

# **A VACANCY IN THE SUPERINTENDENCY**

## **Key Decisions for the School Committee**

### **Planning for a Transition**

Massachusetts Association of School Committees

*MASC is the official representative of the  
National Alliance of Superintendent Searchers*

## *First Steps to Take Upon Notice that a Superintendent Vacancy will Occur*

1. **Assess** the attractiveness of your position and consider what makes the position more or less attractive. This will be important in anticipating the size and quality of the candidate pool as these factors will be important considerations for prospective applicants.
  - a. What is the reason for the vacancy in our superintendency? Is there controversy that will impact the willingness of candidates to apply?
  - b. Is the position legitimately vacant or is there a clear heir to the superintendency in your district at this time? Is there any other reason that an outside candidate will be concerned about another candidate having an inside track?
  - c. Will a candidate come into the district with likelihood of success or the burden of confronting difficult and challenging circumstances?
  - d. Can we have a publicly transparent process and still protect the confidentiality of candidates appropriately? (How much confidentiality can be provided?)
    - i. Will we need to have a late stage public review prior to the final decision making to involve the public?
  - e. Will the search process and subsequent transition be smooth, or are there likely reasons for disruption (public health and safety, seasonal/weather, school vacations, summer, construction, budget crisis)?
  - f. Do some of these challenges face the superintendent to be hired:
    - i. Search Process/Level of Public Scrutiny
    - ii. Governance/School Committee
    - iii. Support of the Central Office Team and Principals
    - iv. Budget and Finance Issues for School
    - v. Maintaining a Strong Vocational and Technical Program.
    - vi. Academic Achievement
    - vii. Political or Legal Issues
    - viii. Status of Labor Relations/Negotiations
    - ix. Scrutiny by Local Media
    - x. Relationships with the Municipal Government(s)
    - xi. Involvement of Local Special Interests (Business, Universities, Constituencies)

- xii. Satisfactory Economic Package for Candidate (i.e., Contract Provisions, Valuable Compensation Items)

## **2. Consider your options for the interim period or the permanent superintendency.**

- a. Do you want an interim superintendent for a specific period?
  - i. Internal or external interim?
  - ii. Will interim superintendent be considered for permanency?
  - iii. Will the interim superintendency serve as an “audition” for a candidate who wishes the position permanently?
  - iv. How much process do you need for an interim?
- b. Do you want to go right to the permanent superintendent search process?
  - i. Make an immediate appointment (internal promotion or external)?
  - ii. Promote your internal candidate?

### **Special note for interim superintendencies:**

An interim superintendent is nothing more than a superintendent with a short term contract that might run for a week or two, month or two, several months, or as long as a full year. The law requires only that a school committee appoint a superintendent in public. No process is required, nor must you engage in an informal or formal search. You may need to consider what your community will demand in terms of transparency, depth, or civic involvement.

*During an interim superintendency, the person holding the position has all the authority of a full-time, “permanent” superintendent. One distinct advantage of an interim superintendency is that faculty and staff generally collaborate fully and engage in exemplary behaviors for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that they do not want an interim superintendent reporting to her/his successor who among the staff may be less loyal or reliable.*

## **3. Determine what kinds of assistance will the school committee require for interim or permanent superintendent?**

- a. Professional services (Full, Partial, Technical Assistance),
- b. Recruitment
- c. Technical Assistance from available sources:
  - i. Preparation for Search Process
  - ii. Graphic Design
  - iii. Recruitment (Mailing Lists, Recruiting Lists, etc.)
  - iv. Advertising
  - v. Focus Groups and Focus Surveys

- vi. Search Committee Support and Orientation
- vii. Compilation of Applications
- viii. Question Development
- ix. Background Review
- x. Parliamentary Assistance in Decision Making
- xi. Contracting Consultation

#### **4. How Much Public Participation Must You Have?**

*[During the search process, several constituencies will be helping you with your search, whether you want it or not. They include the media, local bloggers, faculty activists, special parent/community constituencies, and candidate stalkers. Be prepared to deal with them and to maximize their value and minimize the problems that could ensue.]*

- a. Search Committee (including size, membership, extent of mandate)
- b. Public Input (i.e., On Line Surveys, Live Community Forums, Outreach)
- c. Participation of Administrative and Teaching Faculty
- d. Pre-Search and Post-Initial Interview Participation

#### **5. Timetable**

- a. Schedule for Search Milestones and Hiring Date

#### **6. Screening Process**

- a. Initial Stages – Screening Candidates and Selection of Interviewees
- b. Vetting and Reference Checking at Early Stages, and again in later stages
- c. Preparation of Search Committee
- d. Initial Interviews (includes preparation of questions and process)
- e. Instructions to Screening Committee (Support for Screening Committee)
- f. Selection and Referral to School Committee

#### **7. Public Review Process**

- a. Public Interviews
- b. Meet the Public Opportunities
- c. Public Selection

#### **8. Contracting with Candidate**

*Looking for a Leader – What are the important things to consider?*

**DETERMINE** some of the important elements of the superintendency and the process you will use in finding a chief executive.

