

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Minutes (approved 11/9/17)

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R.J. Grey Junior High School

Monday, October 30, 2017
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum, Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, Kathleen Neville, Eileen Zhang
Members Absent: Deanne O’Sullivan
Others: Bill McAlduff, Beth Petr

1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairperson Amy Krishnamurthy.

2. **Chairman’s Introduction**

Amy Krishnamurthy shared an invitation from Acton’s Town Manager Search Committee regarding an online community survey to gather input. The deadline is November 10th.

3. **Permanent Superintendent Search / Selecting a Search Firm –**

3.1. Presentation: New England School Development Council (NESDEC)

Mr. McAlduff introduced Executive Director Dr. Arthur Bettencourt.

Dr. Bettencourt explained NESDEC’s services and that he is one member of a 3 person team that would do the AB search if selected. NESDEC is a not-for-profit corporation that has served New England school districts since 1946.

He emphasized that the candidate profile that is developed is what drives the search. They do not do searches outside of New England, although they recruit all over the country. They have a very sophisticated electronic network that is used, as well as their hard copy mailing list. A potential timeline would have applications coming in over the holidays and review beginning in early January.

When asked for his thoughts on internal candidates, Dr. Bettencourt said that if a district has a great person who can do it all and fulfill the leadership needs, they should think seriously about hiring them. If the person may not be totally right and a search is done, it tells people that the district is serious about looking at all candidates on a level playing field.

Regarding experience, Dr. Bettencourt said that they are sometimes seeing principals move into superintendencies without having assistant superintendent experience. Programs are now offered for staff being trained for leadership positions. New candidates often have strengths and skills that search committees decide are worth considering even though they have not been a superintendent before.

Recruiting period is 6-8 weeks typically. Six focus groups seem right for a district like AB, but they could do more or less as directed. Site visits are being used less now. A screening Committee of 12-16 people works well. This would be a balance of parents, teachers, administrators, other stakeholders, municipal officials, and at least 1 or 2 School Committee members. A School Committee member should chair the screening committee. He explained

that the screening committee reviews all of the applications and those that fit the profile get passed on to the School Committee for further consideration with no ranking. The screening committee does not choose the finalists.

Dr. Bettencourt stated that all superintendents with the exception of one have remained in the job for 5 years. He noted that some may have moved due to another NESDEC search after they were hired. NESDEC search consultants run a maximum of 2 searches concurrently.

3.2. Presentation: Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA)

Mr. McAlduff introduced Brenda Finn and Donald Macrino from HYA. They described HYA as being different from other firms. They are a national company with methods based in research and best practices. Their community engagement process includes an online survey used to identify the goals, needs, and priorities of the school system as well as leadership characteristics desired. An electronic portal would be set up for the district so all documents could be accessed at any time.

Mr. Macrino stated that searches can be contentious. HYA is able to look at all the survey data and narrow candidates down based on the profile developed by the community. This puts emphasis on the community making the decisions not only the School Committee. A list of the best qualified applicants would be created by HYA and provided to the screening committee to move forward to the next step.

In response to questions, Dr. Finn and Mr. Macrino said that the HYA survey is not customizable. It is good practice to ask the same questions in interviews, so that candidates feel they were treated fairly. HYA consultants work on one search at a time.

Regarding HYA's method of taking the first pass on the candidate pool and then sharing only about 6 candidates for evaluation with the search committee, Mr. Macrino said that communities always ask about that and it does work out well. He said that it adds protection to the School Committee because HYA applies the same criteria to each applicant. There can be discussion if the process should be changed although Mr. Macrino did not advise changing it. He urged people to have faith in the integrity of the process.

When asked if having an internal candidate limits external candidates, Dr. Finn said that when she was a superintendent, it would have given her pause if she knew an internal candidate was there. Mr. Macrino said that if there is an internal candidate that is a sure thing, a search firm is not needed. If it is an open honest search, HYA will communicate that. If that is not happening, then HYA and the district will discuss that. Once the desired characteristics are developed, that is what HYA is hired to find. That is their job, whether the person is internal or not.

