



## Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road Acton, MA 01720

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[www.abschools.org](http://www.abschools.org)

### Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting

January 4, 2024 7:00 p.m./ Executive Session 9:30 p.m.

Administration Building Auditorium To view only: <https://www.youtube.com/actontv1>

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### APPROVED OPEN MINUTES

Members Present: Ben Bloomenthal, Tori Campbell, Liz Fowlks, Lakshmi Kaja, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Leela Ramachandran, Yanxin Schmidt, Andrew Schwartz, Rebecca Wilson

Members Absent: Vikram Parikh

Others: Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Sherri Matthews, Andrew Shen

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#### 1. **CALL TO ORDER (7:00)**

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairperson Adam Klein. Members of the public who wished to watch the meeting online were invited to use Acton tv's youtube channel. It was stated that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website.

#### 2. **CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME - Adam Klein**

a. ABRHS Student Representative Update - Molly Norris '25, Julia Zhou '26, Diksha Mhatre '26, Nikhil Nomula '26, Jadon Yang '26

A potential shift in curriculum regarding social justice and women/nonmales was suggested to add a women's studies course as an elective.

b. Public Participation

Adam stated that per School Committee Policy, members of the public were invited to speak for up to 3 minutes. Students from Resource Force spoke in support of the climate resolution sent to the Committee last June. The Committee was asked to take active steps now per this long term plan to reach net zero and carbon zero. Gary Kushner, Boxborough Finance Committee spoke against the policy of not allowing questions during the meetings stating that it would negatively impact Finance Committee members when questions come up as slides are being presented. He urged the students to go to the Board of Health meetings to help get the battery storage project completed. Gary also shared concerns regarding the Audit report that showed current assets dropped by over 50%..

c. Superintendent's Update - *Peter Light*

Mr. Light spoke about: FY25 Budgetary Concerns, Kindergarten Information Night, Migrant Shelter Update, Cartwheel Webinar- When and How to Seek Mental Health Support for Your Kid or Teen and the next Community Coffee will be Jan 30 at 7pm via zoom.

#### 3. **GUESTS & PRESENTATIONS (7:30)**

a. [Campaign Finance Training](#) - Jason Tait, MA Office of Campaign Finance Education Director

As the community moves toward an override in Acton, Adam wants to be sure elected officials are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Jason Tait does all ballot question trainings for the State. There are some black and white rules but for elected officials there are also many gray areas that officials need to be aware of. (see slides)

Most frequent legal issue involves public employees - someone who is appointed and compensated, full time or part time. They cannot ask or receive money for any political purpose. (Teachers cannot solicit campaign contributions for any purpose.) Fundraising or soliciting in buildings used for governmental purposes cannot be done. Contact his office anytime with questions. Public resources are an important topic. Public disclosure is essential. Public resources cannot be used for distribution.

Permissible distributions are requested by the public, and may be a notification of an upcoming election (date, time, location, and brief neutral title). Political use of government facilities is improper unless each side is given equal representation and access. Ethics Office also has opinions on sending out unsolicited information and is separate from the OCF. Ballot Question Committees are political committees set up with Form CPF M101 BQ. Call or email the OCF at any time with questions.

b. Audit Report Presentation - *Frank Serreti, CPA Partner Powers & Sullivan*

i. [Management Letter](#)

ii. [Report on Examination of Basic Financial Statements](#)

iii. [RSD FY2023 SEFA](#)

The FY24 Management Letter shared opportunities for strengthening internal controls and operating efficiency. The High School Store is now aware of the state sales tax requirements and is working to comply in fiscal 2024. The District's Treasurer has developed a cash and investment policy; however, government generally accepted accounting principles require that a cash and investment policy be formally adopted. This will be taken up by the School Committee this year. The District has drafted a federal financial internal controls policies and procedures manual. The District intends to finalize and implement the manual in fiscal 2024. Basic Financial Statements were examined as well as federal award programs. The district received an excellent ranking. No significant deficiencies were found. The question previously asked was answered satisfactorily.

