

**Westport School Committee
Special Meeting
DATE: Wednesday, April 30, 2025
TIME: 6:30 p.m.
PLACE: WMHS – Auditorium**

MINUTES

Members Present: Evan Gendreau, Fred Melnyk, Jason Pacheco, Caitlin Sampers, Christopher Thrasher

Also Present: Kristin McDaniel Human Resources Director, Michelle Rapoza School Business Manager, 15 Community Participants

I. Call to order and Pledge of Allegiance - The Westport School Committee Special Meeting was called to order at 6:55 pm. with a quorum of the members present by Chair Christopher Thrasher, Followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Thrasher explained this meeting was called to interview the two finalists for Superintendent of Schools in Open Session. Each finalist will be interviewed for 1 hour. Candidates were provided a complex scenario to respond to ahead of time. Each candidate will give a 5-minute opening statement. First candidate will be Reza Namin. Second candidate will be Fran Roy. The School Committee may deliberate and appointment may take place in Open Session. Public Comment is limited to 3 minutes per speaker.

II. Opportunity for Public Comment -

1. Chris Conway 37-year Westport resident is representing the Westport Food Pantry formed by the Town. They serve 600 people per week. Staff and teachers have informed her there is a portion of school age families that may need this service. She is hoping to work with the new superintendent and have the school's partner with food pantries to help those families in need.

2. Christopher Nunes is the middle school Band Director and was a member of the Superintendent Search Subcommittee. Mr. Nunes shares he is concerned with the Superintendent Search timeline. A more thorough search could have taken place if more time was given to the process.

III. Special Agenda

a. Superintendent Search Committee Finalist #1-

Chair Thrasher called on the first finalist Reza Namin to come forward at 7:01 p.m.

Mr. Namin began with an opening statement sharing his leadership style shows honest communication. He aligns his vision with district priorities and uses innovative instruction strategies to prepare graduates for lifelong learning. He is a certified virtual high school site coordinator and can offer advanced placement courses. Mr. Namin also shared experience with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), early childhood education intervention with using an autism center to service students, rotating office, open community meetings, and neighborhood meetings.

Chair Thrasher read the scenario question and asked how would he approach this situation?

Mr. Namin broke the scenario up in sections to address.

1. Staff use of social media
2. Complaint by parent by DESE
3. Addressing physical challenges and teacher morale

Massachusetts General Law states there is accountability of schools to provide free and fair education.

Consider collective bargaining and impact of technology.

Do not make it punitive. Is the child getting services? Every challenge in life is a way to build a stronger relationship.

Listen to staff, get facts straight on the social media post. Regard school policy and right to privacy. Are we offering free and fair programming, autism center, transition room, success room to address needs of child? Involve the Special Education Director, legal counsel, and have parent engagement. Experience with due process.

Have an early budget calendar to School Committee to understand revenue projections and Chapter 70. Make the process transparent. Consolidate services for budget shortfalls. Work with School Committee and City Council to form a series of options with costs. Have an open transparent communication process to address the needs and have empathy.

Mr. Gendreau asked Question 1 - Community piece is important to a smaller town how would you promote collaboration?

Mr. Namin responded that Westport is a rural and urban geographical location. You need to also deal with nonparents and farmers. Have open communication and regular dialog with local legislators and regular meetings with collective bargaining. Mr. Namin mentioned he raised money for building a stadium walkway with a memorial. Communicate visibly face to face on tv, YouTube, and newsletters. Reach out to fixed income residents with no kids in the schools, share success and celebrate. Knowing diversity and be sincere by reaching out to all stakeholders.

Mr. Gendreau asked Question 2 - The financial situation is a concern for the committee with limited revenues. Expand on how you would advocate for the district and manage a tight budget.

Mr. Namin shared he would focus on targeting revenues, having a transition room, alternative education, have a plan with businesses, target grants, limit out of district placements, and begin an international school. Budget is based on revenue, he would look at budget shortfalls and what has been done to target funds.

Mr. Gendreau asked Question 3 - What is your vision for personalizing education?

Mr. Namin responded he would use technology and have advanced placement offerings. Local data team should know where students are academically and emotionally. Offer courses Pre-K-14 to include courses for gifted and talented. Bring staff together and use counseling, behavior modifications and student management system.

Mr. Pacheco asked Question 1 - Why would you like to be superintendent in Westport and what is your 90-day plan?

Mr. Namin shared Westport is a good community with transparency and community engagement. He is looking for a community to take part in and not a job. Mr. Namin said he would write an entry plan for the School Committee. Create a plan on who you will meet with. Meet with principal and staff to address any fiscal challenges. Meet with local legislators, students, and parents. Visit classrooms, talk to folks at games, events, PTO events. He will present his vision, examine policies, procedures, do an internal and external scanning, determine taxation and revenue shortfalls. Document to show your vision. Ask where we are going? How do we get there? and know when you get there.

Ms. Sampers asked Question 1 - You are part of a community now, why are you looking to leave that community?

