

**Concord Board of Education**  
**Special Board Meeting**  
November 18, 2019

**Board members present:** Jennifer Patterson, *President*, Thomas Croteau, Pam Wicks, Jim Richards, Liza Poinier, Chuck Crush, Nancy Kane, Barb Higgins, Danielle Smith

**Administration:** Donna Palley, *Assistant Superintendent*, Larry Prince, *Human Resources Director*

The meeting was called to order by Board President Jennifer Patterson at 6:30 p.m. She stated that the agenda was to begin to plan the search process for a permanent Superintendent, noting that it was important to post the advertisement for a permanent Superintendent soon, in order to achieve as robust a search as possible.

Business Administrator Jack Dunn described the make-up of the last search committee for a permanent Superintendent and introduced Arthur Bettencourt, Executive Director of the New England School Development Council (NESDEC). Dr. Bettencourt described this non-profit organization, noting that it serves schools just in the New England states but does have a national presence with the national network called the National School Development Council. NESDEC is located in Marlborough, Massachusetts and has been in existence since 1946 (75 years).

Dr. Bettencourt outlined several essential aspects of NESDEC's search process:

1. The search assistance and guidance mode is based on CSD needs, during which consultants would work with the Board to build a calendar of milestones outlining the search and determine who was responsible for completing each step.
2. Based on this timeline, which would include outreach, and inclusion of constituencies on the screening committee, a Successful Candidate Profile is developed. Consultants would reach into the community and talk with constituents about what people want in the next school leader. The consultants would bring this data to the Board and assist with interpretation. The Successful Candidate Profile then would guide the rest of the search, informing interview questions and focus.
3. NESDEC is very familiar with New England, having done demographic reports, enrollment projections, strategic planning, special education audits, and Title IX work. It has its own unique proprietary recruiting network and can directly reach out to let candidates know about this vacancy. A self-selection process that can occur.
4. NESDEC does not recirculate candidates from one search to another. The Successful Candidate Profile development process would be unique to CSD.

Ms. Patterson noted that there are number of firms that do this kind of work and that the Board did not use NESDEC for its most recent search.

Dr. Bettencourt noted that the composition of the search committee was very important, and that its work would start once applications were received. He said the Board must feel confident that the committee has been chosen wisely, and that it should include several, but not all, Board members.

Ms. Patterson said that the Board's critical work would be to develop the "Successful Candidate Profile," noting that the advertisement should be posted before January. She said the Board should decide whether to use this firm, another firm, or no firm; although using a firm would leverage the Board's ability to reach a wider class of candidates.

Regarding the last Superintendent search, Tom Croteau stated the critical importance of collegiality within the search committee, especially as members approach the task with different views of what is important. Donna Palley noted that there had been two public opportunities to speak about what qualities they were looking for in a Superintendent, as well as a survey. Mr. Dunn stated that the value of confidentiality could not be overstated. He stated that a nation-wide search this time was particularly important.

Mr. Bettencourt said that the Board had sufficient time prior to posting the job advertisement, and stated that there was no obligation for NESDEC to be the firm chosen. He suggested electronically distributing the word of a vacancy in the next few weeks, with a more expansive process in January 2020. He advised moving forward quickly, but deliberately. He also noted that having a knowledgeable, personable, accessible interim Superintendent in place could put the District in a good position to give the search the thought it deserved.

Chuck Crush asked how the field of candidates would be narrowed down. Mr. Dunn indicated that previously, after a "skype" interview of one candidate; visits with two other candidates in their districts; google searches and reference checks; the committee distilled the field to two and ultimately made the determination to bring only one forward.

Ms. Patterson suggested that, while delegating the main responsibility for vetting candidates, if it was important to the Board to retain a choice among candidates, the Board could give that guidance to the committee.

In response to a question from Danielle Smith about how the student, teachers, community members were chosen for the search committee. Ms. Palley and Ms. Wicks described this part of the process, noting that the building Principals might suggest PTO presidents, parents or staff involved in leadership activities.

Ms. Patterson noted that the Board would be doing this work, and that it was not Dr. Bass' function to choose his successor. She said the committee must represent constituencies and could have a larger number and still be manageable. She suggested that multiple people from the community might be interested in participating, while noting that at the same time the Board would also be searching for a new CHS Principal.

Dr. Bettencourt said the community outreach process would be a 3-pronged process:

1. Identify constituents from a variety of between 6 and 10 focus groups.

2. Conduct a community-wide, proprietary electronic survey with a combination of partially forced responses and partially open-ended responses. This could be posted as a link on the District website.
3. Identify other individuals with whom the firm could have facilitated conversations.

