



**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**(Official Minutes)**

**Special Meeting**

**February 9, 2021**

Called for immediately following the Joint City Council School Committee Roundtable Meeting, broadcast from the Media Arts Studio, 454 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of a preliminary discussion on the Superintendent's Search Timeline. This meeting is anticipated to end by or before 10:00 p.m.

Members Present: Vice Chair Bowman, Member Fantini, Member Rachel, Member Rojas, Member Weinstein, Member Wilson, Mayor Siddiqui

Also Present: Ms. Richardson, Chief Talent Officer of Human Resources  
Mr. Glenn Koocher, Executive Director of MASC

Mayor Siddiqui in the Chair

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m.

The Chair read the call of the meeting and explained that this meeting is being televised, votes will be taken and there will be no public comment.

The meeting proceeded to the first order of business with the following roll call for the purpose of a sound check: Member Wilson PRESENT; Vice Chair Bowman PRESENT; Member Fantini PRESENT; Member Rojas PRESENT; Member Rachel PRESENT; Member Weinstein PRESENT; Mayor Siddiqui PRESENT.

**1. Superintendent's Search Introduction**

Mayor Siddiqui proceeded to the first item on the Agenda with a presentation by Mr. Glenn Koocher.

**2. Presentations: Superintendent Search Process**.....Mr. Glenn Koocher,  
Executive Director, MASC

Mr. Koocher explained that it is the decision of the School Committee to hire and appoint the Superintendent. The Committee should think about where we are in the year and best options. He believes the best option will be to consider hiring an interim, with a very short contract; three months to one year usually.

The Committee can then do a formal, or broad search, casting a wide net to a national or international pool of candidates or cast a small net. One third of school districts just makes an internal promotion without any search at all, this usually happens when someone has been groomed for the position. One third of districts will conduct a search and hire internally. One third of districts performs the search process and hire outside.

The closer it gets to the end of the year, it takes 4-6 months to get someone from a search. On the interim side, do a vacancy for an interim or hire someone. Otherwise, the applications will come in, make the interim appointment. The interim has all the authority of the Superintendent.

Generally, in a formal search, the vacancy is posted for about 5 weeks, review and screen applications, get recommendations from the Ad-Hoc Search Committee. School Committee does not have to have a

formal Search Committee. However, the Ad-Hoc Search Committee is not able to meet in Executive Session; it is not permitted under the OML of the Attorney General. If there is a search committee, they are usually composed of teachers, stakeholders, parents, a municipal representative, the City Manager, a few School Committee Members (up to three), police student research officer. Anyone the School Committee likes.

It is getting late into the year. Most are already done with the hiring process or well into them. Cambridge will not be able to get a full search done until April or May at the soonest and by then, most of the top candidates will be gone. Cambridge, is able to pay a Superintendent and the Superintendent has a large staff, so many Superintendents will apply to Cambridge that would not apply to other districts. Out of state candidates may be scared away by Cambridge's real estate.

Candidates may be anxious to apply for another job during a crisis (economic or otherwise.) It is a risk to leave a secure place for a new place. Another problem is that if their name becomes public, they are likely to be targeted by anyone in their past that has an axe to grind with them. Different folks will badmouth the Superintendent to the School Committee Members to get back at the Superintendent. They can come with a Vote of No Confidence which is a Union strategy.

Every Superintendent candidate is controversial in some way. Some Superintendents have been courageous and as a result are not popular. Others have made very difficult decisions that affected people, and this will show up in background checks.

Key questions are: does the Committee want to proceed immediately for a search process, or start with an interim Superintendent and start the process in September when there is a full roster of candidates looking for a position. If the Committee waits, like Arlington did, you can hire and in mid-November for a Superintendent to begin in June.

**Vice Chair Bowman** asked if the pool is universal across the country?

- Mr. Koocher answered that the best time to start a search is in the fall. Most Superintendents need to give a district a 3-6 months' notice that they are leaving. He has done seventy-five Superintendent searches over his past twenty-one years of service in MASC. One of his first searches was for the district of Cambridge, and there were 120 applications. Most districts are lucky if they get six candidates that are desirable. He stated the Committee can proceed with a search, we can proceed with a RFP or we can use our Human Resources department to conduct our search without outside help.