Mr. Namin shared presently he works 4.5 hours away. He loves his work but wants to be closer to home.

Ms. Sampers asked Question 2 - How would current staff describe their relationships with you?

Mr. Namin said he is very open and he enjoys being around his staff and knows their struggles and challenges. He is always available and has a coaching/mentor personality. He likes to make work fun and have staff feel they want to be there.

Ms. Sampers asked Question 3 - How would you show collaboration for support staff, administration and unions?

Mr. Namin said he would have regular meetings, empower the school council. He would be there as part of the community, have lunch with kids, show respect for staff, be engaged, go into classrooms and share interactions upon staff invitations.

Mr. Melnyk asked Question 1- Is there an instance when you have taken a position, had time to reflect, then taken a different stance?

Mr. Namin mentioned he does not have all the answers. He has conversations with mentor teachers and he self-exams all the time.

Mr. Melnyk asked Question 2 - Westport has a diverse educational community, not all grads are going to college. How would you come up with a plan for kids life skills and programs to bridge the gap?

Mr. Namin said you need to understand each kids' passion and need to create college and career readiness. Identify and offer certification programs on site, create internships, work with colleges, Cisco Network Academy that creates certified network managers, and animation. Have a roadmap for every kid with counseling to support the child.

Mr. Namin shared 3 things that are important - Rigor, Relevancy, Relationship (mentor mentee program).

Chair Thrasher asked Mr. Namin to share his story.

Mr. Namin explained in 1979 he was in Iran when the revolution took place. He was a high school graduate and wanted to come to America and be part of a national team. He had a ticket to travel and traveled to this country alone knowing no English. He has presented his struggle and challenges to overcome adversity, working hard, learning a language as well as being proud of who you are and being a role model. He shared he was inducted into the hall of fame.

Chair Thrasher asked if anyone has any final questions? There were none.

Chair Thrasher thanked Mr. Namin for his participation.

Mr. Namin left here at 7:57 pm.

First finalist interview ended at 7:57 pm.

Chair Thrasher called a brief recess at 7:57 pm.

Meeting resumed at 8:06 pm.

b. Superintendent Search Committee Finalist #2

Chair Thrasher called on the second finalist Fran Roy to come forward at 8:06 p.m.

Fran Roy gave an opening statement sharing she is a 30 plus year educator beginning as a secondary math teacher. She has a PHD in curriculum and instruction, worked at the University of RI, was a consultant and academic officer in Fall River and a DESE appointed receiver for New Bedford and

Boston. She was able to improve outcomes from kids and have schools be released from monitoring. There was a growth experience that changed building cultures and social emotional needs. They were all in together to support kid's needs. Westport is a strong grounded community and her goal is to continue and contribute to the work that is being done.

Chair Thrasher read the scenario question and asked how would she approach this situation?

Ms. Roy responded to addressing the social media post she would invite staff for discussion, seek legal counsel to determine if violations did occur, notify the School Committee with email and updates. This might be a symptom of a larger issue. Look at internal communication policy systems and focus on the preventative parts.

To address the complaint, comply with any records requests since there are obligations to make sure needs of the child are met. Admit to non-compliance and work with the parents. Find out why was documentation not used and take responsibility as well as corrective action to fix the systems.

For the budget piece, this could be a system of something larger. Why is this occurring? Convene stakeholders to identify priorities. Build a budget representative to the School Improvement Plans and district plans. Agree on process and transparency of what is happening and be inclusive.

Mr. Gendreau asked Question 1 - Community piece is important to a smaller town how would you promote collaboration?

Ms. Roy responded she would be visible and attend meetings to see what is going on in town. She sees collaborations with experiential learning for example when students are interviewing community members. Involving students in serving the town and forming partnerships.

Mr. Gendreau asked Question 2 - The financial situation is a concern for the committee with limited revenues. Expand on how you would advocate for the district and manage a tight budget.

Ms. Roy shared she has been watching town finance meetings. This is an opportunity to continue to share a mutual respect that the schools are lean as well and are not taking all the funds. Maintain transparencies with contract obligations.

Mr. Gendreau asked Question 3 - What is your vision for personalizing education?

Ms. Roy would like to look at what is presently available and build a pathway based on needs. She needs more information on early college. Using neo-technical pathways and innovation career pathways.

Mr. Pacheco asked Question 1 - Why would you like to be superintendent in Westport and what is your 90 day plan?

Ms. Roy shared her heart is in the South Coast. She looked at districts with a small community size so she can focus on sharing her talents and efforts for the long term. This is an opportunity to know each child well and work with pathways.

Ms. Sampers asked Question 1- You are part of a community now, why are you looking to leave that community?

Ms. Sampers mentioned she noticed Ms. Roy's current role is losing funds.

Ms. Sampers asked Question 2 - How would current staff describe their relationships with you ?

Ms. Roy responded she has built positive good relationships where people trust her and values each person with a focus on building them up.

