



Mission Statement: To support and challenge all students to achieve personal and academic excellence in a student-centered environment.

BERLIN-BOYLSTON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Tuesday April 15, 2025, 5:00pm
Tahanto Regional Middle/High School
Multi-Purpose Room

Stream link <https://www.youtube.com/@bbrsdlive2893/streams>

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Due to technical issues this meeting may not always stream live, but we will make every attempt to do so and to record the meeting for future posting.

The items listed on the agenda may be discussed out of order as the Chair decides due to potential scheduling and timing requirements.

Present: School Committee: Mr. Michael Totman, Chair, Mrs. Meagan Grill, Vice-Chair; Mrs. Lori Hart, District Clerk, Mrs. Jessica Deglialberti, Mrs. Lisa Mair, Mrs. Elisabeth Mancini

Also Present: Ms. Nicole Bilotta; Ms. Tracy Novick and candidates Donna Flaherty, Albert Ganem, and Susan Gilson

I. Call to Order - Mr. Michael Totman called the meeting to order at 5:02pm

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Schedule of interviews for Berlin-Boylston interim superintendent

Tuesday, April 15

Mr. Totman explained how the interviews would work. The committee asked the eight questions below to each interviewee:

1. Why are you interested in this position and this district?

2. How do you build strong relationships with parents, teachers, your admin team, town [board members] select board, finance committee, capital committee, and the school committee?
3. What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses as a leader?
4. How will you handle the balance of respecting long-time employees of the district's experience and familiarity with how things have 'always been done' with new ideas, changes and perspectives?
5. How could you create an environment where staff felt safe to approach you with problems?
6. How do you handle conflict situations within the school district?
7. Speak to your skills and experiences in the budget process. Please address your experience with regional school budgets, if applicable.
8. We are currently in the middle of a big shift. Our current interim superintendent has had to do much more than just his superintendent duties: he is trying to make sense of last year's budget and finding things (like job descriptions and professional practices) that need updating or creating as some don't exist. He typically works well beyond 7 PM on weekdays, attends town meetings in both Berlin and Boylston that often run until 9 or 10, and he often spends weekends at Central office. Do you feel you are equipped to continue his work? Would you be able to dedicate as much time to turning our district around so we could attract a full-time superintendent next year?

5 PM: Donna Flaherty, Ed. D., Executive Director, ACCEPT Collaborative

Question 1: Dr. Donna Flaherty shared she has gotten to know the Berlin and Boylston community through her work at ACCEPT. Previously she was also a school committee member and finance committee member in a regional school district. She felt with a small town you get to immerse yourself into the community and get into the schools, which was exciting to her.

Question 2: Dr. Flaherty would start with an entry plan to define questions she would want to ask people. She would plan on doing one on one meetings with the school committee, central office, and administrative team to see what the needs are. She would also plan to meet with teacher groups and union representatives to understand what they are doing. Additionally, she would meet with other town committees to get to know them, the culture, and how it applied to the culture of the school district. Dr. Flaherty noted forming a committee to set a direction with the community, parents, teachers, students, etc. She would have monthly meetings with leadership and would make relationships with the universities and colleges in the area to help guide students along the way to getting licensed.

Question 3: Dr. Flaherty noted her greatest strength would be her tenacity. If she sees something needs to be done she is out there problem solving, collaborating and making a plan to get to the end point. She described herself as a servant leader. She really looks at students, parents, and staff needs to see what skills of her own can she bring to help or celebrate the things going on. Dr. Flaherty loves to mentor staff to move into leadership roles. She described her weakness as having high standards for herself and likes to meet deadlines. She creates a map for the year and determines what to do to hit her mark. She also works with staff to see how she can resolve things if not they are not meeting their mark.

Question 4: Dr. Flaherty would want long-term employees to feel valued and that the work they have done has meaning. They are working with children and that's what matters. She felt they would want to know that their work is respected and has positive outcomes and is reflected. She would plan to

get in and understand the culture and what part they play and think of an initiative and how to make them comfortable.

