

Concord School District
Special Board Meeting
January 16, 2020

Board members present: Jennifer Patterson, Jim Richards, Chuck Crush, David Parker, Gina Cannon, Danielle Smith, Barb Higgins, Liza Poinier

Board member absent: Tom Croteau

Administrator: Jack Dunn, *Business Administrator*

Board president Jennifer Patterson called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m., noting that the agenda was to discuss the process and schedule for seeking a permanent Superintendent, and introduce Board members to the NESDEC representatives, Carolyn Burke, Judy King, and Executive Director Dr. Art Bettencourt.

Ms. Patterson explained that hiring a Superintendent is a core Board function and that it is the Board's duty to do a thorough search using a strong process. She emphasized the importance and high degree of community involvement needed and that there would be ample opportunity for community input, including a survey and focus groups which will help the Board understand what the community is looking for in a new Superintendent. She noted that some steps of the process will be confidential, including meetings of the screening committee, which will involve reviewing applications and resumes. She emphasized that transparency is also important and that, while the screening committee meetings will necessarily be confidential, the process of forming the screening committee will be transparent and the committee makeup will fairly reflect community constituencies. She clarified that the purpose of the screening committee would be to bring forward multiple candidates to the Board for its review and ultimate decision. The Board will contact candidate references and thoroughly review all application materials for those being considered for the role.

Gina Cannon asked whether the full Board would review all candidate applications or only the applications of candidates brought forward by the screening committee.

Dr. Bettencourt explained that while NESDEC was available to assist with the schedule and process, ultimately this would be the Board's search, not NESDEC's. The schedule that was presented was a rough draft which the Board needed to review and finalize. Dr. Bettencourt explained that typically a screening committee would recommend three to five candidates, who at that point become publicly known, and begin the interview and reference check process. The Board could meet and interview any qualified candidate, not just those brought forward by the screening committee. NESDEC would assist the screening committee to find qualified candidates and advise on the process.

Ms. Cannon stated that it was her understanding, then, that the Board was not required to review application materials for every candidate; Ms. Patterson confirmed that the Board could, but was not required to.

Liza Poinier asked about the process and its immediate first steps. Dr. Bettencourt explained that the process had begun with the job posting on several websites and in hard copy via a letter, with more advertising to come. He added that applications had begun arriving at the NESDEC office and that, since the deadline was not until February 19, the timeline was looking strong. Dr. Burke explained that NESDEC would not be reviewing applications; but would rather ensure that applicants are qualified, and all application materials are complete. All qualified and complete applications are turned over to the screening committee for review.

In response to a question from Chuck Crush whether this was a nationwide search, Dr. Bettencourt explained that it was. He said an ad would run in *Education Week* the week of January 22.

Dr. Bettencourt reviewed materials, which included a draft search timeline and the job posting, noting that the anticipated start date for the new Superintendent was July 1, 2020, subject to adjustment based on various factors. Regarding the community needs assessment, he explained this was crucial, as it would provide valuable input on skills, traits, style, and experience which the next Superintendent should possess. The assessment was based on three “prongs:” an online survey, community/staff focus groups, and face-to-face meetings between NESDEC and various municipal figures such as the Concord Chief of Police and others who work closely with District leaders and could provide additional valuable input. He said these steps should ideally occur between now and the first week of February, with the goal of a finalized candidate profile by mid-February, which will be used by the screening committee while interviewing candidates. NESDEC’s first meeting with the screening committee was proposed for February 24, at which a schedule/timeline would be developed, role of the committee would be discussed, and a decision-making process discussed. Ms. Patterson noted that this date falls during school vacation week.

Dr. Bettencourt emphasized that while the screening committee would play an important role in the search process, it would ultimately be the Board’s decision who to hire. He emphasized that the confidentiality of the screening committee meetings would be impressed upon committee members. The committee will review all qualified, complete application packets sent forward by NESDEC; narrow the list to 10-12 applicants; schedule and interview those applicants; and recommend three to five candidates to the full Board for consideration. Once those individuals are brought forward to the Board, they become public; this is when the community would be exposed to the candidates and become part of the process. Dr. Bettencourt explained that, ideally, the Board would make its final decision in the March–April timeframe, to provide a helpful transition period for the incoming Superintendent to visit the District and begin meeting stakeholders.

Mr. Crush asked who would conduct salary and benefits negotiations with the final candidate. Dr. Bettencourt explained that NESDEC would be available to help with this process, including contract models and recommendations, but that it was generally done by the Board. He added that NESDEC would discuss individual requirements with candidates in advance; if a candidate was being seriously considered whose requirements might be out of the Board's range, NESDEC would discuss this with the Board.

