

Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District Committee

April 30, 2012

Minutes

CALL TO ORDER

A. McCloughan called the School Committee meeting to order at 5:34 p.m. at the Buker Multipurpose Room.

PRESENT:

Sean Condon, Bill Dery (5:38), Kym Donnellan, Roger Kuebel, Alexa McCloughan, Ann Minois, Jack O'Keefe, Dacia Rubel (5:36), and Larry Swartz

ABSENT:

Peter Gray, Acting Superintendent

ALSO PRESENT:

William Hart, candidate for position of Superintendent of Schools

INTERVIEW:

The purpose of this meeting was to interview William Hart, one of 4 finalists for the position of Superintendent of Schools. Committee members asked him questions, many of which had been prepared in advance. These minutes briefly state the topic of each question, and summarize his answer; for the full text of prepared questions see the numbered questions in a document appended to these minutes, which correspond to the number/letter in parentheses after each brief question summary below.

A. McCloughan asked W. Hart to reflect on his day so far (1a). He said that during meetings that preceded this interview, he consistently heard people say they consider it critically important for the district to hire a superintendent who can coalesce people across a spectrum of opinions, develop a concrete vision for the district, and work with all stakeholders to implement that vision.

A. McCloughan asked what he believes people notice about him upon meeting him for the first time (1b). He said people perceive him as open, easily approachable, passionate about his work, and well versed in what makes for highly effective education.

A. McCloughan asked why he is interested in working in this district and what unique characteristics he would bring to the job (1c). He spoke about the components of 21st century education (as defined in his current district) and said the recent lack of continuity in leadership in this district opens opportunity for broad conversation about what should happen next here to create a world class school system.

A McCloughan asked for specifics about how he would spend his first month on the job, what his priorities would be, and what support he would need (1e). He said he would hold many 10-minute meetings with parents, students, staff, and community members to learn their opinions about what the district "holds sacred" and does not want "messed with," and the challenges for this district. He said he would also examine concrete data (budget, student assessments, et al) and programmatic data (re transportation, food services, special education, et al), and immediately start working with the School Committee on a strategic plan. He

also mentioned acting promptly to resolve some long-unsettled issues to establish a sense of moving forward and getting things done.

J. O'Keefe asked W. Hart how he motivates people (1f). W. Hart spoke about creating a clear and lofty vision, which he said can be inspiring, and about instituting organizational systems to facilitate staff collaboration and professional development.

J. O'Keefe asked him to describe an event or circumstance in which he had to work under pressure (1g). W. Hart mentioned aligning the Pentucket curriculum with the state common core, and advocated proactive, energetic identification of tasks and follow-through.

B. Dery asked how he would communicate with constituent groups (2a). W. Hart detailed the tiered multi-team system in use in his current district as a model of embedment of a communication system in the district culture; advocated clear statement of objectives; mentioned using multiple media to communicate with different types of learners in the community; and said he would be in the schools and at community events regularly to provide informal access.

D. Rubel asked about his management style, his strengths, and about what needs improvement and steps he is taking to make those improvements (3a). He described himself as a capacity builder who puts systems in place, provides training, and holds parties accountable to measurable goals. He said his strengths include facilitating good community-wide decision-making that results in tangible articulated results; he said he finds it a challenge to attend to details he considers low priority, such as regulatory reporting.

D. Rubel asked about his past relationships with boards (3b). He said as an assistant superintendent he has not had a close relationship with the Pentucket School Committee. He said if hired he would propose an externally facilitated process with this Committee to define roles and develop norms of operation.

D. Rubel asked about his experience in negotiations and relationships with teachers' unions (3c). He spoke about focusing on jointly held objectives during negotiation of three contracts in Leominster and Pentucket that involved some "hot button issues." He said he restructured staffing in a large urban high school without the union filing any grievances.

K. Donnellan asked W. Hart to describe a planning process in which he was involved (3e). He detailed the Pentucket district's process of integrating 21st century skills into the curriculum, noting that the district first identified and defined five habits of learning (thinking, communication, collaboration, independence, and creative exploration), then set goals, and finally worked backward to devise the steps toward that goal on a two-year timeline. He gave some details about related faculty development.

