

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)  
Minutes (approved 9/19/17)

Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School

September 7, 2017  
7:00 p.m.

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*Members Present:* Diane Baum (7:04 p.m.), Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, Kathleen Neville, Deanne O’Sullivan, Eileen Zhang (7:04 p.m.)  
*Members Absent:* none  
*Others:* Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Bill McAlduff, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

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1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Chairperson Amy Krishnamurthy.
  2. **Chairman’s Introduction** – *Amy Krishnamurthy*
    - 2.1. **First Day of School Report** – *Bill McAlduff*

The Superintendent reported a great start to the new school year and thanked all of the custodians, secretarial and administrative staff, Central Office staff and leadership team for their efforts.
    - 2.2. **Brief Enrollment Report** – *Marie Altieri*
      - 2.2.1. **Monthly Enrollment and Grade K-6, September 1, 2017**
      - 2.2.2. **Monthly Enrollment and Grade K-6, June 1, 2017**

Marie Altieri referred to the 9/1/17 enrollment report and urged people to be cautious when reviewing it because school had not started when it was created and the numbers always drop a bit after school begins. She noted that there are 14 students over the projection at the Jr High. K-6 is slightly less than last year although still over projection. Kindergarten keeps growing. As of 9/7/17, there were 354 Kindergarteners and the projection was 298. Thirty three new students are from Acton and 23 from Boxborough, which is a very high percentage for Boxborough. A Kindergarten class was added to the budget last spring and another Kindergarten class was added in June to accommodate the numbers. Those decisions turned out to be very important to keep Kindergarten class sizes acceptable. Marie noted that the district is still decreasing in enrollment from the peak a few years ago.

The Committee was asked if there is a plan for 4<sup>th</sup> grade because only one class has 24 students and the others are all over that. A 4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom was added last summer, but the later a classroom is added, the harder it is because it only addresses one school. In addition, there are no more classrooms available.
3. **Statement of Warrants & Approval of Minutes**

The Chairperson read the list of warrants. They were reviewed and signed by the Committee. Minutes will be done at the next meeting.
4. **Acton Board of Selectmen Call to Order**

Acton Board of Selectmen Chairperson, Janet Adachi, called the Board to order at 7:19 p.m. and introduced the members.
5. **Vacancy on the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee**

- 5.1. Press Release – Letters of Interest by Tues, Sept 5 at 5:00 p.m.
- 5.2. Letters of Interest from Candidates (*to be posted Tues, Sept 5 evening*)
- 5.3. Interviews
- 5.4. Election to Fill Vacancy on the ABRSC – **ROLL CALL VOTE** (*Acton members only*)
- 5.5. Unexpired Term Fulfillment Policy, File: BBBE
- 5.6. Appointment to Fill Vacancy in Town Office, *MA General Laws, Ch. 41, section 11*

Amy Krishnamurthy welcomed the candidates: Dennis Bruce, Rachel Rodman and Angie Tso, and thanked them for volunteering to fill Kristina Rychlik’s position until the next Acton Annual Election on 3/27/18. The candidates gave 2 minute opening statements.

The Acton School Committee members and Selectmen questioned the candidates.

- With many new initiatives this year, what do you consider the biggest challenges?  
Dennis Bruce mentioned the Building Project, budget, and permanent Superintendent Search. Angie Tso agreed and added the High School Principal search. She advocated for a robust Superintendent Search. Rachel Rodman agreed with Dennis and added the Challenge Success initiative that helps students understand that success is and not just academics. She felt that wellness can be overlooked in a healthy community.
- What can you contribute to the School Committee re community outreach?  
Dennis has coached many kids in town, served on boards, including the Gates PTO. He emphasized that listening to constituents is important but the School Committee needs to do the work because ultimately they make the decisions. Rachel would like to reach out to young families and help them feel more comfortable. Keeping up the dialogue and communication is vital to a successful community. Angie spoke about community surveys to obtain feedback, but cautioned about information overload. Many people really want to help and there is a lot of expertise in town, but people don’t know where to start. She suggested creating a decision-making matrix so people can figure out how to get involved and reach out to people.
- Now that the School District is regionalized and a separate entity from the two towns, how should the district interact with the towns?  
Dennis responded that being on the Acton Leadership Group (ALG) for 2 years as a SC member, open dialogue between the staff and committees has worked in the past. Rachel would keep an open dialogue and provide clear expectations of what the questions are. Angie described the Finance Committee, Selectmen and other boards as “one family for the town”. People need to understand the decisions they make.
- Given the size of the school district compared to the town, the school is the biggest driver of the budget. The biggest concern for many older citizens is increased taxes. How do you weigh/balance their concerns with school district meeting all of the needs of the students? Candidates agreed that this is not just a concern for seniors. Angie said that it depends on people’s individual values. She prefers a systematic approach with a mathematical conclusion. The School Committee would not take any increase lightly. Rachel described these problems as solvable. Other school districts could be studied, and other or higher charges could be considered. Dennis stated that since he moved to Acton, this has been a question with no good answer. Each board

has to look at their priorities and have an honest discussion about it. Representatives must go to ALG and vet that issue.