Dr. Flaherty noted involving all constituents and having a taskforce to have conversations piloting things and having a voice and knowing that it matters. She explained celebrating achievements and bringing them in new initiatives. She shared an experience at the ACCEPT Collaborative with special needs students and getting them the proper general education.

Question 5: Dr. Flaherty explained that with her servant leadership style she has an open-door policy. She would find ways of integrating herself in the classroom and helping out on rough days. Previously, on every Wednesday from 3-4pm she held an open zoom meeting for people to have conversations with her. She would want to have building and program visits, as well as walkthroughs to get to know students and staff. In the past she has greeted students at a building one day a week. She felt that being a person and being vulnerable with staff and letting them get to know her as a person was important. Dr. Flaherty talked about her brother's story and how it shaped what she wanted to do. Lastly, she noted that going to events and cheering students on is important.

Question 6: An important part of conflict is forming relationships and rapport with all people in the district and understanding the different cultures within. Dr. Flaherty explained knowing what it is that people are stirring for and what they want. She would work with those individuals and give them an opportunity to look at the big picture. Education is key. At some point, someone has to make a decision and it needs to be in the best interest of the kids and looking back at the strategic plan. She thought it was important to have strategic planning and rapport with community committees and show why they are asking what they are asking for to come to a level of understanding.

Question 7: Dr. Flaherty shared that she has lots of experience with the budget process in a variety of different settings. Her best education was sitting on the school committee which helped her understand how the schools function and all the decisions that go into the district. She worked as a finance liaison for the school committee and got an understanding of the needs and wants of the towns. It is about understanding all the different pieces in order to formulate a strategic plan for the town. She has worked with towns with different financial situations and working on that balance and coming to a general census of what they would ask for in the budget. In Battle Creek, Michigan she worked with a \$50 million budget and had to figure out how to manage and prioritize. Dr. Flaherty shared the various positions she held and how that allowed her to have different perspectives into the budgeting process.

Question 8: Dr. Flaherty felt for anyone sitting in that role that is the expectation. She is currently working 7 days a week and has a finger on pulse of what is happening and meeting the needs of the community. Those things can require night and weekend work and that it is important to see the superintendent at school events. It is about showing that you care about what is happening.

Interview one concluded. Mr. Totman spoke about the camera and how it broke earlier in the day.

6:10 PM: Susan Gilson, Ed.D., Director of Finance and Administration, Lunenburg Public Schools

Question 1: Dr. Gilson felt it would be a joy to take the position. She had spent two decades in a regional school district and understands the importance of the role of superintendent and bringing communities together. She loved her previous work at King Philip. Additionally, she felt it would be a delight to work with a smaller district and that it would be an exceptional fit based on her prior experience and strengths in other areas.

Question 2: Dr. Gilson passed out an entry plan she created and described it to the committee. She would first start with how she would build relationships with the school committee. She would also have weekly emails about the state of the district. She noted a no surprise rule that if there was something she didn't know to share it with her. She would work on providing professional development based on needs and get to know the culture of the towns. She would involve the towns in the budget process early to start educating and collaborating as early as possible. She enjoys being visible in schools and participating in things going on. Her top priority while building relationships would also be paying attention to teaching and learning going on. She would want the district to be a place where students feel comfortable, learn and grow. Additionally, she explained she takes community and family engagement seriously. She described a number of potential forums that could be held. She also spoke to her other experience as a facilities manager and working with a large budget.

Question 3: Dr. Gilson felt her strength was in developing her finance experience. She expressed she works well with spreadsheets and does well with negotiations. She explained her experience in negotiation meetings. It is something she would have considered a weakness before and now a strength. She collaborates well with others and has worked on restructuring a full middle school schedule with her middle school team. She spoke about the items they addressed with the new schedule. They survived 13 years of budget cuts with that schedule that was created. She loves to learn what people feel they can do best and encourages them to get other certifications based on strengths she has seen in them. She has worked to get an SRO for her previous district, which helped with safety training. She felt her weakness was getting engaged in problems and thinking how to fix them.