**Member Rojas** asked about the size of the pool of candidates for interim superintendent and the size of the pool of candidates for a superintendent search.

- Mr. Koocher responded there are retired Superintendents that are eager to come back as interim superintendents and still keep their pension. He has a list of them and is happy to share it. Some districts hire a superintendent who is willing to audition and be the interim and then get hired if it works out. There also are candidates that only want to stay no more than 3 years, which may not be acceptable. There are not many districts that have people working for them now that have desirable candidates if you would like to hire within the district.

**Mayor Siddiqui** mentioned that this Committee may look different in 2022, so the fall may not be desirable.

- Mr. Koocher stated that it is not uncommon for districts to do the search and ignore the fact that it is an election year. It is rarely an election issue.

Mr. Koocher laid out the following steps and timeline for a quick search and transition:

If School Committee wants to mount a search for a transition as early as June or July, the Committee should start immediately; do it with full transparency, and with as few meetings as possible.

- 1) Advertise the position for three to four weeks as opposed to six weeks.
- 2) The Committee should choose an ad-hoc supt. search committee that wants to expedite the work. The larger the search committee the longer the search will take.
- 3) The Search Committee Orientation and Training Process and the actual interviews should be done by the end of April so the new hire will have a couple of months to transition.

Given the teachers and principals protect students from all implications, and given that the central office functions at a high level, Cambridge can have a smooth transition.

**Member Wilson** asked if it is possible to hire for an interim to permanent supt., and then do an evaluation of the interim before hiring.

- Mr. Koocher replied that intention would need to be indicated in the first place, i.e. that the interim can be considered to interview for the long-term position. The Committee can also hire a retired supt. that doesn't want the position for more than a year which makes it obvious. If it works well enough, you change the contract from one year to three years. This person shall not be prohibited from applying if advertised although it does not have to be advertised. Generally, the community follows the lead of School Committee.

**Member Fantini** asked if we wanted to hire an Alternative Superintendent is that possible?

- Mr. Koocher answered yes, the candidate can get a temporary certification for a non-traditional supt.

**Member Rojas** stated the timeline for the quick search for a permanent supt. was very helpful, what is the timeline for an interim supt.

- Mr. Koocher answered School Committee should advertise for a couple of weeks. You won't need a search committee because the interim supts do not care about confidentiality. If School Committee started tonight, Cambridge could have an interim one by mid-March on an interim basis effective July 1. The Committee would still have the opportunity to screen candidates and the interim can still meet the community. For the moment, it is done electronically, it costs nothing. MASC has a recruiting list and they would post our vacancy to 51 states School Boards Associations.

**Member Fantini** asked if we are required to do an interim search.

- Mr. Koocher stated there is no requirement that there be a process at all. On the interim basis, things are usually done quickly.

**Member Rachel** asked about the timeline, is it possible to do a search, training, then screening and interviews in September. Would it be realistic to make a decision by November or December?

- Mr. Koocher answered yes as long as everyone works in harmony on the search committee to expedite the process. If the search committee has to spend four to five weeks getting ready, it will not work. They need to commit to being available and being present to get the work done.

**Member Fantini** asked about hiring an outside firm.

- Mr. Koocher responded that there a number of firms, MASC has a list and it can be provided. He mentioned the Colin Center at UMASS. Because of a conflict of interest, MASC cannot take any part in the bid.

**Member Killian** asked if he recommends a process where all search committee members are available for every single interview or are there instances where some search members don't have to be there

- Mr. Koocher answered conflicts happen, they cannot always be avoided. Protocol is that if you miss an interview, don't discuss a candidate you were not present to see. It is easier to meet on zoom than it used to be in person.

