

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Approved Minutes

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

June 30, 2017
1:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy (left at 2:50 p.m.), Kathleen Neville, Kristina Rychlik, Eileen Zhang
Members Absent: Deanne O'Sullivan
Others: Beth Petr, members of the public

1. The ABRSC was called to order at 1:04 p.m. by Chairperson Amy Krishnamurthy.

2. **Chairperson's Introduction** – Amy Krishnamurthy

2.1. Acting Superintendent is in place as of July 1, 2017

2.2. Purpose for this special meeting

Amy Krishnamurthy stated that the meeting was being taped and broadcast live by Acton TV. She stressed that she wanted to be very clear to the citizens of Acton and Boxborough and the staff of the school district, that the School Committee is 100% committed to an open, honest, fair and transparent process to choose an interim and a permanent superintendent. She stated that the School Committee has made no decisions and they are not locked into any one candidate or individual. As Chair, she will not allow any individuals or groups to try to manipulate the process to influence either for or against any candidate. She said that everyone was there because they are passionately dedicated to our students, school district and towns and asked for a respectful and civil exchange of ideas.

The public was reminded that the 2 minute limit for comments would be strictly followed.

3. **Public Participation**

A member of the public referred to the events of the past few months and encouraged the Committee to consider what the community wants and how they got to this point. She stated that surveys often go just to school parents but there are many other people's opinions to also consider.

4. **Search Process Questions and Concerns** – Amy Krishnamurthy

4.1. **From a School Committee Member**

An email regarding impropriety in the search process was sent to the Committee by one of its members. The document contained a number of inaccuracies. At the advice of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) and the District's counsel, the Chair decided to publicly explain and correct some of the inaccuracies. The email would be posted with the materials after the meeting.

Diane Baum stated that she wrote the email. She reiterated her comments from previous school committee meetings that she disagrees with spending time and money to search for an interim superintendent if School Committee members feel that there is a very qualified internal candidate. During the 2014 search this person was the number 2 person for the job because the School Committee thought she was outstanding. Diane was concerned now about possible conflicts of interest. Diane's second question was about the community letters sent to School Committee in support of the internal candidate. Lastly, Diane expressed concern that she felt that the School Committee was trying to take control of the process from the Interim Superintendent Search Subcommittee. She asked why the Committee would question a decision made by the Interim Superintendent Search Subcommittee to make the administrators voting members instead of serving in an advisory role. Diane wanted to protect the process so when it is completed, no one can criticize it.

In response to the addition of a community letter to the meeting materials, the Committee discussed when an item may be added to a posted meeting agenda within the 48 hour requirement. Amy also explained that the ABEA contract required a representative on the search committee and that was added the day of the meeting because that is when she learned about the requirement. Given that the search was in progress, the vote needed to be taken.

Paul Murphy emphatically stated that he does not know who the right person is for this position yet and he intends to go through the process with an open mind.

Kristina Rychlik wanted to correct the comment about Marie Altieri allegedly being involved in the selection process as a possible candidate. Kristina stated that Marie is not part of the search process. She has recused herself when it has come up. Regarding a comment about School Committee members being close friends with Marie, Kristina referenced a January 25, 2014 Beacon article about the last Superintendent decision that mentions members being friends with Marie. Kristina pointed out that the current members that were on the School Committee in 2014 were Paul Murphy, Deanne O'Sullivan, Kristina Rychlik, Brigid Bieber and Mary Brolin, not nine people. Kristina described how many people consider Marie a professional friend, by way of being on community committees, PTO, and School Committee, not necessarily a social friend. She concluded by clarifying that the 3 School Committee members on the 2014 search committee were Kristina, Brigid and Mike Coppolino. Brigid Bieber and Mary Brolin also related how they have worked with Ms. Altieri for many years as School Committee and community members. To remove any doubt, Brigid stated that she has done the Ethics training (as required for all members and staff) and filed a Disclosure of the Appearance of a Conflict of Interest form with the School Committee Secretary.

Katie Neville stressed that committee members need to be mindful of emails that they send, particularly when they contain significant inaccuracies. Eileen Zhang and Paul Murphy described the urgency that surrounded establishing the search subcommittee and moving forward. The language and timeline were drafts and being revised. Paul appreciated when two members of the administrative team offered to help with the search. He apologized to the Acton Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) that he didn't realize their representation was in the contract. Amy asked him to hold this discussion until item 5 on the agenda.

Maya Minkin reminded the School Committee that these issues are messy and in their attempt to be transparent and open, inadvertent mistakes might be made. Kristina Rychlik asked the Committee to better focus on the work ahead, and while they can't control the cyber bullying, they can control comments from each other. To correct the letter, she stated that Marie Altieri received a Masters degree in 2014 from Boston University and her research paper was on Start Times.

Diane stressed that the inaccuracies were not the intent of her letter and that the intent was to emphasize a fair and open process. Amy Krishnamurthy agreed with Diane's comment. Diane will address her inaccuracies in a public document. The Open Meeting Law requirements that must be followed by all members were stressed and resources offered by the Attorney General's office were publicized.

Brigid Bieber stated that all they can do as a School Committee is to do their job as best they can. Their three jobs are Policy, Budget and Hiring the Superintendent. If they make mistakes, they must own up to them. She suggested the process be slowed down although there are so many items on their upcoming workshop list. Another community member wanted them to speed it up. The public needs to realize that half of the public will love what is done and half will hate it.

4.2. From a member of the public

4.3. Open Meeting Law Complaint received 6/29/17

The Committee discussed these two items and whether they should both go directly to school counsel for comment. Mary Brolin felt that the email letter was different from the Open Meeting Law complaint and she didn't want to spend money on legal advice for that one at this time. Members agreed that the points made in

the email could be explained. One consideration was that the meeting on June 22, 2017 was on the last day of school with about one week left in the school year. There were a number of items that they were trying to conclude, making the meeting go late.

