

WORK SESSION MINUTES

Board members met in a work session on November 1, 2018.

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER AND FLAG SALUTE

Board Chair Zach Bessett called the Springfield Board of Education special work session to order in the Board Room of the District Administration Center at 6:05 pm and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendance

Board members present included Board Chair Zach Bessett, Board Vice Chair Michelle Webber, Laurie Adams, and Naomi Raven. Dr. Hernandez was excused from the meeting.

District staff and community members identified included Superintendent Bruce Smolnisky, David Collins, Jenna McCulley, Brett Yancey, Whitney McKinley, Brian Megert, Suzy Price, Jeff Michna, Judy Bowden, Dustin Reese, Anne Goff, Sally Storm, Mark Van Den Hende, Peter Raven, Jonathan Light and Marina Brassfield.

2. SUPERINTENENT SEARCH

Chair Bessett introduced Dr. Steven Lowder and Mr. Richard Parker from McPherson and Jacobson who would assist the district in its search process for a new superintendent. Dr. Lowder and Mr. Parker provided some background on themselves and the firm. Dr. Lowder said that he would cover the following items:

- Set search calendar
- Identify selection criteria
- Discuss advertising media
- Identify community members to receive personal invitations
- Compensation and benefits

Dr. Lowder explained the search timeline. He stated they could post the superintendent position as early as the following week. The deadline for applications would be the middle or end of January 2019.

The team would take three weeks for reference checks to reach the maximum amount of people. The process was confidential until the final interview process. The board report would be given during an executive session in which the search firm discussed candidates.

Dr. Lowder added that if the newly hired superintendent left the district within three years, McPherson and Jacobson would conduct another search.

Site visits would happen after interviews. There would be five to ten highly qualified people vetted. All candidates would be suitable for the job, although some would more closely match the district's needs. Dr. Lowder explained criteria from the community would inform the firm's candidate choices and screening process. By February 20, 2019 the district would hire a new superintendent, however, that timeline could be extended if necessary. He concluded the district was beginning their search very early and would likely attract many highly qualified candidates.

Ms. Raven was pleased to hear the process could be completed by the end of February 2019. She was happy they would have flexibility, if needed. Dr. Lowder said the process had the flexibility to extend to March 2019.

Ms. Raven wondered when the firm would start community visits, and when they would be completed. Dr. Lowder said the listening sessions would occur before the screening process. The firm used information from the meetings to hear community concerns. During the sessions, Dr. Lowder and Mr. Parker asked structured questions: 1) Tell us the good things about your community; 2) Tell us the good things about your schools; 3) What issues should the superintendent be aware of as he/she comes into the district? and 4) What skills, qualities or characteristics should the new superintendent possess to be successful here? He said it was interesting because answers between different groups tended to be consistent. The information told them what qualities the superintendent should embody, and allowed people to be part of the process. The new superintendent wanted to have support of the larger community; it was a big part of their future success.

Mr. Parker added the sessions allowed him to really learn about the community. As consultants, they needed to understand the community and its culture. He explained that during the work session, the board would develop criteria statements which would be used to measure applicants. Then, stakeholder groups helped the consultants understand the nuances. The questions asked of the candidates would come from the input from the stakeholder meetings.

Ms. Raven wondered how the community meetings were structured, and how community members learned of the session. Dr. Lowder said the board would develop a list of people they wanted to invite. There were several different ways to reach stakeholders. In general, there were separate meetings for teachers, administrative staff, and parents and community groups.

Ms. Raven asked about the online survey. Dr. Lowder responded an online survey, with the same questions, would be open for a certain period of time. After the survey closed, the board would receive a summary.

Ms. Raven wondered if board members attended the community session. Dr. Lowder said board members did not normally attend. In the past, board members had their own listening sessions.

Chair Bessett asked if someone from the board could introduce the process at the beginning of the meetings. He wanted the community to know the board was there for them. Dr. Lowder told him that would be fine.

Chair Bessett asked about the interview process. He asked if the community helped move candidates forward. Dr. Lowder said the board would need to narrow the list of candidates to three or five for the interview piece. He explained the site visit process, which involved both a formal and an informal time for the candidate and the board.

Ms. Raven asked when the stakeholder meetings would finish. Dr. Lowder said they would ideally finish as much as possible within a day or two. He hoped to complete some work prior to Thanksgiving break. In response to Mr. Parker, Dr. Lowder said he would email Ms. Bowden with scheduling conflicts to set a date.