1. What makes our district different? (I.E., population, technical or vocational curriculum, financial issues, regional issues, high needs students, etc.)
2. What do we want in a district chief executive?
3. What are the critical skills we seek in our new leader?
4. What are the key responsibilities and challenges confronting the district and the next leader?
5. Do we need to look locally, regionally, or more widely?
6. When do we want this leader in place?
7. How do we want to engage the district (surveys, focus groups, involvement in interviews)?
8. Whom do we want to involve in the process?
9. Who will lead the process for the school committee?
10. What are the factors that will determine if candidates will apply:
  - a. History of stable leadership.
  - b. Presence of internal candidate(s).
  - c. Financial situation of the district.
  - d. Relationship with the municipal leadership.
  - e. Success of vocational and technical curricula and programs.
  - f. Administrative and academic status of the district.
  - g. Leadership of the School Committee.
  - h. Compensation package and contract language.
  - i. Relationship of the teachers union and superintendent in both the sending district and receiving district.
  - j. Political factors creating the transition.



## Professional Skills/Experiences

4. Application for Superintendency: Any special requirements or information for candidates<sup>4</sup>
5. Set Compensation Parameters: Salary  
Fringe Benefits  
Other Provisions

## DECISIONS RELATED TO COLLATERAL MATERIALS

### Use of Printed Brochure vs. On Line Material

#### Description of District and District Profile:

- Critical information needed: Enrollment  
Employees and Deployment  
Operating Budget  
Administrative Structure  
Schools  
Status of Union Contracts (if desired)  
Names of School Committee (if desired)
- Formal District Community Profile (Written Description)
- Photos, Graphics, or other materials to be included (i.e., town seal, mascot, landmarks)
- Content Issues: Criteria for Superintendency (See Attachment)  
Selection Criteria (See Attachment)  
Compensation and Benefits

### COMPENSATION INFORMATION

#### Compensation and Benefits

- Salary Parameters (i.e., Salary at current range, higher or lower)
- Benefits Package Parameters (“Flexible benefits package to be negotiated.”)

*[NOTE: It is sometimes the case that a search consultant, acting without authority, may begin negotiating salaries with candidates above those established in the original notice. The School Committee should be mindful of this possibility and give very careful instructions*

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<sup>4</sup> Some districts ask unique questions from the standard or ask for writing samples or special responses.

*to their search consultant about parameters and protocols regarding contracting and compensation.]*

## **ADVERTISEMENTS/RECRUITING**

### Approval of Advertising Plan

- Education Week
- Local Media (i.e., daily or weekly publications)
- On Line Options

### Deadline for Applications

- Definition of Deadline to have unambiguous requirement.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE LOGISTICS**

### Reference Checking

Who will perform? Who will assist?

### Administrative Liaison

District Liaison to Search Consultant  
School Committee Liaison

## KEY RESPONSIBILITIES (EXAMPLES)

- CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF A (SIZE) SCHOOL DISTRICT WITH DIVERSE CONSTITUENCIES AND HIGH LEVELS OF PUBLIC SCRUTINY
- COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY IN A RANGE OF ISSUES AND TASKS WITH A BROAD CONSTITUENCY
- BUILD A SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM
- RESTORE REPUTATION OF THE DISTRICT AFTER BAD PUBLIC RELATIONS OR CRISIS
- LEAD CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT FOR DISTRICT
- LEAD AND INSPIRE STUDENTS AND FACULTY TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
- DEVELOP POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS
- VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE
- IMPLEMENT EDUCATOR EVALUATION SYSTEM AT ALL LEVELS.
- ACHIEVE ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS REQUIREMENTS AS IS CONSISTENT WITH NCLB/RTTT.
- BUILD A COHESIVE FACULTY/ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM AND COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT.
- FACILITATE A STRONG ACADEMIC PROGRAM IN A SAFE AND POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WITH HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS.
- COLLABORATES WITH SCHOOL COMMITTEE, UNDERSTANDS AND RESPECTS ROLE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT, AND COMMUNICATES EFFECTIVELY WITH EACH OTHER.
- BUILD MORALE WITHIN THE DISTRICT, SCHOOLS AND AMONG THE FACULTY.
- PREPARE AND IMPLEMENT AN ANNUAL BUDGET TO PROMOTE ACCOUNTABILITY AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT.
- DEVELOP AND PROPOSE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR A DIVERSE DISTRICT WITH A MIX OF URBAN AND SUBURBAN CHARACTERISTICS
- RETAIN STUDENTS AND MAKE OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS THE SCHOOLS OF CHOICE FOR RESIDENTS.
- REACH OUT TO ALL SEGMENTS OF THE TOWN TO BUILD A STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY.
- ADDRESS THE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONNEL, BUDGET AND OTHER RESOURCES.
- DEVELOP A LONG RANGE EDUCATIONAL PLAN IN COLLABORATION WITH CIVIC LEADERS.
- DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF CHILDREN.
- INTEGRATE TECHNOLOGY, WRITING, RESEARCH, AND THE ARTS ACROSS ALL CURRICULA.
- ADVOCATE FOR THE DISTRICT AND ITS STUDENTS AT MUNICIPAL, STATE AND FEDERAL LEVELS
- PERSONIFY INTEGRITY AND DEDICATION TO THE WELLBEING OF STUDENTS AT ALL LEVELS.