A member of the public spoke from the audience to say there are many people in both Acton and Boxborough who think the Committee is doing a good job. She stated that there are currently 1,205 members on the closed facebook page that seems to be attacking the Committee and that is only about 4% of the AB community. She stated that of the 1,205 people, only 57 have posted recently.

Diane Baum said that she is a passive member of the facebook group because she wants to know what people are thinking and it is the Committee's job to cultivate civic engagement. Other committee members stressed that factual accuracy is essential because that is how untruths and rumors get started. Several committee members stated that as a result of some of the facebook members' speculation and comments, their reputations have been attacked and hurt.

Paul Murphy left the meeting at 2:50 p.m. due to another commitment.

Another member of the public came to the meeting to show her support for the School Committee "in the face of these terrible public attacks." She stated that all voices are needed, but to hide behind a keyboard and spread such disrespectful comments and untruths was not right. Another member of the public said that this was happening because of the conditions under which Dr. Brand left and the lack of clear explanations. He encouraged the Committee to support the current Deputy Superintendent as their interim and start building community support for the upcoming Building Projects. A third community member asked the public to be patient with the School Committee because they are an elected representative body. She added that there are plenty of opportunities to engage in civil discourse and no one should hide behind a closed facebook group.

5. Interim Superintendent Search Subcommittee Update

(Chair: Paul Murphy, Diane Baum, Tessa McKinley, Deanne O'Sullivan, Eileen Zhang, Karen Sonner, Dawn Bentley, David Krane)

5.1. Position Posted 6/26/16 – 7/10/17

5.2. Search Timetable – may still be up for discussion

5.3. Possible **VOTE** to add Karen Sonner as the Acton Boxborough Education Association (ABEA)

Representative to the Interim Search Subcommittee and to confirm voting rights (*per Paul*)

Amy Krishnamurthy stated that this item would be to confirm voting rights for all members on the subcommittee. She asked Andrew Shen to describe the 2014 search that he and Brigid Bieber co-chaired. He said the search was to screen the applicants and decide who to pass up for the School Committee to decide on. The practice has been to identify stakeholders who are involved, including School Committee members, administrators, elementary and JH/HS staff, Special Education PAC rep and parents/guardians and they were all voting members. That was for the permanent superintendent search and consistent with other district searches that he has been involved in. Regarding whether or not there is a conflict of interest concern, because these members don't decide on the final person, he does not see it as a conflict. It also assumes people on the search are of integrity and would evaluate objectively. People on the screening committee should have a legitimate voice and be able to vote in Andrew's opinion. There was some concern that Paul Murphy and Deanne O'Sullivan, both members of the search committee, were not there.

A decision on voting members needed to be made before the next subcommittee meeting, although there was a question about how definite the timeline was. Members were mixed about whether to continue on the current pace (vote right away) or slow down and think the issue through again. Katie Neville wanted to firm up the subcommittee so meetings could be scheduled. Mary Brolin suggested voting to add Karen Sonner but postpone the voting rights question. Several members felt strongly that everyone on the search committee should have voting rights. It was not the sense of the Committee to wait until July 11 to vote.

Mike Balulescu, Co-President of ABEA with Karen Sonner, reiterated that having an ABEA member on the subcommittee is per the contract, and it assumes a right to speak up. Delaying the vote creates the impression that the School Committee is not taking this issue seriously in his opinion. He understands the abundance of caution being voiced by Brigid, but stressed that the appointment of this vote of a member is contractual. Making it nonvoting would break long standing tradition with the ABEA.

Diane explained that as a subcommittee, in an open meeting, they made a decision in good faith to make David Krane and Dawn Bentley consulting members only and the two administrators agreed. She was open to discussing whether or not to make everyone a voting member, and acknowledged that the ABEA representative was an oversight. There was still some dissent within the Committee regarding protecting the process, and a concern that Deanne and Paul were missing. Diane and Brigid wanted to delay the decision until July 11.

It was suggested that Karen Sonner could be voted on as a new voting member of the subcommittee and a later vote could be taken on the other two members at the next meeting. The point was made that the Committee needed to let teachers know they are honoring the ABEA contract. Brigid thought this made sense but wanted to be sure the second part was considered again. It was recorded that the two members did not object at the last meeting, but there had been some conversation later. Eileen Zhang agreed. Amy Krishnamurthy advocated strongly for voting them now as voting members.

The Committee briefly discussed that because one staff member works with a possible candidate, it should not disqualify them from objectively serving on the search committee. Kristina Rychlik added that the subcommittee needs someone from the Central Office involved because they know the role and how it functions. She felt the group was a perfect representation for this search subcommittee.

Tessa McKinley **MOVED**: to accept Karen Sonner as a voting member of the Interim Superintendent Search Subcommittee (ISS) and to make the other two members of the ISS voting members as well. Tessa revised her motion to read that all members will be voting members. Katie Neville seconded the revised motion and it was **VOTED** and unanimously approved.

6. Permanent Search Process Update *(note: committee has not formed yet)*

6.1. Call for volunteers will be in late August/early September

Amy Krishnamurthy does not want to reach out for volunteers while many are on vacation so they will wait until after the summer for this step.

The ABRSC adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

NEXT MEETINGS:

Tuesday, July 11 – School Committee Summer Workshop (time and location TBD)

Tuesday, August 1 – School Committee Meeting (7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library)

Thursday, August 24 – School Committee Meeting (7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library)

Thursday, September 7 – School Committee Meeting (7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library)