Ms. Raven asked what the standard four questions were. Mr. Parker said they were similar to a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. There were key questions around potential challenges and desired characteristics. Dr. Lowder added feedback was anonymous and grouped by department, demographic and organization. Dr. Parker said if groups were too small, the comments would be mixed into others, in order to preserve anonymity. It was difficult to determine beforehand how many people, and from which population segments, would show up.

Dr. Lowder noted it would be important to recognize the different languages within the district and provide translators for the community meetings.

Dr. Lowder shared the various websites where the posting would be advertised, including the firm's website, Facebook and twitter pages. If other websites were wanted, the board could make that decision. He suggested lots of coverage. Ms. Raven asked which website would be best for the district. Mr. Parker said the majority of applicants found listings on McPherson and Jacobson's website, the district website, or American Association of School Administrators (AASA).

Chair Bessett asked if metrics were available. Mr. Parker would locate some used by other districts and provide a chart for the board.

Ms. Raven asked for recommendations on important information to include in advertising. Dr. Lowder said it was mostly focused on the district's characteristics. Mr. Smolnisky said staff had already begun creating a brochure. Ms. Raven wondered what superintendents wanted in a district. She was told in general, superintendents wanted a strong and supportive board.

Ms. Raven noted three board positions were up for re-election in June 2019. She hoped for some guidance in those conversations. Her inclination was to be transparent. Dr. Lowder said yes, it was best to be upfront during the process. He added the board didn't want to hire someone scared of those changes as nothing was guaranteed. The superintendent was the board's only employee.

In response to Chair Bessett, Mr. Smolnisky said there was a list of stakeholders created at the work session in August 2018. The board would use it for outreach. Chair Bessett wondered how many community members each board member would invite. He was told the decision was up to the board. The consultants only needed to know how to group individuals. Ms. Raven requested a copy of the list from the August meeting.

Dr. Lowder would eventually need a salary range from the board. He advised a competitive salary, but only as high as the community could bear. The hiring process would be one of the only opportunities to raise the superintendent's salary significantly. Other payment incentives for teachers and superintendents could include salary steps, compensation packages or retention and success bonuses.

For comparison, Dr. Lowder shared the superintendent of Eugene 4J School District made over \$200,000 with incentives. Sometimes contracts included step increases, plus whatever raise other administrators received. Salaries were also based on comparable market rates.

Ms. Raven asked about the last salary raise at SPS. She wondered how vocal the community was regarding the raise. Mr. Yancey said the last situation was an assistant superintendent who was asked to become interim superintendent. Negotiations were not in public. Mr. Smolnisky added prior to that time, he hadn't recalled negative feedback from the community.

Ms. Raven asked how the superintendent's salary increases occurred within the district. Mr. Yancey responded the superintendent typically received a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) which was equal to what the administrators received. For example, if the administrative staff received a 3% COLA, so did the superintendent.

Chair Bessett asked when the consultants needed salary information. Dr. Lowder responded they wouldn't need a figure until active recruitment started. On the actual posting, the salary could say, "To be determined," or "Based on experience."

Ms. Raven asked if staff identified suggested ranges or salaries in comparative districts. Mr. Smolnisky said not all districts freely provided the superintendent salary information. Staff would ensure the board saw comparative information on Eugene 4J, as well as other districts closer to Springfield's size and community. Dr. Lowder added applicants would want to know what benefits would be part of the package.

Dr. Lowder introduced an activity in which board members were asked to write down characteristics, qualities and experiences desired in a superintendent. There was a total of 24 items.

After, board members read their priorities for key identifiers (some similar bullets have been combined), which included:

- Diverse background.
- Experience creating equity within a district.
- Cultural sensitivity.
- Ability to transcend language barriers and unify the entire community.
- Successful record working with high poverty schools.
- Kid centric personality; an advocate for children.
- Ability and confidence to think outside the box.
- Inspirational for families, staff and students.
- Charismatic and connects to staff.
- Strong, collaborative leadership skills.
- Provides opportunities for staff empowerment (i.e. site-based management rather than centralized)
- Ability to hold ground under pressure.
- Transformational leader; instructional leader.
- Strong communication skills.
- Advocate for district and higher educational standards.
- Experience in the teaching profession.
- Values community partnerships.
- Understanding of district finances.
- Committed and connected to Springfield.
- Sense of humor.
- Understanding of district priorities.

