

July 11, 2017

Dear School Committee Colleagues,

On June 26, I emailed you a letter voicing my concerns regarding the upcoming search process with the intention of discussing it at our upcoming summer workshop. I did not recall that a one-sided electronic communication expressing an opinion to a quorum, even when no one responds, constitutes a deliberation. I take full responsibility for this oversight and recently repeated the Open Meeting Law (OML) training, which is required of us biennially.

In addition, my letter also contained inaccuracies about the 2013 Superintendent search and about a finalist in that search, Marie Altieri, as follows:

- My letter states that nine of the current eleven School Committee members were involved in the 2013 Superintendent search when in fact, reportedly, it was five.
- My letter states that Ms. Altieri currently lacks a Master's degree when in fact this is not the case. Further probing – either by contacting Ms. Altieri directly or via an internet search - would have confirmed that completion of her Master's was imminent during the 2013 search process and that she subsequently received her degree in 2014. I did not give this matter the due diligence it deserved.
- My letter suggested that several of you have a conflict of interest due to an alleged friendship with Ms. Altieri as referenced in a 2014 Beacon article, and I suggested that, in the likely event of her candidacy these individuals either consider recusal or complete a disclosure form; while I still believe those are best practices, several of you who spoke at our 6/30 meeting about the nature of your relationship preferred to characterize it as a working relationship rather than a friendship.
- My letter inferred that the School Committee Secretary inappropriately complied with a request from a prominent community member to forward a letter to us recommending Marie Altieri as Superintendent. There is no current policy or practice prohibiting the Secretary to comply with these types of requests.

Protecting the integrity of a search process that potentially involves internal candidates is complex, and it is the work of the subcommittee and School Committee to figure out how to best protect the process so that we eschew the perception of impropriety. This was the intention of my letter as we move forward with a search. I now see I failed to effectively convey this point because my intention was obscured by the inflammatory nature of the letter.

I have apologized to Ms. Altieri, and I am now apologizing to you.

Katie said it best at our 6/30 meeting when she stated as follows:

It's imperative that all of us as Committee members be incredibly mindful of how our communications are received. This letter at its core seeks information and further clarification in favor of transparency: These motives are good and important, but to send a letter with blatant inaccuracies is inflammatory. There are ways to gain clarification and promote transparency that don't make assumptions or give weight to inaccuracies. The questions are important and the discussion is great, but I wish they'd been asked without being framed in assumptions. I feel like we started this in a negative place and we could've gotten to this discussion in a more positive way.

I apologize for the inflammatory nature of my letter and the subsequent distress that my letter caused. I also apologize for my inadvertent violation of Open Meeting Law and my lack of due diligence. I deeply understand that when memos and letters contain inaccuracies, it can only leave the reader to question the veracity of the document in its entirety, but I assure you that my intention was pure.

Thank you for the opportunity to correct this information as we move forward with our search.

Sincerely,

Diane Baum

To: Acton-Boxborough School Committee Colleagues
From: Diane Baum
Date: June 26, 2017
Re: Concerns regarding impropriety in our search process/Marie Altieri

Dear Colleagues,

I would like your input on the following concerns that I have around the fairness of the current search for both the interim and permanent Superintendent. We have had several public discussions regarding process, and none of the following concerns have been properly addressed. We are at high risk for giving the appearance of impropriety if we do not address the following (see below).

I want to make it clear from the outset that I am not opposed to internal candidates applying for the Superintendent position, including Ms. Altieri, and I fully acknowledge that internal candidates can have an advantage over external candidates just by virtue of their familiarity. I welcome all applications; what I do not welcome is a *process that lacks integrity*.