**Vice Chair Bowman** asked about the search firms and diversity, equity and inclusion.

- Mr. Koocher replied that it is done by looking at organizations that represent candidates from the full spectrum of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and racial backgrounds. DESE has organized something called influence 100 which is a project designed to recruit and mentor folks from principals up to supts. There is a program at BU that does the same thing and another at BC. There are other organizations with minority administrators who ask to be put on lists that ask to receive minority information. Harvard also has a program that trains people for vacancies. MASC knows all of these people. The function to attract them is harder than the function to find them.

**Vice Chair Bowman** also asked about biases for out of state candidates as it relates to the Ivy League.

- Mr. Koocher answered it is hard to put action behind their words. He added that there are a list of minority supts that meet regularly. But they will not send anyone from the list if they don't believe Cambridge will take them seriously.

**Member Weinstein** asked what are the confidentiality rules of the search committee and what are some best practices for the process of hiring someone from the stakeholders group

- Mr. Koocher for confidentiality, meet under the Executive Session guidelines, if violated a candidates' career is at stake. As far as stakeholders, you can have community focus groups, do online surveys, people on the search committee that are not on the School Committee. You can also invite candidates to meet the community, i.e. Faculty, Administration and then interview with the School Committee. Many people can question the candidate even if they are not on the search committee.

**Member Rojas** asked if he could give any perspectives on what went right and what went wrong.

- Mr. Koocher stated he cannot remember anything that was done wrong. It is not as aggressive as it used to be. The pools are not as large as they used to be. It is a desirable position, but a very difficult job.

**Member Fantini** stated it was done very well. All of the things Mr. Koocher spoke about were done. It was very transparent. We should try to get more candidates and do more recruiting throughout the country. Some drop out before they make it to the finalist round.

- Mr. Koocher stated if you have five candidates, some candidates get nervous, if you have three you run the risk of being left with just only one and it may not be the one you don't want. Move them forward only if you really want them.

**Member Rojas** asked if we want the two step process, do we need to quickly get ready to hire an interim Superintendent in March and then start focusing on a full supt. search to begin in December.

- Mr. Koocher answered that is correct. If at the end of the full search, you end up with someone you do not have confidence, get an interim and start over.

**Member Wilson** asked about the Non Traditional Supt position – is there a pool of them out there

- Mr. Koocher stated they have not had a lot of success with non-traditional supt. positions. Business people that think just because they ran a business they can run a school district. Some try to run a school district like they ran their businesses.

**Member Wilson** asked how many districts are going to look for new supts. by the end of the school year.

- Mr. Koocher stated right now, there are about 7 or 8. There are always superintendents that give late notice to a district.

**Member Fantini** asked how many open permanent superintendent positions are there

- Koocher stated before this year is over, there will be about 35 to 40 transitions. They have done an unprecedented level of 15 superintendent searches so far this year.

**Vice Chair Bowman** asked is this because of the stress over COVID?

- Mr. Koocher replied it is worse for School Committee members than it is for Superintendents. Dealing with unions and parents is not what the elected officials were thinking of.

**Member Rojas** asked about the high number of searches

- Mr. Koocher answered early retirements is the leading factor. Then they realize they shouldn't have retired and want to come back.

**Member Wilson** asked about the diversity pool of retired supts. that would be interested in an interim position

- Mr. Koocher responded there may be twenty that qualify in the diversity category. If CPS looked for someone in a Spanish speaking community, Asian, or Black that is retired, CPS would be hard pressed to find someone in MA. There are some very good former supts that may be interested in coming back into the field.

**Vice Chair Bowman** stated that if we are in a position to have another person of color, it was unique for Cambridge to do so, we should build support mechanisms for the new candidates of color to be successful.

**Member Rachel** appreciated the Vice Chair mentioning that. It also gives us a chance to weave the splintered part of our community back together again.

**Mayor Siddiqui** thanked Mr. Koocher for the presentation, it was extremely valuable. She stated that we need to have a starting point, which brings us to the following motions. These motions do not mean we do not hire a company or inhibit any other process. It is common for the Human Resources Chief Talent Officer to be a main part of the process.

