

To: Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee  
 From: Site Visit Team (see below)  
 Date: March 9, 2018  
 Re: Summaries of Site Visits with Superintendent Finalists for Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

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The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee requested that Mary Brolin, Paul Murphy and Eileen Zhang pull together a site visit team to conduct site visits to the two Superintendent finalists' home districts. The Site Visit Team included:

School Committee Representatives:	Diane Baum, Mary Brolin, Paul Murphy, Eileen Zhang
Cabinet Representatives:	Erin Bettez, Director of Community Education (Parker Visit) Amy Bisiewicz, Director of Educational Technology (Light Visit)
Principal Representative:	David Krane, Principal McCarthy-Towne Elementary School
Teacher Representative:	Karen Sonner, Kindergarten Teacher, Merriam Elementary School, Co-President Acton-Boxborough Educators Association
Community Representatives:	Adam Klein, Boxborough Parent, Member of the AB School Building Committee, Candidate for Boxborough Seat on ABRSC Angie Tso, Acton Parent, Candidate for Acton Seat on ABRSC

The team conducted the following site visits:

- Anthony Parker, Weston School District – March 2, 2018 – 9 am to 1 pm
- Peter Light, Franklin School District – March 5, 2018 – 9 am to 1 pm

At each of the visits, we met for approximately 30 minutes with the following groups/individuals:

- Candidate for introductions and brief tour of facility
- Immediate supervisor
- School Committee members
- Teachers from across the district including Teachers' Union members
- Administration (Principals and Central Office)
- Parents/SPED PAC members/community members
- Students
- Town Officials (e.g., Town Manager, Police, Fire, Finance Committee)

Both candidates organized interesting and informative site visits. We thank all the stakeholders from Weston and Franklin who met with us to share their insights.

## Site Visit Summary for Anthony Parker

**Interpersonal and Communication Skills:** All of the people we met with reported very positive and collaborative working relationships with Mr. Parker. He was described as approachable, very accessible and welcoming. Stakeholders across the board indicated that he is a good listener and that he is present during conversations. In addition, they widely praised his communication skills, particularly his writing skills. Multiple colleagues said his communication with parents was so good they want to use his material themselves.

**Understanding and Experience Addressing the Needs of an Increasingly Diverse Student Body:** Students are at the forefront of Mr. Parker's priorities. He is always finding the best ways to support the students' best interests and helping them to reach their highest potential. He has developed several programs that address specific needs of students. The June Academy, which uses the last two weeks of schools for special mini-courses, were conceived by teachers and students to better engage students at the end of the school year. Mr. Parker supported their ideas and worked hard to bring it to implementation. Mr. Parker was instrumental in developing the Bridge and Transitions programs to help students who need academic and social accommodations and support returning from medical leaves, respectively.

Mr. Parker has been programmatically responsive to the needs of students on either end of the learning spectrum at the high school in Weston. However, given the varying needs of students at different levels, stakeholders acknowledged that he does not have experience with equity and inclusion at the elementary level. Mr. Parker's learning curve leading the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District in this area would be steep.

**Decision Making and Continuous Improvement:** Stakeholders noted that Mr. Parker is action oriented, and drives his decisions based on facts, data, and inputs from as many perspectives as possible. They noted that he is a good decision maker. He is adept at including people who have more content knowledge and who may have different perspectives to thoroughly look at an issue. Stakeholders noted that Mr. Parker does not focus on the reasons a project or change cannot be done, but rather identifies the challenges and addresses them and moves forward. They commented that he does not put off decisions until everything is perfect, but rather looks to implement good ideas and then works on improving them. He is also very strong on follow through. While there have been many great initiatives at his school, many of the stakeholders were quick to share that these ideas were generated by the community and that, rightfully so, Mr. Parker gives credit to those who came up with them. Our concern is that we did not hear examples of initiatives developed by him personally.

**Experience, Knowledge, and Engagement:** All of Mr. Parker's experience has been at the high school level, and for the last twelve years in a small district. Stakeholders, indicated that he has stepped up to take on additional district-level roles during Weston's frequent leadership transitions. Colleagues noted that he has joined district working groups that address issues at the elementary level and he has visited the elementary schools, but his work in this area is not deep. The people we talked to, however, were firm and unequivocal in their belief that Mr.

Parker has the intellectual capacity and interest to further develop and learn about these specific challenges. Additionally, he has not worked with the district-level budget, or ever in a region. He also has limited experience working with Town officials.