Ms. Sampers asked Question 3 - How would you show collaboration for support staff, administration and unions?

Ms. Roy shared she would need to know if meetings are being held on a regular basis. Stay focused on service to children, hold common planning meetings after school and keep communication consistent.

Mr. Melnyk asked Question 1 - Is there an instance when you have taken a position, had time to reflect, then taken a different stance?

Ms. Roy said she is always reflecting and always asks if she has done enough listening. In the past she ran into Human Resources issues so decided to move forward with a co-teaching model. Teachers were not connected to the building as a whole so there were unintended consequences. Being aware that consequences may occur should be thought of ahead of time.

Mr. Melnyk asked Question 2 - Westport has a diverse educational community, not all grads are going to college. How would you come up with a plan for kids life skills and programs to bridge the gap?

Ms. Roy shared to use BCC skill-based certificates and industry credentials also looking at Chapter 74 space requirements. Build programs inhouse and create collaborations with other districts. Advocacy needs to happen more kids want it but less seats are available. This is an issue we should be attending to.

Mr. Thrasher asked what is your goal with your focus on improving outcomes for kids?

Ms. Roy shared she is presently teaching at Stonehill College and looks at ways students are struggling with post-secondary issues. Focusing on data sets, growth and measurement and whole child development with real outcomes for kids. She has experience using growth notes, integrating them with multi systems of support.

Mr. Thrasher asked an influential town resident asks you to consider hiring a friend. How would you handle it?

Ms. Roy would explain how the hiring process works and tell them their friend is free to apply.

Mr. Thrasher asked what would you do if news stations are predicting 4 inches of snow at 7 pm.?

Ms. Roy would consult with facilities, air on the side of safety, and knows that superintendents call each other.

Mr. Thrasher asked what would she do with use of Artificial Intelligence AI since the district has no policy?

Ms. Roy responded they were trained as staff on AI and there is no simple answer. This is a bigger conversation at the university level. AI should be used as a tool. Keep in contact with other superintendents and the state board to keep an eye on it.

Chair Thrasher asked if there were any additional questions? There were none.

Mr. Thrasher asked Ms. Roy for a closing or synopsis.

Ms. Roy asked a question. What are your priorities moving into next year?

Mr. Thrasher responded that finances are always in question. Continue to share a spirit of collaboration with the town and improving it.

Ms. Sampers mentioned she is a parent making sure her kids have the best education.

Mr. Pacheco wants opportunity alive for kids and staff. Collaboration is key.

Mr. Thrasher thanked Ms. Roy for her participation.

Ms. Fran Roy left here at 8:50 pm.

Second finalist interview ended at 8:50 pm.

Chair Thrasher called for a brief recess at 8:50 pm.

Meeting resumed at 8:52 pm.

Chair Thrasher informed everyone that Massachusetts general laws require School Committees to deliberate in open session.

Chair Thrasher thanked both candidates for their participation as well as the members of the Superintendent Search Subcommittee.

c. Discussion of Candidates & Potential Vote for Superintendent of Schools -

Mr. Gendreau acknowledged the Superintendent Search Subcommittee and Ms. McDaniel. They have 2 qualified candidates and saved money in the budget by doing the process in-house. Mr. Namin brought lots of experience and has an entry plan. He shared personalizing education, curriculum development, gateway to college program and student advisory council. Ms. Roy also brought a level of experience and shared collaborative proposals, budget priorities and enrollment.

Ms. Sampers liked Mr. Namin's entry plan however he does not live close. Ms. Roy spoke on outcomes for kids and showed transparency in decision making. Ms. Sampers is leaning toward Ms. Roy.

Mr. Melnyk mentioned these are 2 candidates coming from 2 different places. Mr. Melnyk is troubled with a decision on which candidate is best.

Mr. Pacheco mentioned they have 2 talented candidates that bring a wide range of experiences. Mr. Pacheco liked Mr. Namin's story and valued Ms. Roy's connectiveness to south coast and value of community. Mr. Pacheco is concerned about Mr. Namin's distance and background of the area.

Chair Thrasher is extremely impressed with Mr. Namin's depth of knowledge and his story. Chair Thrasher pointed out Ms. Roy has not served in role of superintendent and does not take this lightly. Ms. Roy's answers in her interview showed a central theme of outcomes for kids, going in as a receiver is a hard job. Chair Thrasher is leaning toward Ms. Roy.

A motion was made to enter into contract negotiations for Superintendent of Schools with candidate Fran Roy contingent on successful negotiations.

Motion by Pacheco, seconded by Sampers

5/0/0

All were in favor, motion passed

Chair Thrasher will make phone calls to the candidates.

IV. Topics the Chair could not Reasonably Anticipate Forty-eight (48) Hours in Advance of the Meeting - There were none.

IIV. Adjourn - A motion was made to adjourn.

Motion by Pacheco, seconded by Sampers

5/0/0

The Westport School Committee Special Meeting ended at 9:04 pm.

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