

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Minutes (approved 6/8/17)

Auditorium
R.J. Grey Junior High School

May 30, 2017
7:30 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Tessa McKinley, Paul Murphy, Kathleen Neville, Deanne O'Sullivan, Kristina Rychlik, Eileen Zhang
Members Absent: Amy Krishnamurthy, Maya Minkin
Others: Beth Petr

1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:32 p.m. by Vice Chairperson Brigid Bieber. Chairperson Amy Krishnamurthy was absent due to an unexpected minor procedure that afternoon.

2. **Chairperson's Introduction**

Brigid Bieber thanked the many members of the people in the audience as well as all those who attended last Wednesday night at the High School. She read a note from School Committee member Maya Minkin who has been out of the country, but who has been following the emails and discussion. Maya looks forward to returning to the Committee in time for the next meeting.

3. **Recommendation to Approve Brian Griffin as a Voting Member of the ABRSD School Building Committee – VOTE**

Kristina Rychlik reviewed the process of establishing the new Building Committee and how members were voted on at the May 8 school committee meeting, with the exception of one more opening. She has now confirmed that Brian Griffin, who has a background in construction, would like to serve.

Paul Murphy moved, Katie Neville seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve Brian Griffin as a voting member of the ABRSD School Building Committee.

4. **FYI - Structure of the Current Central Office**

A current organizational chart of the Central Office was provided for reference for members of the public who may not be familiar with the current structure and staff members. Brigid emphasized that there is a strong administrative team in place. There was some unfamiliarity with the responsibilities of the Deputy Superintendent. In addition to being the Acting Superintendent when the Superintendent is out, Ms. Altieri maintains a full work load ranging from Human Resources, Benefits and Registration, to Negotiations, Records Custodian, Budget, Acton Leadership Group (ALG), Policy, etc.

5. **Discussion of an Interim Superintendent vs. a Permanent Superintendent - VOTE***

Brigid Bieber read Marie Altieri's memo to the School Committee that was sent the previous day. In it, Marie stated that "it may be best to consider hiring an external candidate to fill the role of Interim Superintendent." She reassured the Committee that the full leadership team would join her in support of any external or internal candidate in every way possible. It was clarified that starting July 1st, without Dr. Brand in place, Ms. Altieri would be the Acting Superintendent until someone else was put in place.

The difference between hiring an interim superintendent and a permanent superintendent was explained. When looking for an interim, the district would advertise the position with a shorter time frame, and in a less intensive way, perhaps more targeted to a certain group. An interim would not be expected to move, so they would likely be someone who lives in MA. For a permanent superintendent, a national search would be undertaken. It was pointed out that often retired superintendents apply for this type of position.

The Committee discussed not wanting to put the district through any more transitions than necessary, and the amount of time it would take someone to get familiar with all of the initiatives we have going on right now. Diane Baum advocated for launching into a permanent search right away. She pointed out that in 7 months people will be voting on building projects. She stated that Marie Altieri is known, knowledgeable and an integral part of every initiative the district has taken on. She stated that appointing Marie as interim is best because she is perfect for the job. Deanne O'Sullivan agreed.

Mary Brolin advocated for hiring an interim first because in her opinion, now is not the right time to do a permanent search. She felt the district would get people that are left over from other searches that have been completed. She said that the fall is better because it is when superintendents are thinking about transitions. This timing would also give lots of time to gather input from faculty, staff, and the community. She advocated for an interim, not an Acting Superintendent. The point was made that external interims are not always new to the district.

Eileen Zhang also stressed that Marie Altieri has done a great job and is the best candidate right now to take over a lot of Dr. Brand's work. Eileen has read a lot of input from the community and she supports starting a search right away because they take time. Kristina Rychlik agreed with many of the points made. She disagreed however that now is a good time to start a permanent search because it is not when people are planning to make those kinds of decisions. She agreed about Marie and her capabilities but wants to respect Marie's wishes. Kristina pointed out that some of what is difficult regarding internal vs external candidates depends on how the responsibilities are structured. Some communities hire an interim to handle only the day to day responsibilities and have existing staff handle the current projects. That might be a better way to consider it.

