

Concord School Board  
**Special Board meeting – interim Superintendent candidate**  
**May 28, 2020**

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

**Board members absent:** Chuck Crush, Jennifer Patterson

**Administrators:** *interim Superintendent* Frank Bass, *Assistant Superintendent* Donna Palley, *Business Administrator* Jack Dunn

Board Vice President Jim Richards called the meeting to order at 5:36 p.m. and read the following emergency meeting statement on behalf of Board President Jennifer Patterson:

I, as President of the Concord School Board, have found that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

The business we intend to conduct today is necessary due to the need of the community to meet Kathleen Murphy, interim Superintendent candidate. Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to this meeting. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, we are:

a) providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access by other electronic means: We are utilizing *Microsoft Teams* for this electronic meeting. All Board members have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through this platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone number (925) 391-1169, conference ID: 94 341 727#, by clicking on the link provided on the sau8.org website, or by watching the meeting on ConcordTV's youtube channel. A recording of the meeting will also be posted on the ConcordTV website.

The Board does not intend to take public comment during this meeting, but will allow the public to pose questions of Ms. Murphy. The Board will, however, take public comment on candidate Murphy at its June 1 Board meeting. We do encourage the submission of citizen comments via e-mail at: [concordinfo@sau8.org](mailto:concordinfo@sau8.org)

b) providing public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting: We previously gave notice to the public of the necessary information for accessing the meeting, including how to access the meeting using *Microsoft Teams* or telephonically. The meeting and pertinent instructions were posted on the District website at sau8.org more than 24 hours prior to the meeting and are highlighted at the top of the website.

c) providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access: if anybody has a problem, please call 603 513-9008.

d) adjourning the meeting if the public is unable to access the meeting: in the event the public is unable to access the meeting, the meeting will be adjourned and rescheduled.

#### Roll call/determination of members participating

Mr. Richards noted that Board members would participate remotely, and any votes taken during this meeting would be done by roll call (other than adjournment). Gina Cannon, Tom Croteau, Barb Higgins, David Parker, Liza Poinier, Danielle Smith and Jim Richards were present. Chuck Crush and Jennifer Patterson were not present. In addition, Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley, Business Administrator Jack Dunn, RMS Principal Paulette Fitzgerald and CMS Principal Kris Gallo were present.

Mr. Richards noted that Board members Barb Higgins, Jennifer Patterson, David Parker and Mr. Dunn met with NESDEC representative Art Bettencourt to seek a qualified candidate for interim Superintendent. The Board then interviewed candidate Kathleen Murphy via electronic meeting, and was pleased to present her to the community at this meeting. The Board planned to vote on her candidacy at its June 1 meeting.

Ms. Murphy noted that she had met “virtually” with some members of staff earlier in the week. She said she was drawn to the position by an obvious passion for education in this community; by the District’s status as a refugee destination and commitment to diversity; and because she wanted to be able to help. She said she was aware of the difficulties the community has faced over the last three years, with the deaths of several administrators, the ever-present history of Christa McAuliffe embodied in one of its newest schools, and particularly in the last 18 months with the teacher sexual assault situation. All these have left employees trying to find their way forward, and to bring resolution to all those issues. She said she was also aware of issues the Board would like to address, including special education and program evaluation, and would feel quite comfortable doing that work. She said she was aware there was a middle school project on the horizon, noting that she just completed a middle school reconstruction/renovation project, with a ribbon-cutting in September 2019. She said she could lend significant support to the issue of transparency, commenting that every effort needs to be made to reach out to the public, as it needs to understand what’s happening. She described her history as an elementary school teacher for 13 years, her work in Nashua hiring new staff [in Nashua, the school district is not autonomous as is the case in Concord], as Superintendent in Newmarket, as a director at NH DOE during a 4-year appointment, and her 10-year tenure in Hampton. She noted that she was the first Superintendent there, as Hampton was originally part of the Winnacunnet SAU. She said she was also asked by Governor Hassan to be a military commissioner for MIC 3 (title law), which mandates specific rules for the transition of students whose parents are on active duty. While these students transition from school to school, certain rules and standards must be followed. To that end, she worked closely with the Naval base in Kittery, which gave her a whole other look at students who are transient and moving into a district. She said she has been a New Hampshire-ite all her life; she is married, with children and elementary-age grandchildren. She commented that

she had met with staff electronically, and was looking forward to the opportunity to meet community members

Ms. Cannon asked what Ms. Murphy thought were the top two or three items that needed to be addressed immediately.

