

Concord School District
Special Board Meeting
February 20, 2020

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

Board member absent: Chuck Crush

Administrator: Jack Dunn, *Business Administrator*

Guest attendees: NESDEC staff Judy King and Dr. Carolyn Burke

Tom Croteau called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m., noting that the agenda was to review the draft Superintendent candidate profile provided by NESDEC based on community feedback gathered via an online survey, face-to-face meetings and roundtable discussions over the last weeks. Dr. Burke of NESDEC explained that the goal was to review the draft candidate profile, developed based on feedback from over 500 people in the community across demographics, including staff, students, parents and community leaders. She noted that the document's purpose was to guide the screening committee and the Board in finding the best candidate to meet Concord's specific needs. She noted two key areas in which successful candidates must demonstrate significant depth of skills:

- Ensuring a successful and inclusive system
- Providing effective and efficient system leadership

She noted that each area contained a number of supporting points and asked Board members to read and review those for the first area (ensuring a successful and inclusive system) and rank their top three or four to discuss and potentially reorder to best reflect the District's priorities.

1. **Creates a positive climate and culture:** possesses excellent interpersonal skills and an equal measure of emotional and academic intelligence; is courageous and approachable, professional, respectful, thoughtful, empathetic, fair, open, honest, a trustworthy person of integrity; someone calm under stress and with whom *all* community members feel comfortable
2. **Fosters and values relationships; a bridge builder:** is known in the community; is able to build bridges among/between groups and can lead all constituents to see themselves as part of a whole; is in the schools and the community; knows and is known by students, staff, parents and community members; is friendly and outgoing; engages people in conversations; sees him or herself as full member of the District and wider community
3. **Values and leverages a diverse community:** experienced working successfully in a diverse community; understands Concord's demographic and can articulate how/why this is a plus; believes in the power of including many voices; collaborates

with community members and groups, staff, students and parents to share ideas and resources for the benefit of students

4. **Communicates well and often:** demonstrates that s/he has no “hidden agendas;” has excellent written and oral communication and public relations skills; uses multiple modes of communication including social media to seek and share information; listens and learns; responds and communicates in a timely manner; ensures that everyone has the information needed to participate and express ideas
5. **Comfortably navigates a political environment:** able to successfully navigate Concord’s unique political environment; sees him/herself as integral part of the City’s leadership team; has a demonstrated skill in building credibility in a political environment for the mutual good of the District and community
6. **Has excellent conflict management and team building skills:** is comfortable in the role of Superintendent/team and District leader; sets a tone of respect; expects, listens and seeks to understand multiple perspectives and opinions; is fair and equitable with all parties; provides well-thought-out, researched and timely responses; follows up and follows through; uses data and information to inform decisions; remains calm and respectful; brings divergent groups together for continuous District improvement; celebrates successes and collaborates to improve areas of need; fosters a District-wide culture of positive, collaborative and informed decision-making
7. **Is skilled at evaluating and implementing programs to support the needs of a large and diverse student body:** is up-to-date on educational trends, programs and practices that enable staff to effectively support students with diverse social, emotional and academic needs and backgrounds to thrive and to master the curriculum; is experienced in supporting students who have experienced trauma; knows and understands special education programs, practices, laws and regulations; is able to provide for both college- and non-college-bound students
8. **Is a strategic thinker and change agent:** is able to assess current programs and collaboratively develop programs and plans to move District forward; is able to create a common set of expectations, goals and action plans PK-12; is skilled at pacing change and at including stakeholders and building consensus

Jennifer Patterson commented that the consistency between what the community seemed to be looking for and the feedback she hoped would be received was striking. She added that the prioritization process made a lot of sense and thanked NESDEC for gathering the data. Board members ranked the bullet points as follows:

- Jennifer Patterson: 1. Positive climate – specifically, honest, courageous under stress; 2. Fosters relationships – talks to everyone and really listens to everyone and incorporates that information; 3. Communicates well and often
- Jim Richards: 1. Positive climate, 2. Evaluating/implementing programs, 3. Conflict management/team-building

- Tom Croteau: Noted number of times trust was mentioned in the description. 1. Positive climate, 2. Values/leverages a diverse community, 3. Evaluating/ implementing programs
- Liza Poinier: 1. Positive climate, 2. Diverse community, 3. Evaluating/ implementing programs
- Danielle Smith: 1. Positive climate, 2. Fosters relationships, 3. Communicates well and often
- Barb Higgins: 1. Positive climate, 2. Fosters relationships, 3. Strategic thinker and change agent
- David Parker: 1. Excellent conflict management/team-building; 2. Strategic thinker/change agent; 3. Evaluating/implementing programs
- Gina Cannon: 1. Positive climate, 2. Fosters relationships, 3. Conflict management/team-building

Board members discussed the rankings and other points they felt deserved inclusion and/or emphasis in the final document, including an emphasis on proactivity vs. reactivity, familiarity with the unique nature of Concord's community and government, fostering transparency and open communication across and among all levels, and being a courageous and strong leader. Dr. Burke noted that the interview and selection process was long, and that the screening committee would read and get a feel for the document to help select whom to interview. Interviews would generally take an hour and consist of roughly 10-12 questions. She explained that the goal was not necessarily to find someone who would hit every bullet point in the document, but who would mesh with its overall themes and priorities. She noted that, after the screening committee process was complete, the Board would be interviewing the finalist candidates at least once and that it would be important to focus on listening for responses that show the candidate meets the two overarching themes of ensuring a successful and inclusive system, and providing effective and efficient system leadership. She added that the document's bullet points should help guide what to listen for in candidate responses, as well as reference calls and site visits.

