

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH TRANSITIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABTSC)
MEETING Minutes (approved 3/6/14)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

Saturday, January 25, 2014
9:00 a.m. ABTSC Meeting
Followed by ABTSC Executive Session

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Kim McOsker, Paul Murphy, Maria Neyland, Deanne O'Sullivan, Kristina Rychlik
Members Absent: none
Others: Beth Petr

The Acton-Boxborough Transitional School Committee was called to order at 9:01 a.m. by Chairperson Maria Neyland.

1. Chairmen's Introduction

Maria thanked Brigid Bieber for leading the Superintendent Search Committee and Andrew Shen for facilitating. She reviewed the timeline and procedures for the meeting and stated that this vote to appoint a new superintendent is the most important decision that will be made during her tenure on School Committee.

2. Interviews of Superintendent Finalists

1. Marie Altieri

Marie stated that the top issues for the new Superintendent would be the regionalization transition, budgetary issues and the curricular requirements from the state. She emphasized the importance of communication and having good relationships with people. Her nontraditional background includes a variety of teaching experience – adults first, then young people. Her master's degree will be complete in 11 weeks. All of her coursework has been relevant to AB. She was hired 7 years ago as our Director of Personnel and Administrative Services and oversees all HR and Food Service. She has a supervisory role in technology and is intimately involved in budget planning. Salary and benefits all come under her, which make up 80% of the budget. She works with principals and teachers on whatever they are dealing with, as well as parent, student or staff issues. She is also responsible for student enrollment and School Choice. For 20 years, she taught all kinds of students and knows how hard it is for teachers with the wide range of issues and abilities that their classroom students have. Marie has a strong background in technology, but a tempered view of it. She noted that it can engage kids in a way that they have not been engaged before.

Marie emphasized that the Superintendent's role in budgeting is critical. Budgets must be sustainable. Taxpayers need to know that when they give their dollars to the school district, they are going to the highest priority of helping students learn. Regarding stress, Marie said that while our District has high standards, we must be sure to always maintain a healthy balance. Students need to learn that everyone has to make choices to stay balanced.

Marie has spent many years involved with the Acton Leadership Group (ALG), working with the State on Chapter 70 funding, and working with Boxborough this year on regionalization. Because of her excellent relationships, she knows who to contact for answers and how to get things done. As Superintendent, she would have more opportunity for these conversations

and collaboration with School Committee so the Committee can make the most informed decisions possible. She gave the example of a time when the District had the potential to lose three principals, but she took proactive leadership steps to prevent that.

Given that the Superintendent's role is as an educational leader in the district, as well as a business leader, Marie said that she would spend 15-20% of her time in classrooms to stay in touch with students and teaching. To do that, a person must rely on a strong team, which she is confident that we have.

In conclusion, Marie asked the Committee, "Of what are you the most proud in AB?" Answers ranged from: how "giving" all of the staff is, how proud families are of their school, the creativity and products of the classrooms, staff working across subject areas, the respect that the Committee has for the staff that the Committee does not meddle in the day to day operations of the schools, the community, extraordinary community service, and how the kids support each other and treat each other throughout the buildings and activities. One member loved that the kids are obviously proud of what is going on in their community.

Marie then asked "What are you worried about for our kids and the school district?" The Committee's responses centered on regionalization and how it will affect the people who work in the schools particularly with a new superintendent, and dealing with financial pressures as the changing needs of the students' education must be balanced with the concerns of the taxpayers. Young people that graduate today must have the same quality of education and be as ready for the new world as the kids who graduated years ago. One member expressed concern about technology that has evolved that allows anonymous comments to be made that have affected civility.

Marie stated that she shares the Committee's pride and concerns and urged them to consider all of her experience and education as a whole. She reminded them of Dr. Yong Zhao's visit last summer. He emphasized the need to help our kids find their passion, give them the ability to follow it, and be well rounded socially and emotionally. The District needs to be ready to learn and change because no one can predict the future. Teachers need to be allowed to be creative and passionate, excited and engaged and that is not easy in today's environment of requirements and changes.