Mr. Macrino explained that districts do not want a superintendent with strictly business experience and a business model. They have to have a current educational background and current practices with business and communication skills. They have to be comfortable and competent dealing with all levels of the community, including the municipal side. Someone who has an exceptional knowledge of educational business practices is best. An excellent superintendent has to have the big picture but also has to be hands on with the details. They must be engaged with staff and students, and must hire well and work well with an administrative team. They must demand the very best from staff. Regarding experience, Mr. Macrino said that someone who has never been a superintendent may be able to do it because they have learned about the position through other jobs and responsibilities they have had.

Educational credibility can be important. The more experience, depth and understanding, the more credibility the person will have.

4. **Committee Discussion - Possible VOTE**

With both firms having left, Mr. McAlduff invited the Committee to share their thoughts about the process. A vote could be taken if they are ready to decide, or at a future meeting.

The Committee generally agreed that both firms were well qualified although quite different from each other. HYA has a very structured process but they are less engaged in the New England area compared to NESDEC. NESDEC's ability to work with our district and what our community would expect, felt more comfortable to several members.

Several members were drawn to HYA's method due to the protection it seemed to provide for the School Committee from the community. Others agreed but felt it is School Committee's job to find the best superintendent who can last at least 5 years or so. They did not want to give up any control over candidates. They felt that HYA does not know our community like Committee members do and members need to stay engaged along the whole process. HYA's survey did not contain all of the information that may be needed. Members liked that HYA consultants only work on one search at a time, although Dr. Finn has only been with them since 2016 and Mr. Macrino since 2015. The suggested HYA timeline was noted as possibly too long for this process.

The Committee discussed the various costs of each firm. Being a member of NESDEC gives AB a discount on their service.

Dennis Bruce moved to appoint HYA as the search firm to represent the ABRSC. Maya Minkin seconded the motion.

Discussion continued. HYA did the Concord Carlisle and Lexington searches. Although NESDEC is New England based, both firms have national networks to draw from.

A member of the public stated that when comparing HYA's additional cost with additional value, he felt it was not worth the expense. A Committee member agreed. Another Committee member felt that given the importance of this search, the Committee should pay whatever is necessary to do it properly.

Some Committee members expressed concern that HYA's structure leaves the Committee out of the beginning of the selection process and that the community would dislike that lack of transparency. NESDEC seemed to be a better fit in that regard. Other Committee members disagreed and felt HYA would actually be giving more control to the community due to their participation in the survey. Mary Brolin asked about the District's contractual obligations to the ABEA and how that would work with HYA's process. Brigid Bieber reiterated that the ABEA has a contractual right to be on the screening committee. There was a question about whether this would apply if HYA does the screening instead of an initial screening committee.

A Committee member agreed that the community should be engaged in the process as much as possible, but she was concerned that it could be difficult for some of them to evaluate candidates if they were on the screening committee. It was pointed out that NESDEC is a

professional organization with much expertise, just like HYA. NESDEC can give the screening committee more support if they are asked to.

The Committee VOTED the motion: to appoint HYA as the search firm to represent the ABRSC. YES: Bruce, Minkin, Zhang (3 Acton x 2.5 = 7.5 votes) **NO:** Bieber, Brolin, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Murphy, Neville (2 Acton x 2.5 = 5 plus 4 Boxborough = 9 votes) **ABSTAINED:** Baum The motion failed 7.5 - 9.

Brigid Bieber moved to appoint NESDEC as the search firm for the ABRSC. Paul Murphy seconded the motion.

The Committee VOTED the motion: to appoint NESDEC as the search firm for the ABRSC. YES: Bieber, Brolin, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Neville (3 Acton x 2.5 = 7.5 plus 4 Boxborough = 11.5 votes) **NO:** Bruce **ABSTAINED:** Baum, Zhang The motion passed 11.5 – 2.5.

Mr. McAlduff will contact both of the search firms.

Mr. McAlduff has received a number of emails about the Assistant Funding / Before and After School Funding discussion recently and knows there is a lot of confusion. He has decided not bring this question back to the School Committee until December at the earliest so he can take more time to make a strong recommendation that he is comfortable with.

The ABRSC adjourned at 9:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents used: See agenda, handout from NESDEC, handout and slides from HYA

Agenda Posted on 10/26/17 at 1:00 p.m.