4. **NEW BUSINESS** (8:45)

a. [School Calendar 2024-2025](#) - (First Read) - *Peter Light*

Start date for staff is Aug 26 and students is Aug 28/29. Because of all the days we have off now in the calendar, it puts us into the last week of June. November is broken up a bit. The national Election Day is a day off. The winter recess is long. Most schools do not open on Dec 23 and 24. Dec 23 - Jan 2 is a long stretch off. Last day is June 18 with no snow days. Feedback is welcome. Some people have expressed concern about the number of days off, but a member spoke in support of the work previously done to include other cultures' holidays. In many families both parents work making it difficult to have so many days of no school. Could community education provide more programs during those days? Finding the staff could be difficult but it will be looked into. Also if new groups move in, why does the school have to keep accommodating more holidays? Adam explained that the Committee went through a

comprehensive process and if the Committee wants to review the holidays again, it needs to be done very early in the process. Teacher contractual issues are also a factor. The Committee may survey the community in the fall on how the district could help parents who need care on no school days.

5. **ONGOING BUSINESS (9:00)**

a. School Committee Communication Goal Update - *Adam Klein*

The Budget Saturday meeting has been moved to Feb 10 from 8:15 - 3:30. The ballot date is March 27. School Committee office hours are being scheduled in the libraries and Town Halls starting February 1 through March. Outreach to the local seniors will also be investigated. If other community events are happening and a member can come and speak, please let Adam know. Andrew has started an FAQ. Also see the Budget section of the website which will be updated with questions and answers that are coming up. No decision has been made about closing a school in the district.

b. [High School Course Leveling](#) - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*

i. [High Course Leveling Recommendation Memorandum](#)

ii. [Year by Year Course Leveling Plan](#)

iii. [High School Principal Memo Regarding Budget Implications](#)

This plan was presented to the Committee in November. Material in the packet has not changed with exception of an updated memo from Principal Dean re budgetary constraints.

Ben Bloomenthal moved, Tori Campbell seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to approve the high school course leveling plan as presented to be included in the schools' program of studies and implemented by the administration.

Mr. Light thanked Principal Dean and the High School staff for all of their work over the past couple of years on this important plan.

c. Health Insurance Update

i. [Memorandum of Understanding with Health Insurance Trust](#) (MOU) (HIT) and Town of Acton - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*

Mr. Light explained the process and the proposed MOU. If the District chooses to leave the Trust, we would have to consider the \$500,000 that would be forfeited that we loaned to HIT.

Ginny Kremer moved, Andrew Schwartz seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to authorize the Superintendent to sign the Memorandum of Agreement.

ii. [Engagement Letter](#) with Russell Dupere for Representation regarding Health Insurance - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*

It is really important that the District be protected in this type of work. Stoneman Chandler does not do this type of work and Andersen Krieger works for the Town.

Leela Ramachandran moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to authorize the School Committee Chair to sign the engagement letter with the law office of Russell Dupere.

d. [Student Use of Electronic Communication Devices Policy](#) - (Second Read) **Possible VOTE** -  
*Andrew Shen*

Liz Fowlks reported on the subcommittee's work to incorporate the "why" of this policy which is a guideline for schools. Links were also added to the schools' handbooks. A member expressed concern that some schools require students to remove smart watches which prohibits them from contacting parents. He supports the policy but very much opposes the prohibition of these devices. Members discussed how to easily find the right section of the handbooks from the new policy. A simplified note will be included in the policy and the links will be included in procedures.