Ms. Murphy noted that human connections and relationships were vital, to help the community understand the work that needs to be done, and help educators to understand the work. She said had heard in a number of conversations that there was much needed healing. She planned to engage the community in forums to facilitate discussion, out of which comes the transparency everyone is looking for. She felt that having someone come in to evaluate programs and get community input on special education was important. While the Board's and community's desire for a permanent Superintendent should be the priority, there were tasks that should be tackled now, including social/emotional learning.

Mr. Croteau asked what she would look for that would need to be addressed right away once the special education programs are evaluated; what weaknesses and strengths would she look for?

Ms. Murphy noted there is typically a limited response rate for surveys, but to understand what parents are thinking and what they want, one must actually meet with them, and even the students themselves. She said it was critical that teachers have the necessary skills and that these were constantly changing. She said that superintendents need to be out in their buildings and see what's happening, in order to be able to improve. Starting with the question, "What can we do to make things better?", data was also important. She said it was critical that student progress be constantly monitored by teachers, case managers, etc.

Ms. Higgins noted that the Concord School Board was autonomous; its votes were not overridden by votes of the constituents. She asked, in general, how Ms. Murphy would approach budget development in light of this.

Ms. Murphy noted that the public needs to become familiar with the budget. Coming from a town that had adopted SB2, she had developed videos on the budget which were posted on the local cable TV station, visited groups in towns and noted those critical aspects of the budget that were seeing increases. She said she was concerned about budgets, as the unemployment rate has gone so high; property taxes may not be made which could result in a lack of revenues. She said it was the Board and Superintendent's joint job to deliberate, develop budget, then share it with community. She commented that she brought the community's concerns on pending legislation and legislative changes to Hampton state representatives, and recommended this.

Mr. Parker noted that not many people in the community were involved in Board business and asked how Ms. Murphy would invigorate the community.

Ms. Murphy noted that people want you "to go to their place," where they're comfortable, and some people do not come to the schools because they may have had a bad experience in school. She said Board members need to be ambassadors of the educational community to the larger community.

Ms. Poinier stated that one of the Board's biggest challenges was communication and asked Ms. Murphy to expand on how the District could reach parents, students and the rest of the community.

Ms. Murphy noted the need for a presence on social media, as it has become the way people are getting information. She uses Twitter as it is immediate and contains photos or short videos; whereas if she sent a link to an article, she would not get as many "likes." She said the District and Board needed to use Facebook, etc. She stated that visits with city officials and others were important, though the conversations needed to be focused, including stated topics and goals.

Mr. Richards asked how Ms. Murphy would approach the challenges in determining the launch of a successful school year starting in September.

Ms. Murphy noted that there first needed to be a framework to address all scenarios that might be present in the fall, including remote learning, "rolling learning," face to face instruction; or a mixed approach. From there, all of the issues that come along with each scenario must be addressed. She said a broad array of stakeholders needed to be involved in those discussions: teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, support staff, parents, students, members of the wider community. She noted that, in Hampton's developing plan, the deputy police chief, assistant town manager, director of recreation, chamber of commerce director, a local doctor and others were all included. Once a framework has been established, then post all the information and hold regular meetings. She said there were parents who would not send their children back and other parents who insisted on school physically being in session.

Mr. Dunn read a question from Concord resident Dan Habib: "As I'm sure [you] know, students with disabilities have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and the school shut down. These students are often particularly vulnerable to the disease because of underlying health issues, so household stress and social isolation has been particularly high for these families. Additionally, many of the services that students with disabilities and their families rely on – OT, PT, speech, paraprofessional support, individualized instruction – has [sic] been limited or at times nonexistent. So both academically and physically, this is a group that is unlikely to have progressed academically or physically during the pandemic, and may even see regression from the months of isolation. Many students and their families may not feel it will be safe to return to school in the fall, even if non-disabled students return. Do you have any specific, innovative ideas for supporting students with disabilities this summer and in the fall if and when you become the interim superintendent?"