- If you are voted in, will you run for reelection in the spring?  
Dennis made a deal with his family that he would not run again. Rachel thinks she would run again. Unless there is a family or other situation, Angie will run.
- Angie was asked regarding process and a systematic approach to solving problems, how would she make it work, given the rules and procedures Committees must follow. She replied that as a newcomer, she has to learn the regulations and processes before deciding how to proceed.

Rachel was asked what best practices has she seen in other districts that could be used here? She replied that in Colorado, the district was so poorly performing that the state was threatening to take over its administration. They streamlined many of their practices so all schools were doing things in the same way using best practices. She thought we could do that at AB regarding MTSS to provide more uniformity in the schools.

Dennis was asked what motivates him to take on this commitment if he does not plan to run in March and why he is more qualified than the other two candidates. He responded that during his 4 years previously on the School Committee, he participated in negotiations, regionalization, and many other decision-making discussions. At the time there were some people who were angry and some called for resignations of some School Committee members. In the last superintendent search, there were also some people that were unhappy and the School Committee got through it all. Dennis said they successfully got through that time because they had people on the School Committee with valuable institutional knowledge and they knew how to be a strong committee member. He described Brigid Bieber, Mike Coppolino, and Xuan Kong as “anchors” that held the Committee together. He would like to be the anchor that this Committee could depend on to get through this tough time. Dennis was asked if he thought these contentious issues would be resolved by March. He replied that no one knows but things always get better. There are things that need to get done for the children and parents of the community. He hopes that as time goes by, trust will be rebuilt, and the issues will be resolved.

- What does living in a civil society mean to you?  
Dennis talked about the many ways to voice opinions including face to face, or as “keyboard cowboys”. As public officials, members will be criticized and they need to cut through the noise to see if there is a valid concern and if so, address it. Issues need to be dealt with on an adult level. Rachel envisions more reaching out from the Committee. Some complaints are legitimate and discourse needs to stay open to bring consensus back. Angie agreed saying that noise will calm down. Stay positive. Be a model for our children.
- How would you work with the School Committee members and the community?  
Dennis said that as a member of the Committee, you cannot have your own plan. It is very collaborative work between each other and the administration. There are 11 members that all work together. Rachel would need to learn the process and everyone’s roles. As a social worker and a nurse, she knows how to work

collaboratively. Angie agreed that collaboration is key. She would be open to all Committee members' perspectives. Dennis added that the biggest thing he could do is work hard from Friday to Wednesday. It is the work that Committee members put in to be prepared for School Committee meetings and cast a good vote that is key. Members need to know both sides of the issues, not just one side. This is the most important thing he could do to be part of the team.

- What subcommittees are you interested in and how much time can you contribute outside of School Committee meetings?  
Dennis works from home and has a flexible schedule. Rachel likes working with administrators and is available during the days. Angie is flexible mostly in the morning and likes the outreach committee.

### **Public Participation**

Xuan Kong spoke in favor of Angie becoming a School Committee member, but he urged the Committee to support Dennis for this particular role. Xuan spoke strongly of Dennis' successes as a previous fellow School Committee member.

Danny Factor asked the candidates if they were committed to a permanent superintendent search in which multiple candidates will be presented to the public for a public hearing. Dennis pointed out that this has been done for the past few searches. Danny stated that some concerns have been expressed that this may not be followed for the next process. All three candidates said yes to the question.

Former School Committee members Heather Harer and Kim McCusker supported Dennis Bruce stating that this is a time of lots of change in our community and Dennis' experience is needed. They urged Rachel and Angie to stay involved.

A member of the public asked the candidates how they would balance making quick decisions with their own concerns. Dennis spoke to having a clear decision-making process so he can make a good decision within the time frame needed. Rachel always collects as much data as possible and can do it quickly due to her nursing profession. Angie also considers data very important to support the decision-making process.

Another member of the public stated that our school district faces enormous challenges these days. She supported Angie for School Committee in the last election. She stated that Angie has a passion to serve and does not shy away from challenges. She keeps the community at heart. Angie is part of the large Asian American Acton community and will bring fresh new positive views to the Committee.

### **Deliberation by School Committee and Selectmen**

Katie Green thanked the 3 candidates for stepping forward to get involved. She felt that Rachel was very new to the community and urged her to get to know more about Acton and stay involved. Because this position is a 5 month term and considering what the School Committee has been going through, Katie stated that Dennis' experience would be helpful. She urged Angie to run again in the spring.

Stating that he would be happy to work with any of the three candidates, Paul Murphy nominated Dennis Bruce as the new School Committee member. Joan Gardner seconded.