Dr. Burke and Ms. King then reviewed the online survey and focus group processes and timelines. Dr. Burke discussed the plan for conducting focus groups, including its timeline, and recommended the week of February 3 and/or 10. The focus groups should be conducted on back-to-back days and would involve parents, faculty, administration, community members, and students. She explained that these would be in a casual, round-robin style and that participants could drop in for as little or as much time as they wanted. She noted that offering both focus groups and the online survey would allow maximum participation from those with differing communication preferences, and that NESDEC would help the Board plan and conduct these groups. The Board will use data compiled from the survey results and focus groups to draft an ideal candidate profile.

Ms. Patterson recommended the week of February 3 for the focus groups, as there was only one Board meeting scheduled for that week. She added that there are twice-weekly Board meetings in February due to the budget planning meetings, and that another meeting should be scheduled as soon as the focus groups were over in order to develop the candidate profile, in advance of the screening committee's first proposed meeting on February 24.

Dr. Burke explained that NESDEC would summarize community input from the focus groups and create a draft candidate profile to distribute to the Board ahead of its meeting. The benefits and possible challenges of several dates in early March were discussed; March 4 and 10 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. were selected. Dr. Bettencourt suggested keeping the date when final candidates are announced open, to allow for the screening committee to not be locked into a specific date. Dr. Burke recommended mid-March for meeting, interviewing, and determining/releasing the name of the candidate finalists. Jack Dunn confirmed that the dates discussed did not conflict with presently-scheduled budget work sessions. Dr. Bettencourt agreed to revamp the meeting calendar provided in the meeting folder and distribute to Board members.

Mr. Crush suggested the focus groups be advertised as quickly as possible to give people ample time to plan. Ms. Poinier asked about the typical number of focus groups. Dr. Burke stated that six to seven groups are typical, with some daytime and some evening sessions for community, parents, staff, and students. Mr. Crush recommended at least three parent/community focus groups to maximize input from those demographics. In response to a question from Jim Richards whether parent and community member meetings should be joint or separate, Dr. Burke explained that most community members who attend these meetings are also parents, and that many people prefer the online survey option, so focus group numbers are not as large as they used to be. Ms. Poinier asked if the survey had already been developed or if it is newly created. Dr. Bettencourt

explained that NESDEC has a proprietary survey, which provides good guidance for input and focus group discussions which consists of some forced-choice questions and several free-response questions. Ms. Cannon suggested community involvement might be high, given the events that have led to the search for a new Superintendent; several Board members remarked that feedback and input was welcomed and encouraged.

Mr. Crush asked if community members such as the Mayor and Police Chief would be part of the focus groups or would be individually interviewed. Dr. Burke explained that this could go either way; that their input is entered the same as any other participant. David Parker stated that he felt it was important to involve those individuals in the focus groups and invite them to be part of those conversations. Ms. Patterson suggested the Board work with Mr. Dunn to determine more specific time and location details so the Board could focus on more high-level Board items.

Ms. Poinier clarified that the focus group responses would be transcribed but not electronically recorded. She added that several local reporters would probably want to attend these focus groups. Dr. Burke explained that people would be welcome to speak to reporters if they wished, but that attendees would be discouraged from recording video or taking photos of meeting charts or materials. Dr. Bettencourt explained that the press was generally very cooperative.

6-7 groups:

(3) Parent/community morning/(2) evening

Teacher/staff and (1) school administration

Government/civic leaders – mayor, councilors, local business, police chief, etc.
suggested by Mr. Richards

High school students

Survey and focus group results and updates could be discussed at Board meetings

Ms. Cannon asked if City Council members should be invited to be part of focus groups. Ms. Patterson agreed this could be a good idea and asked if there was a limit to the number of focus groups that could be held. Dr. Bettencourt explained that there was no maximum number and NESDEC would work with the number of meetings scheduled, but that six to seven was a common/average number. Ms. Poinier suggested finding a time when Mayor Bouley, City Manager Tom Aspell, and Director of the Chamber of Commerce Tim Sink were all available, as they might provide valuable input. Dr. Burke emphasized that the most important thing was to get the word out to the community about the focus groups to encourage maximum participation. Dr. Bettencourt clarified that no one would be precluded from attending any focus group; the goal was to get the best possible input and encourage people to respond as honestly as possible. Mr. Croteau suggested calling and personally inviting some community members to these meetings.