Question 4: Dr. Gilson would honor all of the experience people have. She would establish norms as they come in with the group and honor past practice. She has done work balancing special education and general education teachers to provide assistance to all students. After a while you wouldn't know which teacher was which. She also worked on past practices of co-teaching and found there was no common planning time. They worked to restructure how it was done and it was successful in helping boost achievement for all students. Performance in math has been stronger.

Question 5: Dr. Gilson likes to be visible and approachable and chooses to work in the schools to get her work done. As superintendent she needs to have several leadership teams with planned agendas and having them meet frequently. This would allow people to feel more comfortable talking. She also needs to be actionable and follow up on whatever is a concern. She spoke to an experience with a former custodian and getting the school ready for the start of the year. They worked together to come up with extra custodial help.

Question 6: Dr. Gilson spoke to conflicts in the schools. She is an active listener and felt she is a calm person. She Values people's due process and makes space to hear what they think is the matter. She makes decisions in the best interest of the students and the district. She would want to make sure procedures are in place and staff are trained if conflict arises.

Question 7: Dr. Gilson spoke to her experience with her three-town regional district. There were challenges with towns meeting at the same time and challenges with chapter 70 funding formulas. Networking with town committees early on is an important step in the budget. She also spoke to her work with municipalities and its parallels to regional school district budgets.

Question 8: Dr. Gilson agreed absolutely, yes. She would invest in the interim position and would apply for the permanent position. She has worked updating job descriptions in the past. It helped her learn and grow more in her appreciation with what the different jobs did. She would not be going in and changing things, but would look really hard at what is there and ask continued questions. She has a supportive family and this position would give her time back from now to invest into things.

Interview two ended and Ms. Novick brought in Mr. Albert Ganem

7:20 PM: Albert Ganem, M. Ed., Interim Superintendent, Berlin-Boylston Public Schools

Question 1: Mr. Ganem spoke to his previous positions in 35 years in education. As interim superintendent he was tasked with several things to get the district turned around. He spoke to the issues at the beginning of the year with budget, payroll, bills, and staff in central office. He spoke to the hiring of the business office staff and that he is still working on the healing between the towns. He wants to continue the work he has started within the district. He has enjoyed doing the job and wants to make sure the district is in a good position for a permanent superintendent.

Question 2: Mr. Ganem spoke about having relationships and conversations with the towns and district. He attends meetings in both towns and meets regularly with the admin team. It is also something he would like to work on and to continue to foster those relationships. He noted that students were not included in the questions and that is the number one priority. He has worked to cultivate the relationships with the students.

Question 3: Mr. Ganem described compassion and hard work as his greatest strength. He loves the work he does and also looks for those things in people he hires. His weakness is sometimes moving too fast and noted that sometimes he can make a mistake. He shared that we are trying to teach students it's okay to make mistakes. It is something he will continue to work on.

Question 4: Mr. Ganem shared that things have not been memorialized well. He has been working to put things in place for processes and procedures. He noted bringing admin assistants together to see what is working and what is not. They need to memorialize the past and get ready for the future.

Question 5: Mr. Ganem noted that is something to figure out together and takes time and trust. He is accessible by phone and email. He is spending more time working on that.

Question 6: Mr. Ganem shared that conflict arises every day and he works to listen and learn from them. He expressed the need for an HR person. Right now, there is wonderful work being done by Ms. Patti Spongberg who does payroll who has had HR added on.

Question 6: Mr. Ganem worked in Hampden-Wilbraham for six years and has worked with the BBRSD budget. He noted he wanted to revisit the regional agreement and how it works. He has a great finance world, but expressed it's his job to know that as well. He has to understand the budget and overall impact of it and the curriculum that goes along with that, and cuts with the least impact on students. He meets with the business office many times a day to understand the moves they are making. Mr. Ganem also noted knowing how to hire. He wanted to make sure the district has the things teachers need to provide to students and that it is equitable across the district.