**Team-building and Values Related to Quality and Accountability:** Mr. Parker builds and maintains trusting relationship with the students, teachers and people around him. When dealing with conflict or differences of opinion, stakeholders noted that Mr. Parker gives voice to other stakeholders and can change his perspective based on the information he hears. He considers all sides of an issue and is good at cutting through the “noise” and getting to the issues. But he is also able to make decisions that go against others’ wishes. He does not shy away from conflict. When he makes decisions that others don’t agree with, however, he is clear, direct and open. He explains the rationale for his decision and people generally feel respected and heard.

**Experience with Budget Development and Capital Projects:** Though Mr. Parker did oversee the construction of the Science Wing at Weston High School, he has not partnered with the MSBA on a major building project. Additionally, he lacks experience in developing a capital improvement plan (CIP). These points are concerning given that Acton-Boxborough has made a CIP a district priority and we have a relatively short period of time before we need to “sell” the building project to our two towns. From what we have learned, this candidate would need to rely heavily, and perhaps completely initially, on district leadership to move these initiatives forward.

**Leadership Style:** Mr. Parker is a much respected and loved school leader. He was described as an inspirational leader who makes people feel important in playing a role. He encourages people to take on leadership positions. Input from all stakeholders indicated that he has the capacity and will to tackle problems in a way that includes all constituencies and to take on problem solving and conflict in an inclusive and process-oriented way.

**Additional Comments:** Overall, the site visit team feels that Mr. Parker would connect and work well with students, teachers and parents. There was more concern about his experience working with administrators and central office staff, town boards and management, and the school committee. The group felt that Mr. Parker moderately meets the needs of the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District at this time.

## Site Visit Summary for Peter Light

**Interpersonal and Communication Skills:** Mr. Light is a person who treasures and cultivates relationships, as we heard from many colleagues regarding his abilities. Many people mentioned his sense of humor and ability to connect with people. He seemed as comfortable back in his high school as he is in the administration building. Both town and school personnel really value working with him and the personal connection he brings to that work. Many stakeholders felt Mr. Light is an excellent communicator and gave specific examples of his communication skills. He listens to others and is able to adopt ideas different from his own if they are more beneficial to students. Mr. Light was described as thoughtful, approachable, available, proactive and supportive of staff and students. He is someone who you can count on to follow through on an issue or problem. A principal explained that you could call Mr. Light when you needed someone to help you solve a problem or brainstorm through an issue, or simply someone to listen to you. According to stakeholders Mr. Light works closely and effectively with town officials.

**Understanding and Experience Addressing the Needs of an Increasingly Diverse Student Body:** Mr. Light was described as a strong advocate for students. His work always has the best interest and safety of students in mind. A teacher sought out one of our team to share that when a student was not getting services that were really needed, Mr. Light got involved and personally made sure the student was getting what he needed to succeed in the school day. Stakeholders said he fosters an inclusive environment and knows the students and families.

Stakeholders emphasized Mr. Light's creative and impactful work on social and emotional learning in the district. They indicated that when Mr. Light took over leadership of the Wellness Committee he brought a high-level framework to the group and helped the Committee recognize that in order to serve the children they also had to serve the families. Mr. Light collaborates with YOU, Inc., a behavioral health and education organization, which is piloting a mental health clinic within the school setting, and he has liaised with Lesley University to implement their Trauma-sensitive Schools Framework in Franklin and with the YMCA to implement the concepts of social thinking, including Zones of Regulation. The YMCA is using this as part of their staff training so there's continuity between district and community programming. Working with the schools, the YMCA also provides the district with food backpacks for families who need assistance.

Stakeholders gave examples of Mr. Light providing opportunities for all students. While a Principal at the High School, Mr. Light started the Franklin Arts Academy, a "school within a school", focused on students who are bored with school and/or need alternative ways to learn. The program is academically challenging, with honors, AP and college preparatory classes. He also increased the number of AP courses at the high school and he created a new tradition for Franklin students taking part in the Special Olympics where, after the games, a police escort meets the bus at the edge of town leads them back to the high school where all the students and faculty line the driveway and welcome the athletes home. This tradition is valued by all

students and faculty. Mr. Light also started a Substance Abuse Task Force to address this issue in the district. The Task Force includes students, parents, teachers and administrators.

The stakeholders at the site visit did not discuss any specific examples of Mr. Light addressing academic inclusion for students with special needs. This raises a concern that in a similar high performing district, there might be less focus on the academic needs of all types of learners.

**Decision Making and Continuous Improvement:** Stakeholders noted that Mr. Light is a decision maker. He is not afraid of making hard decisions. He can be firm but leaves room for dignity, fairness and value to be in the forefront. He is able to maintain good relationships, even when having difficult conversations. He was described as pro-active. Stakeholders said he is able to identify problems before they escalate.