K. Donnellan requested specifics about W. Hart's experience in leadership searches (3f). He said he participated in hiring Pentucket high school's five headmasters and an elementary and high school principal.

S. Condon asked why faculty and staff should support his candidacy (4a). W. Hart said he has a record of successfully articulating and implementing a vision, knows how to create systems that allow faculty to collaborate on practice, and respects the staff's talents.

S. Condon asked how he would assess curriculum (4b). He said a district's vision statement is the lens through which to evaluate curriculum. He mentioned Pentucket's rubrics for balancing content acquisition with 21st century skills, and spoke of student assessment as an indicator of whether instruction is getting the results desired.

S. Condon asked his opinion about the difference between a good and an excellent teacher, and a good and excellent principal (4d). W. Hart said great teachers are incredibly honored to do the work they do, and pay great attention to detail, such as identifying what engages each student in a class and differentiating instruction accordingly. He said great principals are passionate about their work, know how to ask important questions, and know how what sort of concrete feedback will prove most helpful to each specific staff member.

A. Minois asked about employee accountability (4e). W. Hart spoke of clear articulation of objectives and expectations, support and systems to help staff meet expectations, and regular analysis and sharing of where things stand on the continuum toward implementation.

A. Minois asked W. Hart about new concepts in education (4f). He said districts should first establish a vision and then assess what innovative or long-standing approaches have a reasonable ability to close the gap between the status quo and the district's goals. He gave examples of some concepts and processes that were introduced in Pentucket but not implemented long-term by teachers. He said technology is valuable for teaching students to collaborate, differentiate, and communicate in a variety of media.

A. Minois asked what makes school districts successful and effective (4g). W. Hart said districts should begin with an end in mind; create leadership roles that are well structured and hold people accountable; and keep decision making as close to the classroom as possible so teachers will feel ownership and have the skill set required.

R. Kuebel asked W. Hart what are the components of a good budget (5a). He said the overwhelming majority of financial support should be in areas the district prioritized; efficiencies should be found in support systems; and personnel funding should be allocated in a way that has the most significant impact on students.

R. Kuebel asked him to describe the budget process in the Pentucket district (5b). W. Hart spoke of that district's strategic plan; the process through which budget planning proceeds down and back up through the administrative and building leadership teams; and agreement on goal-oriented ground rules so parties to budget planning do not repeatedly try to "recreate the wheel."

R. Kuebel asked how W. Hart galvanizes support for a proposed budget (5c). He spoke about focusing on goals rather than dollars, and continually educating

about the collective community's common vision and agreed-upon goals, so people are not ignorant of what the school district will be doing next.

L. Swartz inquired about W. Hart's use of data in decision-making around school budgets (5e). He replied that assessing student achievement clarifies strengths and challenges; then he evaluates where in the budget those challenges are being met by best practice. He spoke about food service head counts and trends and the impact on that program's solvency; comparative data about central administration if there is a perception a district is "top heavy"; and use of state online data bank of many districts' budget data.

L. Swartz asked how Pentucket integrates technology into instruction. W. Hart said the district vision statement, 21st century skills list, and K-12 rubrics preceded and serve as the lens for evaluation of potential new technology. He said most students carry personal devices that can be utilized at school for tasks that the district might otherwise purchase other devices to achieve, at high cost, which would become obsolete within a few years.

L. Swartz asked him what make regional districts unique and challenging (5f). As positives, W. Hart mentioned economies of scale and the pooled talents of two communities. He said perceived or real differences between communities and their needs can be problematic, but focusing on elements of highly effective teams can help communities collaborate.

ADJOURNMENT:

A. McCloughan recessed the meeting at 6:47 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 7:00 p.m. at the Wenham Tea House; the Committee and candidate continued informal conversation over dinner. The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

DOCUMENTS AND EXHIBITS

USED AT THIS MEETING: Interview Questions — School Committee Interview (7 pages)
Supplemental interview form for superintendent search 2012 (3 pages)
Packet of documents provided to the Committee by W. Hart

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Sierks Smith, School Committee recording secretary