The data would be brought back to the Board in groupings, which would be distilled into major themes, and culled down to 4 or 5 pages of bulleted comments that the Board determined it was important for candidates to know.

Mr. Crush commented that while this was a different Board from the previous, he thought there would be more community interest.

Dr. Bettencourt said that the composition of the screening committee, which would exist to narrow the applicant pool to those candidates the Board would be interested in as finalists, was best assembled not by targeting people or requesting the large influx of people who might be interested but, rather, approach constituent groups with requests to put forward suggested members.

Dr. Bettencourt recommended a meeting of the NESDEC team with the Board to plot out the search and develop a timeline, and then discuss regional and national outreach. Advertising would be done electronically. The next stage would be active recruiting: contacting those who might be a good fit, and fielding calls from interested parties. He said that confidentiality was critical to this process. After this, the community-wide needs assessment process would involve several teams going into the community to collect data. NESDEC would work with the Board to solidify the screening committee, and would train the committee. This would include developing screening questions, the role of chair, the location of interviews, etc. He suggested that two Board members should serve on the screening committee, working under Board authority. NESDEC would be the bridge between the work of screening committee and the work of Board in this process. All applicant packets would then be made available electronically on NESDEC's own website, and NESDEC would assist in arranging interviews for selected candidates. NESDEC would screen for credentialing, experience, and other qualifications. The screening committee would narrow candidates down to 3 to 5 for Board review. At that point a public process would include candidate visits to the District; the Board would perhaps visit their Districts. He stated that in total this would be a 4-month process, noting that from March to April and up to June 30 would be a good transition period and would allow for contract separation if required. Typically, a new Superintendent would start in July or August. Dr. Bettencourt indicated that typically, 25 applicants would apply for a position in a city the size of Concord.

In response to a question from Mr. Croteau about unsuccessful candidates wanting to know why they were not chosen, Dr. Bettencourt indicated NESDEC would have those conversations. He did, however, suggest that NESDEC would not be the public voice; the Board President should be the voice of the Board and the search process.

NESDEC's fixed consulting fee would be \$14,500 and its fixed expenses fee would be \$3,260, for a total of \$17,760. Mr. Crush said he felt the fixed consulting and expenses fees

were reasonable, and asked if there were other costs that were not typically included in the proposal.

The Board thanked Dr. Bettencourt, who left the meeting.

Ms. Patterson suggested that if the Board hired NESDEC, the composition of the search committee could be somewhat deferred. Mr. Croteau suggested that the Superintendent was such an important search that the Board would need the best guidance and guidelines of a professional search firm. Ms. Kane asked if the Board had a responsibility to put out a bid, see who else was out there. NESDEC seemed comprehensive, etc.

Ms. Patterson noted that the goal was usually to issue an RFP. Last time an RFP was issued: one company did not meet the criteria and the other two were highly qualified. She suggested there might not be a significant number of other firms in the region. Ms. Poinier expressed her opinion that it was important to secure a firm with national reach, as NHSAA had had such a limited pool. Ms. Patterson commented that she was impressed by how this firm would engage with the community. She stated that the whether to hire NESDEC would be a decision of the Board, but that the process was already well established and organized.

Board member-elect Gina Cannon commented that the focus groups would be of value and that their input, while possibly not ultimately the same as the candidate qualities sought by the Board, would engage the community.

Board member-elect David Parker suggested that any decision to hire a firm at this point would be based on only one presentation.

Mr. Richards said he was not familiar with school superintendent search firms and that normally the Board would issue an RFP to other search firms. He stated that the Board would not find a less expensive option, but it might be worth getting another option, reaching outside New Hampshire. Ms. Patterson stated that the Board could be prudent and look at further options even if it did not want to issue a formal RFP. Ms. Higgins, Ms. Kane and Ms. Poinier volunteered to call references on previous superintendent searches completed by NESDEC, inquiring about the following areas, and would create a brief report for the December 2 meeting.

1. guided vs. comprehensive – ask this of Dr. Bettencourt
2. the scope of community engagement
3. adherence to timeline
4. what worked and what didn't work in terms of the process
5. whether the Board was happy with the result

Ms. Wicks left the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

Ms. Patterson noted that the screening committee's role would be important, but the final decision still lay with the Board, and suggested the Board carefully choose its search firm.

Public Comment

Concord resident and parent Kate Frey commented that the NESDEC presentation was very good. She said the Board would need a comprehensive search, relying on experts that have been through this process a number of times. She said, about the search committee list from 2015, that it needed to be expanded and might include community constituency groups such as the Chamber or the municipality. She also said students must be included but the Principal should not decide who those might be.

Larry Prince said a job description existed from the last search process, and the search firm would help further develop this.

A motion was made to adjourn.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Richards, *Secretary*