Tori Campbell moved, Liz Fowlks seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the amended Student Use of Electronic Communications Devices policy.

e. Subcommittee and Member Reports

i. Capital Subcommittee - *Ben Bloomenthal, Dec. 13*

Discussion covered completion of recent asphalt repairs, a temporary computer system, heating system updates at Jr High and Admin Building and school rooves, districtwide phone system has been completed. FY25 projects including Admin Building roof replacement and asphalt for Conant and Blanchard, tennis court repairs, and more.

ii. Policy Subcommittee - *Liz Fowlks, Dec. 14, Jan. 4*

Primary discussion was the new cell phone policy. A new Cash and Investment policy will be discussed as well as the Resource Force resolution to reduce carbon emissions at the next meeting.

iii. Joint PTSO - *Lakshmi Kaja, Dec. 4*

This was dedicated to the budget and Peter's presentation. They would like a longer session for more questions and answers. Other School Committee members welcome.

iv. Budget Subcommittee - *Rebecca Wilson, Dec, 15*

Members were informed prior to the ALG meeting that an override number was going to be proposed by the finance committee. Ongoing work to create two budget proposals was discussed, one with an override and one without, as well as how potential cuts might impact the district. Helping the community fully understand why the deficit exists, and ensuring that everyone sees how the funding model is problematic was discussed. Leaving local taxes to cover the bulk of the cost of education leads to issues, like when a pandemic impacts health insurance. This is affecting many other districts as well.

v. Acton Leadership Group - *Tori Campbell, Rebecca Wilson, Dec. 18*

The multiyear ALG model and potential override were discussed. The finance committee offered a number to get negotiations started, but it was lower than the School Committee can support. The district cannot absorb more than \$2 million in cuts without devastating consequences for student learning. To maintain the excellence of our district and meet student needs, we need proper funding. This is not a position of "nice to have", it is a position of moral and legal responsibility to our students. ALG meets again on January 8th at 7:30am at Town Hall, to continue the override discussion. All stakeholders are encouraged to participate and get involved in the process.

- vi. Health Insurance Trust (HIT), *Andrew Schwartz, Jan. 4*  
Consultant reviewed current financial reports. Costs are higher. Rebates for prescriptions are coming in. Budget deficit is still at \$2.1M. Shift to Aetna from Medex is saving costs. Consultants are preparing an analysis of multiple alternative plans to be reviewed at the next meeting.
- f. Consent Agenda/Action Items - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*
  - i. [ABRPTSO \\$1500 donation](#) to ABRHS Community Service program
  - ii. [Mark Lawrence Photography \\$2767](#) commission check to RJGJH Student Activities
  - iii. [Basketball uniform \\$1699.60 donation](#) to RJ GreyBen Bloomenthal moved, Tori Campbell seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the consent agenda.
- g. Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve [1-4-24](#) - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*  
Rebecca Wilson moved, Tori Campbell seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the warrants (see motion language in memo)

The Superintendent reported that Conant's Statement of Interest to the MSBA was not moved forward.

6. **EXECUTIVE SESSION (9:30)**

Adam stated the need to meet in Executive Session pursuant to:

MGL Ch 30A, sec.21 (a) Purpose 2: to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel, or to conduct contract negotiations with nonunion personnel. He stated that the Committee would not return to open session.

Tori Campbell moved, Leela Ramachandran seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED by Roll Call**: to enter executive session for the reason given.

(YES: Bloomenthal, Campbell, Fowlkes, Kaja, Klein, Kremer, Ramachandran, Schmidt, Schwartz, Wilson)

7. **ADJOURN**

**FYI** - [Conant MSBA Notice](#)

[Monthly Student Enrollment](#), 1/02/24

NEXT MEETINGS: January 18, 2024 and February 1, 2024 at ABRSC at 7:00 p.m. in the Admin Building

\*Next Community Coffee with Superintendent ABRSC Chair via zoom: January 30, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: agenda, agenda item summary pages, Campaign Finance Training Guide and slides, Annual Audit Report: Management Letter, Report on Examination of Basic Financial Statements, RSDFY2023SEFA, Proposed School Calendar FY25, ABRHS Course Leveling Recommendation Memorandum, Year by Year Course Leveling Plan, J Deane Memo Regarding Budget Implications, MOU with HIT and Town of Acton, Engagement Letter with Atty Russell Dupere, Student Use of Electronic Communication Devices Policy (new), ABRPTSO Donation Letter, M Lawrence Photography Donation Letter, Basketball Uniform donation to RJGrey memo, Statement of Warrants 1/4/24