Ms. Raven noted the district completed important work over the past couple years. SPS had a large vision and she felt people were on board. The new superintendent needed to be able to have humility. The district had put a lot of thought into the direction it was going and needed someone to recognize and support that objective.

The board completed a prioritization activity where members put colored dots next to their top five traits. The five most popular overall would become the criteria moving forward.

The board discussed the identified traits and characteristics desired. With guidance from Dr. Lowder and Mr. Parker, the board began narrowing their priority list.

Ms. Raven explained her thought process. There were four main groups: staff, community, students, and the district. Nine key identifiers related to staff, seven related to community, five related to students, and five to the district as a whole. She thought if those four areas were put into words from the key identifiers, the board would clearly articulate who they sought in a superintendent. Dr. Lowder said the consultants would put the five items into a few cohesive sentences for the board.

Chair Bessett added that an equity lens was necessary. Mr. Parker wondered if equity was an issue within the district. Chair Bessett thought it was something the board needed to be aware of. Not all demographics were represented on the board or staff. He explained there was not equity among socio-economic groups either.

Dr. Lowder explained candidates would be answering essay questions around the items. Dr. Lowder suggested having five headers, and then subsets for each. Mr. Parker suggested having staff, district, community, relationships, and communication. Students as a focus could weave through each section.

Ms. Raven thought a logistical need of committing to the greater community was missing. Mr. Parker said candidates would need to commit to five to seven years in the position. Ms. Raven liked the list so far, but she thought it might be too vague. She wanted specificity in applicant responses. Dr. Lowder said the consultants would structure the application to address the list of qualities. During interviews the candidates would be asked very specific questions around these qualities.

Ms. Adams asked if a similar process would be done with staff or at stakeholders meeting. Mr. Parker said four specific questions would be asked and answers were written down verbatim. Dr. Lowder would wordsmith the criteria chosen by the board, and then return it for review. He didn't want to expand items; the purpose was to be clear by condensing. The four questions at public meetings would be based off criteria.

There was continued discussion about desired traits as the board worked to narrow their choices.

Mr. Parker said every superintendent had strengths and weaknesses. Often boards entered this process thinking they wanted someone skilled in all areas. However, that was not always the reality. The board indicated they were not looking for a manager. Mr. Parker saw qualities emerging that indicated they were looking for someone with heart, who was inspirational and acted as the face of district.

Ms. Raven agreed. She added the district had a wonderful cabinet of people who managed operations and staff. She wanted someone who recognized the issues within the district, but stayed positive and continually worked to improve the district.

Mr. Parker wondered if they wanted someone with more teaching and instructional experience, or management experience. Dr. Lowder said during interviews, the board would begin to see how candidates lined up with their vision.

As an interview question, Ms. Raven hoped to ask candidates to describe the ideal relationship between the superintendent and various groups, such as teachers. Dr. Lowder said yes. The board set the vision and people worked to reach that vision. The superintendent held people accountable.

Dr. Lowder wrapped up the session.

Mr. Smolnisky said staff would distribute a stakeholder list to board members and consultants.

Ms. McCulley was working on an advertising brochure and she was close to having it finished. Criteria statements would be added once they were finalized.

Mr. Parker provided a timeline for November 2018 and December 2018 meetings with the board and stakeholders. Exact dates would be decided. By late 2018 or early 2019, the consultants would provide a report to the board based on information gathered at the stakeholder meetings.

Mr. Smolnisky added that if needed, the district could invite the consultants to Eugene for another meeting.

Ms. Webber asked about advertising and media, and how close the district was to completing the new website. Mr. Michna said the website would be launched within the next couple days.

During the work session, the board chose the following criteria:

1. Strong, inspirational leader.
 - 1a. Respects teachers and the profession. (Balance between district and site-based; understands empowerment for all staff. Someone who knows how to lead and has backbone.)
 - 1b. Relationship building skills for all stakeholders.
 - 1c. Strong communicator and advocate for the district.
2. Recognizes and embraces the strategic plan and goals.
3. Advocate for higher standards for students and staff. Accountability for all.
4. Values community partnerships.
5. Equity – advocates for every student’s success.

3. ADJOURNMENT

With no other business, the Work Session was adjourned by Chair Bessett at 9:14 pm.

Minutes prepared by Marina Brassfield