Deanne O'Sullivan stated that before considering Marie Altieri as an interim, she wants to know if it is harder to find a permanent candidate if an internal interim candidate has been put in place.

The Committee discussed not wanting to feel rushed to make decisions, and the length of time a permanent search could take. Brigid Bieber liked the comment about keeping Central Office staff in their current roles to keep the initiatives going and have the interim handle the rest of the responsibilities. The District cannot go without someone in that position for a long period of time due to the amount of work to be done. Diane Baum pointed out that this is not a typical year. We need a strong leader because we are going to be asking a lot of the people of Acton and Boxborough. Deanne emphasized the need to clearly define what the responsibilities of the interim would be and what the current Central Office staff would handle.

Paul Murphy wanted to respect Marie's recommendation, hire an interim to serve for the next year, and then start the permanent search. When asked if there was anyone in mind who could serve as an interim, Brigid said that Committee members know people who have done this in the past.

Community member Steve Ballard advocated for looking for an interim and a permanent at the same time. The Committee was asked to explain the difference in the Central Office now and before Dr. Brand. Brigid said the Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning and Assistant Superintendent for Student Services titles were given to Marie Altieri (formerly Director of Personnel and Administrative Services), Deborah Bookis (formerly Director of Curriculum and Instruction) and Dawn Bentley (whose predecessor's position previously was Director of Pupil Services).

The Committee was asked about the cost to hire an interim and where that money would come from because this was an expense that was not in the budget. Brigid said it would have to be found in the budget and that had not been decided yet.

Brigid read an email from Allen Nitschelm and Susri Anuradha sent to the Committee last night with four requests for consideration. She stated that she would expect a national search for a permanent superintendent.

Allen stated that the most important thing by far in his opinion is that AB deserves the best candidate available. He wants a great pool of candidates to choose from. He stated that if someone is the interim and they are a candidate for the permanent position, he believes that that taints the process and people will know that and may not apply for the permanent job. He felt that to get the best superintendent, the interim person must be excluded from the process. There was a question if it is possible to prevent an interim (or any candidate) from applying for the permanent position.

Eileen Materese asked the School Committee if they would consider professional mediation with Dr. Brand and if he will have an opportunity to answer the same question. Brigid stated that it is not on the agenda and the Committee is moving on to the next stage. She cannot speak for Dr. Brand. If the School Committee wants to discuss it, it has to be on the agenda. She emphasized that the District has a mutually negotiated agreement and the Committee is moving on to the next steps to fill the position.

Brigid summarized that it sounded like the Committee wants to look for an interim superintendent with experience with our school district on a part time, if not full time basis, and at the same time, start a permanent superintendent search.

6. Discussion of an Internal Candidate vs. an External Candidate – VOTE*

Brigid asked the Committee if they are looking for an interim, would they consider candidates no matter where they came from. Diane Baum said that the Committee's job is to protect the students. She wants Marie to stay in a leadership role, although she is uncomfortable with Marie's letter. Kristina Rychlik also was uncomfortable with Marie's letter, but she knows that Marie will remain in a leadership role. Kristina noted that the Committee may feel differently once they see who applies for the jobs.

A member of the public who was at a School Committee meeting for the first time, said that it bothered her that everyone was only talking about one candidate. She asked for clarification. Brigid explained that the role of the Deputy Superintendent is to step in when the Superintendent is absent. This is very different however from assuming that a Deputy Superintendent would step in and take on another full time job. She stressed that the Committee is trying to get the work of the Central Office done in a very important upcoming year.

Mary Brolin pointed out that the applications are confidential until the finalists are named. She thinks there are about 5 internal staff members who have superintendent licenses so the internal vs external candidate question affects any of them.

Allen Nitschelm said that it was courageous of Marie to write the letter and he is sure it is because she does not want to do the interim. He feels Marie would be an excellent choice for Superintendent now.