1. Marie Altieri has submitted the names of potential Interim Superintendents, to the Chair of our Interim Search Committee. I do not know if Ms. Altieri contacted the Chair or if the Chair solicited names from her, but these names are currently on our list of those to contact should they not respond to the post. The reason given for adding these names was that "they are familiar with our district". It has recently come to light that several of these potential candidates whose names were provided by Ms. Altieri are currently actively and publicly supporting her candidacy for the permanent Superintendency in our district or have in the past actively supported her candidacy. ***I am concerned that we are allowing an employee who has announced her intention that she wishes to be our Superintendent, to provide input into the selection process.*** My concern is that any such Interim Superintendent would be well positioned to influence stakeholders on her behalf. This has the potential to place other candidates for the permanent position at an unfair and marked disadvantage.
2. It looks like we are heading toward eschewing best practices by adjusting the minimum qualifications typically recommended for Superintendents, and our doing so happens to benefit a potential internal candidate: Marie Altieri. ***I feel strongly that we need to publicly clarify the rationale for making these adjustments that conflict with recommended best practices*** because I can't think of a reason for it aside from the following:
 - These changes happen to accommodate the limits of Ms. Altieri's academic and professional profile: lack of a master's degree, limited teaching experience, no building-based management experience (see

attached resume submitted to Groton-Dunstable). *This makes possible for her what would otherwise be out of her reach.*

I fully expect the majority of us will justify this adjustment by minimizing the importance of these qualifications or deeming them irrelevant, but at the end of the day, it's still problematic because *it gives the impression of impropriety*. Why, for example, is it unproblematic that she has still not completed her Master's since 2013? It seems to me that this begs the question: ***What would any Search Committee worth their salt say about an external candidate with this profile?***

Moreover, this would apparently be the third time in Ms. Altieri's career that employment qualifications have been adjusted to accommodate her professional desires: Public records indicate that, in 2007, then Superintendent Bill Ryan reclassified a position to ensure her eligibility and procurement of the job she currently holds and, in 2013, the School Committee (which included 9 of the current members) approved language changes around basic eligibility requirement that contradict best practices and that also happen to accommodate Ms. Altieri's resume profile.

3. On June 22, 2017, our School Committee Secretary took it upon herself to forward a 2-page single-spaced letter at the behest of a respected, beloved and influential citizen of Boxborough who apparently enjoyed a longstanding tenure as our Jr. High School principal. The letter was a lengthy endorsement of Marie Altieri as Superintendent. We received a similar letter from a member-of-standing in the Acton community. The School Committee Chair should, in my view, ***discourage the practice of vote-influencing prior to and during the search process***. I know this a reality in probably every election, but I believe that, as a governing body, it is incumbent upon us to ***codify that we discourage such practices***; yet there seems to be no appetite among us to do so.
4. We have yet to discuss ***conflict of interest issues*** and the potential that some of you may well have to recuse yourself from a vote or at the very least file the appropriate paperwork, as Kristina recently did when we voted on the sustainability policy that her daughter had a hand in crafting. The 9 of you who were involved in the 2013 search were characterized in a Beacon article on 1/25/14 as conflicted and "wrestling with your familiarity with Marie as a friend." Several of you were quoted as saying that the process was difficult for you *because of your friendship with Marie*. ***Do you have any ideas about how our process will address this? Will it not be even more difficult for the 9 of you to cast a vote the second time around?***

Moreover, at our June 22, 2017 meeting, there was enormous pressure to give voting rights within the Interim Search Committee to 2 district employees currently serving a consulting role and who both have a close working relationships with Marie Altieri. Many of you with many more years of experience on SC than me saw no problem with doing so. ***How are we minimizing conflict of interest issues given that we apparently can expect to have a strong internal candidate in Marie Altieri once the search is announced in the late fall of 2017?***

Given the weight of the abovementioned, it seems to me that until these issues are addressed, the deck is already well stacked even before the process has begun. As I said publicly at our June 22nd meeting, if the 9 of you already know that you would like Marie Altieri to be our Superintendent, why would you move forward with an expensive and time consuming process? Why would you do that to the taxpayers of Acton and Boxborough? And if you are truly undecided, as you intimated at that meeting, then why aren't we taking steps to ensure that this process is fair?

Sincerely,

Diane Baum