its cost structure. It is not about what we do, it is about what CASE has to do to change their cost structure.

Sharon Smith McManus announced that she will not be running for another term due to family needs. She said that it has been a rewarding 6 years on the Committees. John Petersen thanked Sharon for the timely update and her dedicated service to the community.

NEXT MEETINGS

January 6, 7:30 pm AB SC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library

January 20, 7:30 pm AB SC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library

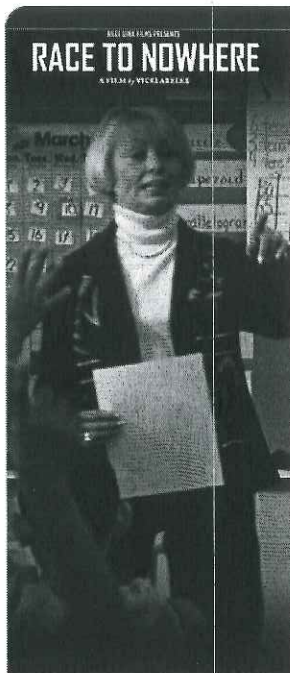
January 22, 9:00 am APS/AB Joint SC Budget Presentations at R.J.G. JH Library

Amy Bisiewicz was thanked for taking minutes in Beth's absence.
The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

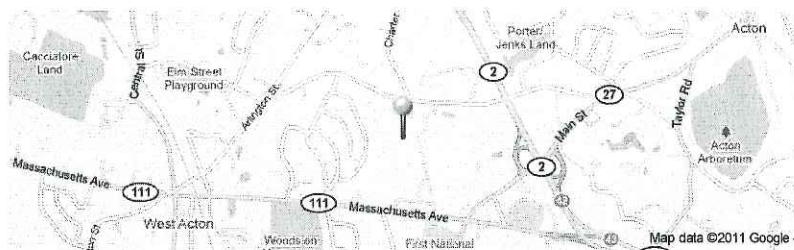
Respectfully submitted,
Amy Bisiewicz
Beth Petr



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ACTON BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL



LOCATION

Acton Boxborough Regional High School
36 Charter Road
Acton, Massachusetts
United States
See map: Google Maps

Ticket Prices: \$10 in advance, \$15 at the door, or \$5 student ticket with valid student ID

[Tickets](#)

DATE

Tuesday, March 15, 2011 - 7:00pm

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Phone: 925 310 4242

Email: tickets@racetonowhere.com

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Thanks to everyone for taking the lead in bringing the film to communities nationwide. Shining a light on the issues the film raises will help create the movement our youth and educators need.

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LATEST HEADLINES FROM RACE TO NOWHERE

- Most New York Students Are Not College-Ready
- Most New York Students Are Not College-Ready
- A Decline in Science Fair Participation
- State of the Union
- Feedback from Central New Jersey
- Highlights from Last Week

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PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
Theatrical material involving scenes of adolescents.



FILMS

Race to Nowhere Film Screening at ABRHS

On March 15, 2011 at 7pm, the PTSO and the AB Coalition for Healthy Youth will host the film 'Race to Nowhere' in the ABRHS auditorium. A panel consisting of a pediatrician, a mental health professional, a counselor, school administrators and two AB Students will be available to answer questions and concerns after the film screening. We highly recommend that parents and guardians of children of all ages in the Acton-Boxborough schools attend, as well as ABRHS students.

Please join us - it will be a very thought provoking evening! You may purchase tickets through the link below.

<http://rtnactonboxborough.eventbrite.com/>

Tickets ordered in advance: \$10 for adults and \$5 for students

Tickets sold at the door cost \$15.

This award winning documentary continues to attract attention from parents, educators and community groups nationwide, and the feedback has been very positive. It speaks to the pressures faced by American school children and their teachers in a system and culture focused on achievement, competition and pressure to perform. Sometimes our achievement culture comes at a high cost - students become disengaged and stress-related illnesses are on the rise. The film provides an important platform for dialogue about causes of stress and how to mitigate them, and ends with practical suggestions for students, parents, teachers, administrators, and medical professionals.

<http://www.racetonowhere.com/screenings/acton-boxborough-regional-high-school>

On Feb 15, 2011, at 8:46 AM, Heather Harer wrote:

Hi Brigid and John,

I wanted to express my concern to both boards regarding the discussion between the Regional/Local School Committee with FinCom in terms of the "waterfall", "cascade" proposal and or idea for the upcoming budget year.

As you both know, I was extremely vocal when this topic was discussed in the Fall. However in the end, I understood that the committees needed to stand behind a previous vote and agreement.

I am hoping that you don't venture into the same type of vote going forward in this next budget process.

I commend the town and the schools for conservatively budgeting during these difficult times. I commend the Administration for being creative and looking for areas where they can make changes. Over the past year we have made over \$800K in cuts to our school budgets. You have proven to me that our Districts are running efficiently and lean, but this comes with a price. It means that for years we have avoided areas that need attention, i.e., class size, technology, text books, teaching assistants, professional development, to name just a few. For years, we have told the parents that we would work on these areas, and we never seem to get to it. Parents have been very supportive and understanding of the difficult times, but because of that I feel as though our students have gone years without the essentials.

I urge you to advocate for all of our students and their needs and to continue to support our Superintendent and our Administrative Staff as they provide their professional opinions as to what the needs of all of our students are in town. I urge you to reinvest in their education, and to try and spend monies where we are lacking such in text books, programs, technology, assistant time, and any other areas you see we are in need.

If after the fiscal year comes to and end there are excess monies I would expect that you could then consider returning monies to E&D, as we've done consistently for many years!! **Please do not do that before we even start the year!!!**

As many of our citizens have done, I have voted you in as School Committee members to make difficult decisions with our children's educations at mind. I trust that the board members will consistently think about our needs, while maintaining a fiscally responsible budget.

I appreciate all that you do to support our Superintendent, his staff, all of our teachers and most importantly our students in Acton and Boxborough. Thank you for the time and energy that you put into this important volunteer position.

Much thanks,
Heather Harer