A member of the public stated that well qualified candidates do not want to work for a divisive School Committee, referring to comments made at the May 18th School Committee meeting. Brigid replied that the most important thing that the committee can do in terms of these questions is to move forward with the process, and come up with the best superintendent possible. Paul Murphy said that there are 11 committee members but there is one voice that represents the Committee. There is no vote that is required to be unanimous. The Committee is often on the same page, but they do not always agree.

Heather Harer appreciated the meeting's discussion about not always being in agreement, but achieving consensus. She was part of the last two superintendent searches and it is lengthy process. She said that it's difficult to start this process with so many restrictions. What's best for kids and teachers is to continue these discussions. She concluded that if we have someone who can lead us through the next 7 months, the Committee should not restrict them from being the permanent superintendent.

The Committee was asked if they have figured out their goals and "lessons learned" so they know what to do for the next superintendent. Brigid replied that they talked at the last meeting about their philosophies and they will talk more when they do the search. This is part of the timeline.

7. Next Steps to Move Search Forward

7.1. Review of Previous Search Timeline (Fall 2013-Winter 2014)

7.2. Review of Previous Search Candidate Qualifications

Brigid was on the past two superintendent search committees in 2009 and 2013/2014. She reviewed the timelines and said the last one was a 5-6 month process. The previous search was the same length but started later with applications in January. Kristina thought this might make sense this time given how busy everyone will be this fall.

Typically, the School Committee would put together the search information with a position start date indicated, usually July 1. With the upcoming capital projects, it would be good to have the permanent superintendent begin next July 1.

7.3. Establish New Search Process

7.3.1. Search Committee Profile

7.3.2. Should a Search Firm be considered

Brigid confirmed that the Committee seemed to be saying that they want an interim and to start a full permanent search. She asked if everything was organized, and advertising could begin soon, if the time frame to advertise would be longer. If they start advertising sooner than last time, and extend it a longer time, she wondered if that would be beneficial regarding obtaining the best candidate pool.

A member of the public stated that there is a lot going on that the public does not understand. She is concerned about a lack of trust in the Committee and thinks possible superintendent candidates are seeing this. She urged the Committee to put on the agenda a way to bridge that trust so the next superintendent can be confident that they have community and committee support.

Brigid replied that the best way to build a bridge is to listen to everyone, which is what the Committee is trying to do. At the end of the day, she said, “we are all still neighbors”.

Brigid asked if there was consensus to look for an internal candidate and a permanent one. There were questions about what it would mean to have an Acting Superintendent in place compared to an interim and some confusion about Marie Altieri’s letter. Paul Murphy stated that the Committee needed to wait for a vote due to public sentiment about a lack of trust. There was consensus that no action should be taken yet.

It was agreed that the Committee would confirm with counsel whether or not an interim can be hired with the restriction that they cannot apply for the permanent Superintendent position.

Regarding the qualifications that should be used for the search, information from both searches was in the packet, but it will be discussed at a future meeting with it on the agenda. A community member offered to speak with the Committee about some people she knows that might be good interim superintendent candidates.

Another School Committee meeting will be scheduled with the goal of deciding on an interim search and agenda items for a full superintendent search. Information on search firms and a profile of a search committee will be included.

8. Approval of Open Meeting Minutes of Executive Sessions on 4/26/17 and 5/2/17

Kristina Rychlik moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was,

VOTED: to approve the minutes of the Executive Sessions on 4/26/17 and 5/2/17

(YES: Baum, Bieber, Brolin, Murphy, Neville, O’Sullivan, Rychlik, Zhang)

Tessa McKinley abstained.

Diane Baum stated that there seems to be sentiment in the community that the School Committee should approach Dr. Brand and see if he wants to be here. She asked the Committee if they should consider doing that. Brigid replied that it is not on the agenda, so it would have to be added to the next meeting to discuss. Paul Murphy asked that it be added to the agenda, because “the Committee needs that trust of the community.”

The ABRSC adjourned at 9:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: Agenda, Letter from Deputy Superintendent Marie Altieri to the ABRSC, Email from A. Nitschelm and S. Anuradha dated 5/29/17

NEXT MEETINGS:

- June 8 – ABRSC Meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library (material posted June 2)
- June 22 – ABRSC Meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Jr High Library (material posted June 16)