



CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Roundtable Meeting

October 15, 2024

Call for 3:30 p.m. held in and broadcast from the Dr. Henrietta S. Attles Meeting Room, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of discussing the process for the superintendent search.

Members Present: Member Harding, Member Hudson, Vice Chair Hunter, Member Rachel, Member Rojas, Member Weinstein (Absent), Mayor Simmons

Also Present: Mr. Glenn Koocher, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC)
Dr. Carolyn Turk, Director of Education Policy, Office of the Mayor

Mayor Simmons in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 3:31 p.m.

The Chair read the call of the meeting and explained that this meeting is being televised and recorded. Votes will not be taken and there will be no public comment.

The meeting proceeded with a roll call of members present: Vice Chair Hunter, PRESENT; Member Hudson, PRESENT; Member Rachel, PRESENT; Member Rojas, PRESENT; Member Weinstein, ABSENT; Member Harding, ~~ABSENT~~; Madam Mayor, PRESENT

Member Harding arrived at 3:40 p.m.

Mr. Koocher introduced himself and shared that he was a Cambridge resident and former member of the Cambridge School Committee. He highlighted the planning document the was shared with School Committee members prior to the meeting which can be found on this [website](#)

He noted that the School Committee has the discretion to undertake a search however it sees fit. He highlighted that typically communities fall equally under three categories: 1/3 promote an internal candidate; 1/3 conduct a search and promote internally; 1/3 conduct a search and hire outside the district. He underscored that the MASC would offer support and resources but would not play a role in undertaking the Cambridge search due to a conflict of interest as it the organization has strong ties to the city.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Koocher highlighted the following:

Trends and Challenges in Superintendent Searches

- Declining Applicant Pool: Fifty years ago, school districts could expect up to 100 superintendent applicants. Today, this number has significantly decreased.
- Reluctance of Out-of-State Candidates: Out-of-state applicants are often hesitant to relocate due to challenges in finding employment for their spouses/partners.
- High Local Real Estate Costs: Expensive local housing makes relocation less appealing for potential candidates.
- Early Retirement Incentives: The early retirement system allows superintendents to retire with full pensions at ages 57 or 58, which may discourage them from seeking new positions.

Candidate Search and Recruitment

- Annual New Pool of Candidates: Each year, a new group of superintendent candidates emerges, offering fresh opportunities for recruitment.
- Sources for Candidate Search: Many superintendent candidates begin their search by browsing job openings on superintendent association websites.
- Role of Promotional Materials: Most recruitment materials are now electronic, with the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) reaching a distribution list of over 1,300.
- Cloud Storage for Materials: It is recommended that promotional materials and candidate files be stored in the cloud, ensuring committee members have access to them remotely.

Best Practices for Screening and Selection

- Thorough Screening and Reference Checks: It's essential to conduct comprehensive reference checks and screen candidates broadly to ensure a high-quality selection process.
- Community Involvement: The search committee should actively engage with the community and other key stakeholders through focus groups, surveys, and other outreach methods to gather input.
- Developing the Search Committee: Form the search committee early in the process. Be mindful that larger committees can slow down decision-making, so it's important to ensure committee members have adequate availability and commitment.

Legal and Logistical Considerations

- MA Open Meeting Law Compliance: Ensure that the search committee adheres to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, which mandates that no more than three members of the Committee can participate in the screening process.

Appeal of Cambridge as a Destination

- Cambridge's Appeal: Cambridge is an attractive destination for candidates due to its diverse population, strong reputation, and generous budget for education.

Operations of the Search Committee

- Confidential Process: Maintain confidentiality throughout the search process to protect candidates and ensure fairness.
- Informal Straw Poll: Before interviews begin, conduct an informal straw poll to narrow down the candidate pool to the top 3-4 candidates.
- Interview Logistics:
 - Example: Conduct interviews with 2-3 candidates per evening.
 - Saturday interviews can be considered to accommodate schedules and to keep the process moving forward.
 - Recommended interview length: 75 minutes, with breaks in between.
- Finalists: Typically, 3-5 finalists are presented to the entire School Committee for final consideration.

Finalists' Interview Process

- Develop Interview Questions: Ensure interview questions are prepared in advance, focusing on open-ended and insightful queries. MASC is willing to share sample interview questions.
- Reference Checks: Conduct comprehensive reference checks for all finalists.
- Benefits Package: Careful attention should be given to developing a benefits package.
- Compensation: Offering a higher salary typically attracts stronger candidates.
- Hiring Timeline: Set a target date for extending an offer, contingent on reaching a mutually agreeable contract.

Discussion Points with Committee Members Following Mr. Koocher's Remarks

- Recruitment Firm vs. Independent Search:
 - Consider the value of engaging a recruitment firm versus managing the search internally.
 - Recruitment firms can guide candidates through the process and often have connections with top-tier candidates.

- Facilitating Community Involvement:
 - Hold community meetings to gather input and ensure stakeholder engagement.
- Search Committee Composition:
 - Ensure that the three School Committee members on the search committee are actively engaged.
 - Limit the search committee to no more than 7 faculty members to maintain efficiency.

Best Practices for Search Committee Operations

- Timeline: Ideally, the search committee should complete its work within 2-3 weeks.
- Candidate Site Visits: Once finalists are identified, efforts should be made to visit candidates in their current districts. Zoom meetings can facilitate preliminary discussions with district colleagues.
- Profile Development: Careful attention should be given to developing a strong, accurate candidate profile at the outset.
- Writing Samples: It is generally not recommended to request writing samples from candidates.
- Community Involvement: Authentic community involvement is critical to the success of the search.
- Legal Compliance: Consult legal counsel to ensure adherence to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

Additional Recommendations

- Interview Timing: Interviews should ideally take place in January or February to align with typical hiring cycles.
- Proactive Recruitment: Districts like Lexington and Brookline were proactive in soliciting candidates, which can be a valuable strategy.
- Candidate Interests: Candidates highly consider:
 - The School Committee's operating structure and culture.
 - The district's funding situation.
 - The district's relationship with the City.
- Anti-Bias Training: It is recommended that the search committee undergo anti-bias training at the beginning of the search process.
- Timing of Hire: The hiring of the superintendent should be finalized before the new School Committee members take office following elections.

Following the discussion, the Committee discusses next steps including arranging for a forthcoming Special Meeting which would allow the Committee to take votes; researching potential search firms; the possibility of sharing with the community the preliminary details of the upcoming process.

On a motion by Member Rojas seconded by Vice Chair Hunter the meeting was adjourned on the following roll call vote: Vice Chair Hunter, YAY; Member Hudson, YAY; Member Rachel, YAY; Member Rojas, YAY, Member Weinstein, ABSENT; Member Harding, YAY; Mayor Simmons YAY (5:10 p.m.)

Attest:



Katherine Christo

Executive Secretary to the School Committee

Documents Distributed:

A Vacancy in the Superintendency: Key Decisions for the School Committee, Planning for a Transition (MASC)