2. Glenn A. Brand

Glenn began by stating that he could not imagine serving in the role of Superintendent without all of the experiences that he has had to this point. He has worked in different kinds of communities and understands the diverse range of needs. Sharon and Needham are similar to AB where partnerships are vital, and there are high expectations for and demands on students to be successful. Glen said it is not just about fiscal resources. He is impressed with AB's focus on providing a wealth of experiences for students in and out of the classrooms and agrees that social and emotional goals are essential. He is excited about the prospect of leading the first year of full regionalization.

Glenn's top priority would be his entry plan and articulating it clearly. This will provide him with the needs and desires of the community. Even in the best school system, there is room for growth. He would gather information from all the key stakeholders in both towns, of all ages, synthesize it, and then report it back. He is aware of the growing diversity of the AB schools and community and understands this issue from his early years in education where there was much diversity. Understanding the heritage and culture of students is essential. Lastly, he understands that the projected decline in AB enrollment must be a priority.

Glen shared his views on special education services, and the core philosophy that all regular education staff understand the equal access that all students must have. Special education is expensive so needs must be communicated.

He was fortunate to teach in a high functioning collaborative in the beginning of his career focused on working collaboratively as a team. Teachers stayed with students for 3 years, requiring close work with colleagues. The importance of teaming was the take away for him. Teaching is no longer an isolated activity. The second element of the experience was that teaching is a profession of everyone being a lifelong learner. He also saw the need for educators to provide the best classroom experiences for students including social and emotional experiences as well as exploratory ones. "Students need to explore who they are."

Glenn spoke about the central role of technology and while it cannot replace a teacher, it is a tool that can supplement and support the educational vision. This requires dedication to professional development for staff to ensure that they understand how to integrate the technology into their teaching, with attention to resources because that is a reality.

Budgeting is obviously critical for a school district to meet their goals. This requires planning ahead and being extremely organized. The AB budget is about twice as big as Glenn is working with now, but there is a methodical way to break it down. He described the need for a keen eye on maintaining reasonable growth, combined with the ability to plan long term and articulate future school needs. After "navigating the tension between being creative and reality", the decisions must be translated so the wider community can understand them and support the "story" of what the school system needs.

Regarding stress, Glenn said there will never be a check next this box meaning it is finished. He shared his experiences as a principal in Needham dealing with student suicide. Even in great communities with many resources and loving supportive families that provide much for the kids, reality can be very stressful. The creation of an advisory program and enhanced professional development for everyone working in the schools so they could recognize student stress was helpful. He stated that dealing with students' stress cannot be just during the school day. Strengthening relationships with families and the community and working with adults as a whole to strengthen student resiliency, all of this helps.

Regarding his leadership style, Glenn is "partnership orientated", because leading is about relationships. Because 80% of the budget centers on people, this automatically requires attention to people. Shared dialogue is needed and it can take time. Creating opportunities for people to get involved so they feel like they have a voice is also key.

Glenn described the vision for our District as one that will be globally recognized, anchored around global connections, through travel, individual contacts, and fostering connections for students to learn about the world around them. When asked why he wants to be a superintendent when it is so challenging today, Glenn responded that he has a passionate belief in public education and what it can accomplish and provide for students. He greatly admires the success AB has had and the support that the entire community provides.

Glenn concluded that he has the experience and understanding of being a teacher, administrator and educational leader that AB needs. He has achieved success in communities similar to Acton and Boxborough including interfacing with many town leaders. As the educational leader, he can be expected to be visible in the community, and to lead the system and community as a whole. He looks forward to the opportunity to see the classroom work on the playgrounds, the fields and the stage. As a leader he will be anticipatory, because technology and changes in society demand it, but he is committed to leading the system to the

future, not standing still. He is forward thinking with strong communication skills in and outside of the school system and will be sure that the school's voice is heard. Leading AB, which has achieved many great things and still wants to explore, innovate and provide creative opportunities for students and staff, is a leadership position that he feels he is the best candidate for.