Ms. Patterson suggested a discussion about the composition of the screening committee in order to find the best balance of constituencies. She noted that the previous screening

committee was composed of three Board members, two Central Office administrators, three building administrators, one high school student, one teacher, one special education teacher, two parents, and two community representatives. Dr. Bettencourt explained that try as much as possible to balance the number of teachers, parents, and community members, and to look at the constituencies the Board feels are important to involve in the process. Mr. Parker suggested the screening committee have more teachers and only one or two Central Office administrators, as there should be more emphasis on people who work with kids every day, such as teachers and paraeducators. Barb Higgins recommended a principal, teacher, and support staff member from each school level: elementary, middle, and high. Ms. Patterson asked how large these groups should be and what would be considered too large. Dr. Bettencourt recommend 12-13 members but added that these groups generally end up with 17-18 members and that NESDEC is familiar with this. He explained that it was important to create the balance the Board wanted and that NESDEC would work with whatever they came up with. Dr. Burke noted that the group would meet approximately six times. Ms. Patterson suggested the group have two or three Board members. Mr. Crush recommended two Board members, one Central Office administrator, three principals (one from each school level), one high school student, two teachers, one special education teacher, three parents with at least one of those with a student receiving special education services (IEP/504 Plan), one or two community or civic representatives, and one or two support staff or paraprofessionals. Mr. Dunn noted that representatives from the Friends Program and Chamber of Commerce were the participating civic entities on the last search committee. Ms. Higgins emphasized the importance of keeping grade-level representation even across demographics to ensure all school levels were represented. Ms. Patterson recommended Mr. Dunn as the Central Office representative and asked the best way to select parents and community representatives, noting the significant time commitment the task will require. Mr. Crush asked if advertising for committee participation might be a good idea, if the posting was clear about the time commitment involved. Ms. Patterson suggested looking first to parents who have actively participated in recent Board meetings. Dr. Bettencourt noted that there was still a good amount of time to reach out to potential participants since the screening committee would not meet until March. He added that sometimes it was as difficult to select the screening committee as it was to select the Superintendent, as these were both important decisions. He recommended approaching each constituency, asking them to recommend participants, or to have a specific person in mind to ask. Mr. Richards noted that the District has only one high school principal and one middle school principal, and that the Board may want to consider the high school's assistant principals.

Ms. Patterson noted that Danielle Smith and Mr. Croteau had expressed interest in being the Board's representatives on the committee and asked to have a discussion about what made sense and how much work Board members would want to take on. Mr. Richards expressed support for these recommendations, explaining that Mr. Croteau had served on the Board for a long time, and had considerable leadership experience. He agreed that Ms. Smith was also a good selection as she was a District parent who was active in the schools

and provides thoughtful input as a Board member. Ms. Patterson offered to serve as the liaison for NESDEC but not on the screening committee, given the time commitment of being Board president. Dr. Burke noted there would be ample opportunity for Board member involvement with candidate interviews and introductions to the community once finalists have been chosen.

Dr. Bettencourt explained that NESDEC did not typically interface with the press and suggested a Board member on the screening committee serve as a spokesperson between the Board and the public or press. Mr. Richards offered a reminder that the Board was entering budget season and that anyone considering volunteering for these additional roles and tasks avoid overcommitting. Ms. Patterson suggested Mr. Croteau would be a good committee spokesperson and could work with her as spokespeople for the full Board. In response to a question from Mr. Parker about his experience with the press during these hiring processes, Dr. Bettencourt explained that most press members seek updates on the process and do not ask particularly probing questions. Mr. Parker suggested the City and Community Relations Committee might determine these roles; that he would feel more comfortable with an official recommendation from one of these committees instead of volunteering Mr. Croteau in his absence. Mr. Crush stated that proactive communication through all stages of the process was important. Dr. Burke explained that everything should be posted on the Board website: timelines, procedural information, etc. Mr. Richards agreed that this information should be always available to the community, students, and staff as everyone has a vested interest in the outcome of the Superintendent search. Mr. Dunn reminded everyone that the Superintendent's assistant should be utilized as much as possible regarding organization and communication. Ms. Patterson suggested adding a dropdown menu about the Superintendent search on the Board web page as a good place to gather and organize information. Ms. Cannon echoed the importance of proactive communication and solicitations for participation. Ms. Patterson noted that once information was posted on the website, it would be very easy to send links to anyone Board members wanted to approach for participation.

Dr. Bettencourt explained that it was not too early to start thinking about the new Superintendent's contract, and that the Board might want to work with District attorneys and at past contracts to see if anything needed to be updated, as it would want to have many issues decided in advance of actually finding a successful candidate. He added that it might also be a good idea to look at and update the Superintendent job description to ensure responsibilities and goals were accurate. He recommended having informational documents about the District budget and strategic plans available for potential candidates, and remarked that the Board website was very good and informative and that NESDEC would direct potential candidates there. He suggested Board members prepare for questions from the public about why some portions of process were public and some were not.

Ms. Patterson suggested that she, Mr. Dunn, Ms. Smith, and Mr. Croteau meet in the very near future and determine a list of people to ask to participate. She explained that the Superintendent search process could be discussed at any posted Board meeting, and that

the Executive Committee had added the search as a standing agenda item. The next full Board meeting is on February 3.

The Board voted 8-0 to adjourn (motioned by Ms. Higgins, seconded by Mr. Crush).

The meeting adjourned at 7:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barb Higgins, Secretary

Lauren Hynds, Recorder