Ms. Cannon asked if the document was realistic as it set a high bar, and all candidates would naturally possess different skill sets. Dr. Burke noted that each district has its own priorities and that different items would rise to the top of the list based on those unique needs; for example, some districts seek a candidate with particular strengths in curriculum oversight and budget development. She noted that the overwhelming non-negotiable priority for Concord was building a positive climate and culture and that the screening committee should have a feeling of a candidate's intangible qualities after the interview. Board discussion centered around the concept that while all the skills outlined in the profile document should be a baseline, the ideal candidate would possess intangible qualities of intuitive leadership and strategic thought rather than hit an objective checklist. The document would define values as identified by the Concord community that should feed into the ideal candidate's ability to successfully perform the job.

Dr. Burke asked Board members to read and review the next set of bullet points, which support the second goal of providing effective and efficient system leadership. These draft points were as follows:

1. **Makes students' safety and security a priority:** collaboratively develops District-wide practices and protocols designed to protect the safety and security of students; works with Police Chief and community agencies to ensure schools are prepared for crisis or emergency situations; enforces behavioral expectations throughout the District for the safety and security of students and staff
2. **Models and holds self and staff accountable for meeting District expectations:** has excellent supervision, mentoring and evaluation skills; ensures that District policies, goals, expectations and standards are communicated, understood, and practiced by all staff members; provides professional development and supports administrators and staff in implementing practices in line with District policies and state, federal and local laws and regulations including special education laws and regulations; builds common practices Pre-K–12
3. **Has excellent time-management skills:** able to prioritize and create areas of focus; schedules to ensure s/he spends time out in the District and community and in the classrooms while ensuring the District is well managed/led; delegates while maintaining oversight; can assess areas in need of leadership and (re)delegate areas of responsibility to ensure oversight of all areas
4. **Develops, implements and oversees a fiscally sound budget:** understands the ramifications of an autonomous budget process and can work with the Board, administrators, staff and community to develop a fiscally sound budget that supports needed District programs and practices; understands the RFP process and monitors the effectiveness of contractors and contracted programs
5. **Develops and mentors leaders:** can build a leadership team that sees itself as an integral part of the whole Pre-K–12 system; builds leaders throughout the District by enabling staff to create and take risks; believes in delegation and accountability; collaboratively creates common practices and expectations PreK–12; able to make difficult personnel decisions
6. **Works effectively with the Board and community leaders:** demonstrated ability to ensure that the Board has the knowledge and information it needs to make informed decisions; knows the roles and responsibilities of both the Superintendent and Board and acts accordingly; meets with City leaders (Mayor, City Council, City Manager, Police and Fire Chiefs) on both a scheduled and an as-needed basis; believes in shared resources and ensures the District is positioned to respond to the needs of its students

As with the previous round, Board members ranked their bullet points as follows:

- Jennifer Patterson: 1. Develops and mentors leaders, 2. Safety, 3. Modeling accountability – she added that developing a fiscally sound budget should also be high on list as this is a unique piece that makes Concord's such a challenging superintendency

- Jim Richards: 1. Models accountability, which he said incorporates several of the other bullet points on the list; 2. Budget; 3. Develops and mentors leaders
- Tom Croteau commented that student safety was a given, but no one in the community would ever want the Board or District to forget that point and to constantly remain vigilant. He said good mentoring and staff evaluation would bring good learning to students, which would lead to good teachers staying in the District, an overall positive cycle. He said he has heard feedback from teachers wanting to see the Superintendent out in the buildings and to feel that person was approachable and aware of school climates and daily goings-on.
- Liza Poinier: 1. Models accountability, 2. Developing and mentoring leaders, working effectively with Board and community leaders, 3. Safety. Emphasized the importance of communicating a culture and climate of safety rather than a “police state.”
- Danielle Smith: 1. Safety, 2. Models accountability, 3. Develops and mentors leaders
- Barb Higgins: 1. Models accountability, 2. Safety, 3. Develops and mentors leaders – feels increased accountability would naturally lead to increased safety
- Gina Cannon: 1. Models accountability, 2. Develops and mentors leaders, 3. Time management – commented that it was critically important for the Superintendent to be in the schools where staff can see and interact with them.
- David Parker: 1. Safety, 2. Budget, 3. Works effectively with Board and community

Ms. Patterson noted that the concept of safety has two components, internal and external. The external element involves safety procedures and precautions to protect students and staff from external issues/dangers, while the internal element involves developing and fostering a culture and climate of safety and accountability. Dr. Burke pointed out that NESDEC has a staff lawyer dedicated to Title IX who could be a resource for relevant District or Board questions and issues. She clarified that the candidate profile was not a limiting document, and Board members were welcome to dig deeper on topics during candidate interviews. Various Board members voiced approval and appreciation of the document.

Ms. Patterson opened the meeting for public comment.

Concord resident and parent Laura Mower remarked that she was encouraged that the discussions aligned so closely with what she heard in the community focus groups.

The Board voted 9-0 to adjourn (moved by Ms. Higgins, seconded by Mr. Parker).

The meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barb Higgins, *Secretary*
Lauren Hynds, *Recorder*