The Committee took a break for lunch.

3. Brett M. Kustigian

Brett began by stating that what is best for kids, is always the most important thing to him. He is attracted by ABRSD's high standards, track record of excellence, commitment and Long Range Strategic Plan. He recognizes that his community is very different from AB but because he is on the MARS Board of Directors he has established a vast network of colleagues with whom he can consult. His leadership style is one of collaboration and a team effort. He stated that a superintendent cannot implement things by himself.

His entry plan would involve many kinds of communication, honoring AB's work of the past and using both of these to create a plan for the future. He draws on his experience as a teacher every day and talked about how important it is for a superintendent to be visible in the classrooms. This is true for new teachers as well as veterans. He totally revamped technology in his district using a debt exclusion purchase plan which was very difficult at first, but well worth the effort in the end.

Brett stated that no matter the size of your budget, accountability, oversight, transparency and using every dollar to the absolute best you can is key. He is used to working with budgets that are extremely tight and he is very creative in reallocating resources and saving money. In today's day and age that is the challenge going forward. He would bring a work ethic, integrity, transparency and the ability to build relationships with town officials, elected officials and all members of the community.

Having an overarching goal to ensure the social and emotional wellbeing of the students means AB has their priorities set correctly in his opinion. This school statement sends a message to everyone in the community. School Improvement Plans have to have the same focus. He believes that data drives many, if not all, decisions and he is comfortable using it and understanding it.

He has known Dr. Mills for 15 years so he feels like it could be a seamless transition. He will look for a mentor like Dr. Mills and build on it. Brett has been very successful in his current role and he is confident that he would do well at AB. He stated that he has "the experience, education and leadership skills to lead a high performing district." and that it would be a good fit, based on the data.

3. Public Comment and Feedback

Maria Neyland stated that only 2 minutes per person would be permitted due to time.

Allen Nitschelm asked if Acton was going to appoint people to key positions based on who they know. He stated that this is the most important decision the School Committee will make. He advocated for Glenn Brand or Brett Kustigian.

Ann Corcoran has concerns about the shortness of the deliberation process in winnowing the 29 candidates to three, but was impressed with the three finalists. She has written three books on technology and education and wants to make sure that the new superintendent has a clear vision for technology in our schools.

Richard O'Brien spoke in strong support for Marie Altieri. His family is invested in Acton education with one daughter a teacher and another an administrator at AB. He has worked with Marie over many years and described her as a leader with the educational wisdom to take on the position. He thanked the Committee for three excellent finalists but urged them to choose someone who is invested in our community over the long term, Marie.

Former Acton Selectwoman Lauren Rosenzweig Morton spoke in support of Marie Altieri. They have worked together for years on committees and events in town. Marie has the proven people skills, education and background to be superintendent. This is a very high caliber school system and she is very well respected by the teachers. Lauren noted that a lot of Marie's work is done behind closed doors due to confidentiality requirements that protect individuals so Marie cannot discuss or respond to some issues.

Marc Lewis has taught 7th grade at R.J. Grey for 7 years and served as President of the teaching association (AEA) for 10 years. Although he did not want to speak at the meeting, he didn't want to regret not speaking up. He stated that our schools are at a precipice, with regionalization, all the new initiatives (PARCC, Common Core), budget issues and more, What we need is someone to guide us through the process and relationships and who has the earned trust of whom he/she will lead. "The last thing we need is uncertainty."

Nancy Sherburne encouraged the School Committee to think of someone who will be the single individual who establishes the vision and direction of the School District for an extended period of time. That person should have experience in a broad range of positions in public education and extensive and recent educational training. Having been a teacher, an administrator, a principal, and a superintendent brings a breadth of background. The three finalists are all strong candidates with different skills and differences. Nancy feels it is critically important for the superintendent to have superb communication skills with people in all different roles in the community.