## SELECTION CRITERIA (EXAMPLES)

- ACADEMIC DEGREE REQUIREMENT (I.E., PH.D./ED.D OR MASTERS DEGREE)
- QUALITY AND LENGTH OF EXPERIENCE (I.E., TEACHING, CENTRAL OFFICE)
- NON-TRADITIONAL CANDIDATES CONSIDERED
- EXPERIENCE IN SIMILAR COMMUNITIES
- ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS FOR A DISTRICT OUR SIZE
- URBAN EXPERIENCE (I.E., URBAN CHALLENGES IN SUBURBAN ENVIRONMENT)
- EXPERIENCE WITH DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION
- RURAL, SMALL DISTRICT, OR REGIONAL EXPERIENCE
- VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE.
- FINANCIAL/FISCAL MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE
- CURRICULUM EXPERIENCE
- EXPERIENCE WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITY, FACULTY, STUDENTS, PARENTS
- COLLABORATIVE SKILLS
- CLEAR SENSE OF DIRECTION/PURPOSE/MORAL COMPASS
- KNOWLEDGE OF INNOVATIVE CONCEPTS
- UNDERSTANDING OF EDUCATOR EVALUATION SYSTEM
- CURRENCY ON TECHNOLOGY AND EDUCATION
- EXPERIENCE AS A MANAGER/TEAM BUILDER
- EXPERIENCE WITH SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION
- EXPERIENCE IN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND PERSONNEL
- EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH PARENTS AND PARENT ORGANIZATIONS
- UNDERSTANDING OF MA REGULATORY SYSTEM
- EXPERIENCE LINKING STANDARDS-BASED SYSTEMS TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
- KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD TEACHING AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT
- UNDERSTANDING OF MA ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS.
- STRATEGIC PLANNING (INCLUDING MISSION, VISION, ETC.)
- EXPERIENCE WITH MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
- COMMUNICATION SKILLS
- SPEAKER OF A SECOND LANGUAGE
- EXPERIENCE IN LEADING SCHOOLS OUT OF SANCTION STATUS

**DRAFT SEARCH TIMELINE**  
**SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH - Model Timeline**

*This timeline can take from 2-5 months depending the level of “process” and the size of the search committee. It is important to be flexible, allowing sufficient time to make up for unanticipated delays. The most likely delays would be on the search committee end because of the number of potential member schedule conflicts. A, earlier start date, such as over the summer, allows more time to plan, recruit, and interview. A late start will still work well if the school committee expedites the process. A very late start (March/April) would require expediting the process and imposing sharp deadlines.*

<b>September, 2024</b>	School Committee receives preliminary documents, approves draft timeline, sets focus group meetings, makes decisions about recruiting search committee, etc.  Search Committee Appointed and Orientation (Set Fixed Date)  Focus surveys planned and on-line survey developed; materials development completed and ready for distribution
<b>Mid-September, 2024</b>	Advertisements/E-Mail and General Mail distribution of materials. Also, distribution of search information to recruitment networks. Materials mailed and distributed. Candidate recruitment is ongoing.
<b>Early October</b>	Focus Groups will take place Search Committee will organize to prepare for screening of candidates, scheduling of interviews, and preparation of questions.
<b>Late October</b>	Deadline Set for Filing Applications (3:00 p.m. EST via mail, e-mail, fax or personal delivery to search coordinator)
<b>Immediately After Deadline</b>	Applications are compiled and prepared for the Search Committee to review during school vacation. Review begins immediately.  Search Committee begins initial screening, selection and initial interviews. Process culminates with recommendations to the School Committee.
<b>Mid-November</b>	Search Committee concludes interviews and forwards report and recommendations to the School Committee.
<b>Early December</b>	School Committee interviews candidates, conducts site visits, and other due diligence steps are scheduled. School Committee interviews finalists are completed. Site visits take place.
<b>December 16 (Week of...)</b>	School Committee makes hiring decision.
<b>July 1, 2025</b>	Superintendent takes office <u>or before if so needed and negotiated.</u>