Amy Krishnamurthy asked if there were any other nominations and there were none.

Janet Adachi thanked Rachel and Angie and stated that an experienced hand was needed at this time. Diane Baum agreed saying that this member needs to be able to “hit the ground running”. Eileen Zhang agreed.

The Acton members of the School Committee and the Acton Board of Selectmen  
**VOTED by roll call on the nomination of Dennis Bruce:** Katie Green (yes), Peter Berry (yes), Joan Gardner (yes), Chingsung Chang (no), Janet Adachi (yes), Paul Murphy (yes), Maya Minkin (yes), Eileen Zhang (yes), Diane Baum (yes), Deanne O’Sullivan (yes), Amy Krishnamurthy (yes)

Dennis Bruce was elected to fill the vacancy on the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee until the Town Election on 3/27/18. Rachel Rodman and Angie Tso were thanked again for offering to serve and were encouraged to stay involved in the community.

6. **The Acton Board of Selectmen adjourned at 8:50 p.m. and the ABRSC continued.**

7. **Public Participation - none**

8. **School Building Committee Update – Mary Brolin**

8.1. Building Committee Recommendation Regarding Building Option – **Second Read** –

**VOTE** (materials from 8/24/17 SC meeting)

8.2. FYI

8.2.1. Next Deadline is 10/2/17 for Enrollment/Certification Executed & Maintenance and Capital Planning Information

8.2.2. Special Town Meetings in Acton & Boxborough on 12/4/17

8.2.3. Outreach and Communications

Marie reported that a presentation was given at the 8/24/17 meeting and the Building Committee recommendation was shared. The feasibility study will answer a lot of outstanding questions. Outreach will take place leading to up to 12/4/17 Special Town Meeting.

The Superintendent explained that the current vote on the preferred option to take to the Special Town Meetings on 12/4/17 for feasibility study funding would affirm the process that has been ongoing in the Master Planning Process by reviewing all of the factors that go into a Building Project. The Committee would be proposing the potential project to be a twin school for two K-6 elementary schools, probably on the Gates site. The vote also starts the last phase of module 1. Mr. McAlduff explained how the Owner’s Project Manager (OPM) would be chosen, according to strict state guidelines. He explained that although the School Committee is voting on a preferred project now, because the District has already done much of the background work, the MSBA should look at that favorably. During the feasibility study is when the option will be extensively vetted.

The Committee discussed the enrollment data submitted to the MSBA. Marie Altieri provided much more data than requested, to help explain our expected trends, particularly given our increases at the kindergarten level. She gave much more housing data to support

what is really happening right now. Enrollment numbers get confirmed next month, shortly after the meeting with MSBA.

Paul Murphy moved, Diane Baum seconded, and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: that the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee approve the Building Committee's recommendation of identifying a twin K-6 school, with space for preschool classrooms, as the preferred school construction option.

Further, that the funding source for the next phase of the required MSBA process (the Feasibility Study) being brought for approval at the December 4, 2017 Special Town Meetings in Acton and Boxborough, be from the school district's E&D fund.

9. **Recommendation to Accept Gift from AB Soccer Boosters – VOTE** – *Bill McAlduff*  
Brigid Bieber moved, Katie Neville seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to accept the gift of a sound system from the AB Soccer Boosters with gratitude.

10. **Subcommittee Reports** – *Amy Krishnamurthy*

Acton Leadership Group will meet on September 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 a.m. in Acton Town Hall. The Acton Finance Committee is developing their Point of View document and has asked some School Committee members to attend their October 10<sup>th</sup> meeting to update them on the Building Project plans. Boxborough Leadership Forum is on Tuesday, September 12<sup>th</sup> at 7p.m. in the Boxborough Library.

11. **School Committee Member Reports** - *Amy Krishnamurthy*

The School Building Committee will meet on September 13 at 7 p.m. in Room 13 in the Administration Building.

12. **Possible Reschedule of October 5 and November 2 School Committee Meetings due to conflicts with High School Open House on 10/5 and MASS/MASC Conference on 11/1-4**  
– *Amy Krishnamurthy*

12.1. It was the sense of the Committee to move the October 5<sup>th</sup> meeting to Tuesday, October 3.

12.2. The Committee discussed whether to cancel the November 2 and November 16 meetings and have one meeting on November 9 instead. (An extra meeting was scheduled for November 30 to prepare for the Special Town Meetings on December 4.) It was the sense of the Committee to move the November 2 meeting to November 9 and keep both meetings on November 16 and 30 for now.

13. **FYI**

The ABRSC adjourned at 9:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda, list of warrants

**Next Meetings**: ABRSC, TUESDAY, September 19, 7:00 p.m. in the Junior High Library  
ABRSC, October 5 (OR Tuesday, October 3?), 7:00 p.m. in the Junior High Library