Question 7: Mr. Ganem's goal is to get someone to come into work smarter, not harder. He shared he is not a corner office superintendent and he loves being in the schools. He explained sometimes there can be lots of shifting around of his schedule. He shared that the UDL professional learning speaker is the author of the UDL book, Katie Novack. He explained being in the schools is the best part of the job. He looks at other districts and tries to see things that need to be done that other districts are doing. He hopes to get all the things in place and not just to keep the ship afloat. His goal is to make sure the district is in a place the new superintendent can come in and say this is a place where I want to work. He shared the *Spirit Work* book for the school committee for collaboration. Collaboration and communication equals transparency.

Closing - Mr. Ganem shared it has been one of the most rewarding and also one of the hardest jobs he has had. He thanked them for the opportunity to work with the school committee. He shared the district has great staff, great admin, and great students. Part of his job is to have hard conversations. The job is to make sure they are providing high quality education. He apologized for the meeting and questions about hiring and thanked Mr. Totman for stepping in. He expressed that they all need to work together and thanked the committee.

IV. Business Item

- Selection of interim superintendent - **Vote**

Deliberating: Ms. Novick proposed having the school committee share their top candidates.

Mr. Totman asked each member who their top candidates were.

Mrs. Lori Hart - She explained it was a hard decision with each candidate bringing different things to the table. Her vote was for Mr. Ganem based on what she witnessed and work that has been done.

Mrs. Jessica Deglialberti - Also noted it was a hard decision between Dr. Gilson and Mr. Ganem and felt they were neck and neck.

Mrs. Lisa Mair - She shared her vote was for Mr. Ganem and that he had done so many things already and they would be lucky to keep him for another year.

Mrs. Elisabeth Mancini - She shared her vote was for Mr. Ganem and that he had done a great job and noted keeping him is stability for the district.

Mr. Michael Totman - He agreed with the previous statements and he shared his vote for Mr. Ganem.

A motion to hire Mr. Al Ganem as the interim superintendent for the 2025-2026 school year made by Mrs. Lori Hart seconded by Mrs. Lisa Mair. Discussion: Mrs. Hart noted the repair work Mr. Ganem has done with the towns and the stability. She did also like Dr. Flaherty. Mrs. Mair shared how she liked how Mr. Ganem is streamlining and making the district more efficient and effective. Mrs. Deglialberti explained how great of a job he is doing. She noted Ms. Gilson's plans and wanting to have goals to address things. Mrs. Mancini finds it appealing that Mr. Ganem has a goal for this year and that goal is to get them someone really great for next year. It will allow for a great opportunity next year and concerned if some new come in as interim it would be a hard transition. Mr. Totman also agreed with things the committee said. He thanked Mrs. Meagan Grill for the work in bringing Mr. Ganem to the district and gave her credit for doing that. Mr. Totman noted Mr. Ganem has worked from the ground up to get things functioning again. He has heard from around the district about the great changes going on. Mrs. Hart spoke to the meeting and how he brought in his own people. She wanted to credit him because they chose to work with him again. They noted he brought them out of a bad situation and the work done with the budget and the respect they have earned. Mrs. Mancini spoke about candor from Mr. Ganem and how it can go both ways.

Mr. Totman noted one of the candidates did choose to take a position somewhere else.

Vote: Mrs. Lori Hart, Mrs. Jessica Deglialberti, Mrs. Lisa Mair, Mrs. Elisabeth Mancini, Mr. Michael Totman - all aye, 5-0, motion passes subject to negotiations on his contract

Motion to adjourn made by Mrs. Lori Hart and seconded by Mrs. Jessica Deglialberti to adjourn all in favor, Vote 5-0, meeting adjourned at 7:23pm.

The listing of items is those reasonably anticipated by the Chair which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may, in fact, be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.

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