**Experience, Knowledge, and Engagement:** Mr. Light has experience working with town groups, parent groups, and every level of the school system in Franklin, which has 11 schools. He works closely with the Director of Student Services, collaboratively with the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, and on Franklin's policy subcommittee. He participates in all district budget meetings with principals, and leads the Peer Observation Committee for struggling teachers. He has spent the past two years in his central office role getting involved in as many aspects of running the district as possible. His Superintendent called Mr. Light a "thought partner" and a trusted and valued advisor. She said, "In many ways, he co-leads the district." He seems to be able to connect with the teaching staff and administrators equally. He has a great deal of social capital in his district. Many times, we heard that once Mr. Light gets involved in something, he does the research to be fully informed about the topic and fully commits himself to the endeavor. This was described regarding his work on the design and construction of the new high school, as well as the SEL committee he chairs. He also involves the experts around him to strengthen an effort. He can look at the "big picture" when moving things forward.

One concern is Mr. Light's lack of experience in a Superintendent role. Although the type of decision-making that occurs within a high school and as an Assistant Superintendent can be similar to the types of issues that face a Superintendent, experience in the role provides a greater foundation upon which to rely when there are very difficult district-wide decisions that need to be made. Mr. Light also has limited experience on the elementary level. He has co-taught a few elementary classes and works with elementary teachers on committees. Elementary teachers noted, however, that no other central office staff has come to the elementary schools in years with one exception. On the other hand, Mr. Light has been at these schools four or five times this school year.

**Team-building and Values Related to Quality and Accountability:** Mr. Light was described as a team player and someone who encourages and supports others. Colleagues noted that in meetings and on committees he strikes a good balance between his voice and the voice of committee members. He listens to others and hears their perspectives, even if he disagrees. Colleagues say he always considers what is best for the students and will change his viewpoint if others bring better information. He seeks out experts for their input and listens to them to

make the best decisions. He is not impulsive, but takes the time to learn about an issue and find the best solution. He circles back on issues when appropriate. One teacher gave an example of when Mr. Light turned down a new program idea due to lack of funding, but revisited the issue the following year when funds were available. He supports his colleagues to take risks. One example was the new forensics lab at the high school. They started that program with one pilot class and it has grown to 12 sections. One teacher said, “He is the guy in central office who is always willing to help.”

Mr. Light can have difficult conversations when needed and handles conflict directly. One teacher noted that she shadowed him for a year and “learned the strength of no.” He is firm but fair. He talks openly with people about concerns and is receptive to hearing feedback about himself.

**Experience with Budget Development and Capital Projects:**

Since Mr. Light has only been in the Assistant Superintendent position for two years, and because the final budget in Franklin is the Town Manager’s budget, he has only limited budget experience beyond the school level, and none at the regional level. The stakeholders interviewed, however, believed he has the capacity to learn and apply this knowledge quickly.

Mr. Light was intimately involved with the Franklin High School building project and its success was very noticeable during our tour of the facility. In this process, he worked closely with MSBA to resolve many differences. Stakeholders talked about the significant amount of time Mr. Light dedicated to the project, working to educate the community and overseeing details of the project. The high school includes elements that were not reimbursable by MSBA (e.g., an indoor walking track), but Mr. Light was able to get community support for these features. Mr. Light has the experience to lead a building project and has the communication skills and presence to “sell” the community on the project.

**Leadership Style:**

Mr. Light promotes conversation from all stakeholders involved in outcomes. He seeks out experts and resources to utilize, and shares them with others to make decisions. He was described as an analytical thinker. When listening to the voices of other stakeholders, he was described as a “silent leader.” Several stakeholders also noted that he is a mentor and someone they can go to with any concerns. They also described him as consistent. When leading projects, he knows when to slow down when necessary and when to push forward when appropriate.

Mr. Light appears confident in his leadership with teachers and staff. Teachers discussed how, as a Principal, he was an early adopter of a new teacher evaluation process. As the Assistant Superintendent he recognized there were problems with the process, so he asked for anonymous teacher feedback and then openly shared all the feedback with the teachers so they could work together to address the issues. This has led to a consistent teacher evaluation process across the district that allows for some autonomy.

**Additional Comments:** There was some concern that Mr. Light has worked his whole career in one district and that the Franklin district is less culturally diverse. This would require learning to work within our community.

Overall, the site visit team feels that Mr. Light would work well with teachers, administrators and central office staff, town boards and management, and the school committee. To a slightly lesser degree, we thought he would connect and work well with students and parents. The group felt that Mr. Light significantly to moderately meets the needs of the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District at this time.