Ms. Murphy replied that there was a concern about the possibility of regression for students with educational and physical challenges. She stated that these students could safely be brought back into school in the summer, but it must be determined whether staff was willing to do that. She noted that, for example, physical therapy could not be done remotely; bringing the physical therapist and student together physically was critical, and not having those sessions since March 16 was very difficult. She noted that, if the District did not provide support for youngsters, there would be significant issues with

compensatory services. She said there were professionals (PT, OT, paraprofessional, etc.) willing to go into the students' homes; this was a strategy that might be employed to provide those therapies. She said she knew that much critical work needed to be done in the summer, including taking the time to evaluate and measure what those losses had been. She said she had been impressed with speech and language pathologists' work online and that parents were also participating. She was concerned that parents might be personalizing a sense of "failure" in terms of the child's possible lack of progress.

Mr. Croteau said he thought the District needed to be aware of making sure teachers, support staff and other service providers were on board with the call for this kind of work; this would usually involve extra pay or a stipend. He said the administration would need to keep in mind the needs of staff as plans proceed.

Ms. Murphy noted that teachers, paras and support staff were the heart of the work and needed to be adequately supported. She said educators had experienced incredible stress for, among other things, knowing they could not always reach students' IEP goals, etc.

Mr. Dunn read the first of two questions from Concord resident and parent Quentin Goble: "We see that while you were Superintendent at Hampton School District you commissioned and released a redacted report on a bullying incident that occurred in the schools. The Concord School Board also commissioned a report written by an independent investigator about Concord School District officials' handling of sexual misconduct complaints against Howie Leung. However, they have refused to release a redacted report to the public, and are using tax payer's money to block that release. As Interim Superintendent would you revisit the Board's decision and finally offer the community transparency regarding this matter?"

Ms. Murphy noted she had requested an administrative review be done about a bullying incident in her district, and she had previously staged a public forum about racial bullying. She said it was important to do an administrative review to examine responses of the administration, how to improve, and what the district's policies indicated. When the review was received, names, dates, times of events were specified. Knowing she had to be careful about FERPA and on advice of legal counsel, she did release a redacted report. She said she was not familiar with the referenced District's report but that, in light of the need for transparency, suggested there might be a way to provide a summary or an executive response to the report without violating student privacy rules. She said she would want to engage with the Board on whether certain information could be given to the community, while still protecting students and personnel.

Mr. Dunn read the second of two questions from Concord resident and parent Quentin Goble: "Based on [a] 2019 legal settlement, the District is required to provide ongoing "district-wide training for its educators and administrators on best practices in protecting students from educator misconduct and addressing complaints by students and educators regarding potential Title IX discrimination." The District held one of these training in the beginning of last year but that was it. What are your plans to institutionalize ongoing training on this issue for all staff?"

Ms. Murphy noted the US DOE had recently released new Title IX regulations and technical assistance, changing some of the language from the original Title IX. She said this was an opportune question to ask right now, as there would be a need for additional training. Whether Title IX or pedagogical strategies, training must be consistent and ongoing. She discussed the extensive training program instituted in Hampton related to the racial bullying incident some time ago, stating there was a need ensure everyone was exposed and familiar with policies, procedures, and expectations for how things were going to be, going forward.

Public comment

There was no public comment.

Ms. Murphy reiterated that everyone she had met has been very professional, and clearly cares very much about the community, the students and their families. She said it was important to work together to shine a light on the wonderful things that happen every day in the school community, as people sometimes get caught up in the negative things that happen. She said she would love to participate in helping do that.

In response to a question from Mr. Croteau, Ms. Murphy said she holds an experienced educator certificate with Superintendent and Principal endorsements that expire in 2022. She said it was critical that appropriate credentials are in place for all staff required to have them.

**The Board voted 6-0 to adjourn (motioned by Ms. Higgins, seconded by Mr. Croteau).**

The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barb Higgins, *Secretary*

Linden Jackett, *Recorder*