4. Discussion and Deliberation

Kristina Rychlik read a summary of the site visits that had been made. Dennis Bruce gave a summary of the multiple groups' feedback. Brigid Bieber reviewed the reference checks done by FMS and Herb Levine. Herb thanked Brigid, Andrew Shen and the Search Committee for a job well done. Herb stated that what has been said about the three candidates is verified by the reference checks that he did. He shared some concerns that were mentioned. Regarding Marie, this was not a criticism but in changing jobs from her current one, it was asked if she can thicken her skin and make very difficult decisions involving people whom she knows. Regarding Brett, it was noted that while he has been very innovative and creative in his current position, he has learned that he has to be sure his initiatives are being well received and has followers before proceeding. Regarding Glenn, in a particular school he was not as visible as in the other schools, although this type of visibility (in all schools) may not have been in his job description so Herb said that that may not be a valid comment. All candidates are kind and passionate about education and their jobs. Herb believes they have all the required background.

Maria opened the discussion for School Committee comment.

The Committee agreed that it was a very tough choice, with lots of information to process about the three finalists. Concern was expressed about the size of Brett's school community compared to AB and was he ready for such a "big jump". Marie impressed members with her accomplishments around things that many thought could not be done such as increasing the funding formula. She is very giving of her time and would have to be conscious of this. Some of the feedback comments noted that she has less experience in the classroom than Glenn and Brett.

The Committee wondered if her administrative experience makes up for this. A member said that Glenn has a good fit with the Leadership profile created.

Stating that this decision is the biggest one the School Committee will make, Dennis Bruce moved and Michael Coppelino seconded the

MOTION: to appoint Glenn Brand to the position of Superintendent of the ABRSD, subject to successful contract negotiation and satisfactory results of final background checks.

After discussion, there was consensus that Brett's qualifications and experience were not as closely matched to our District as Marie's and Glenn's.

Additional members' comments regarding Marie's qualifications included:

- Marie commands impressive respect from our teachers.
- Marie "knows us" and has been quietly behind many important changes in our community.
- Her educational training is recent and relevant to our District.
- Everyone loves Marie. She provides counsel and guidance for all. She is a friend to many.

Members' comments regarding Glenn's qualifications included:

- During his site visit, similar comments about the respect that he commands were made.
- As our mission statement states, we "prepare students for a global society". Glenn has a global perspective with his experience in Canada and doctorate program in England.
- He has principal and teaching experience. He has "all the experience we are looking for".
- He said he would move his family to the community.
- Glenn would like our school district to be a global leader in five years.

After some difficult discussion, there appeared to be consensus that Marie could certainly run our school district well as superintendent, but the Committee noted the difference between running the district and leading it. Glenn referred often to his teaching and principal experiences during the interview process and the Committee valued that he had more of this type of background than Marie.

ABTSC VOTE:

The motion to appoint Glenn Brand as the new ABRSD Superintendent was unanimously **APPROVED.**

5. ABTSC Executive Session

At 3:30 p.m., it was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED by role call: that the **Acton-Boxborough Transitional School Committee** go into Executive Session to discuss strategy in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel.

(**YES** – Bieber, Brolin, Bruce, Coppelino, McOsker, Murphy, Neyland, O'Sullivan, Rychlik)

Maria Neyland declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Board and the Committee would return to open session for the sole purpose of adjourning.

The ABTSC was polled to go out of executive session at 4:12 p.m. and was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used:

- Agenda
- Finalists' Cover Letters, Resumes, Licenses, Handouts
- Search Committee Materials: Timeline, Committee members, Charge, Leadership Profile, Advertisement, Memo dated 1/7/14 announcing Community Forums, Memo dated 1/14/14 announcing Superintendent Finalists
- Interview Questions for 1/25/14
- Summary of District Forums, Brigid Bieber
- Summary of Finalists' Site Visits, Kristina Rychlik
- Emails from the public