Mayor Siddiqui recognizes we are working against the calendar. She explained that the first motion **#21-49** does not mean that we don't do any of the things already stated.

Ms. Richardson stated she has gone through this process twice in Brookline. She is not new to the process.

Member Rachel wanted to be clear that she does not want any one person to rule candidates in or out.

Ms. Richardson replied she has no say in who candidates are, she is only the liaison and not on the committee.

Member Rojas asked if this was done in the last search, and Member Fantini answered in the affirmative.

### **3. School Committee Agenda (Policy Matters/Notifications/Requests for Information):**

#### **#21-49 Joint Motion by Mayor Siddiqui and Vice Chair Bowman**

That Lisa Richardson, Chief Talent Officer of Human Resources, be appointed as the official Superintendent Search Liaison Designee. On the following roll call vote **#21-49** was adopted: Member Wilson YEA; Vice Chair Bowman YEA Member Fantini YEA; Member Rojas YEA; Member Rachel YEA; Member Weinstein YEA; Mayor Siddiqui YEA.

#### **#21-50 Joint Motion by Mayor Siddiqui and Vice Chair Bowman**

That Vice Chair Bowman convene a Superintendent Search Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee to advise the Committee of the Whole on the Superintendent Search Process.

Discussion followed on item **#21-50**.

Vice Chair Bowman spoke on the purpose of the Ad-Hoc to bring a proposal to the Committee of the Whole. The School Committee is in a unique situation of being in a budget season, bargaining and bringing kids back to school, if we are committed to time being of the essence, an ad-hoc will be essential for doing the bulk of work to bring back to the committee.

Ms. Richardson added that an ad hoc makes the most sense, it makes a faster moving committee.

Member Rachel agreed it makes more sense because it is more efficient. We cannot do a search in executive session. Do we have to decide whether we are going interim or permanent first?

Vice Chair Bowman stated that we don't have as much time as we think we have to move this forward, there are many pieces that are time consuming. She hopes that the ad-hoc will move fast to do the timeline.

Member Weinstein asked if the ad-hoc operates in the same way as other sub-committees?

Vice Chair Bowman answered that the ad hoc lays the groundwork for the search committee.

Student Member Killian asked when laying the groundwork ends, is that when the search committee begins?

Mayor Siddiqui answered that the upcoming decisions will ultimately be made by the Committee of the Whole, the ad-hoc will present recommendations to the Committee of the Whole.

Member Wilson asked about the timeline and process, since we don't have a lot of time, appointing an ad-hoc to lay out ground work, what are the thoughts and hopes of actually getting into the nitty gritty of the search committee.

Member Fantini answered when you see the book on how this process goes, it will jumpstart the work. Then you can see what the last committee did and what we will change.

Member Rachel asked if the ad hoc is going to recommend whether we go interim or not.

The Chair will call another meeting on Friday. Member Wilson requests that there be public comment. Mayor Siddiqui stated yes to public comment.

Vice Chair Bowman stated that as we engage the community, it is still going to be our decision and our vote. There will be moments for community engagement and transparency. It is something that the Ad-hoc Sub-Committee should talk through. The bottom line is that the School Committee ultimately takes the vote based on all of the different voices of the community.

On a motion by Member Wilson, seconded by Vice Chair Bowman, on the following roll call vote, **#21-50** was placed on the Calendar: Member Wilson YEA; Vice Chair Bowman YEA Member Fantini YEA; Member Rojas YEA; Member Rachel YEA; Member Weinstein YEA; Mayor Siddiqui YEA.

#### **4. Announcements - None**

On a motion by Member Wilson, seconded by Member Rachel, on the following roll call vote, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.: Member Wilson YEA; Vice Chair Bowman YEA Member Fantini YEA; Member Rojas YEA; Member Rachel YEA; Member Weinstein YEA; Mayor Siddiqui YEA.

Attest: 

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Dosha Beard  
Executive Secretary to the School Committee