

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Special Meeting

October 27, 2015

Called for 6:00 PM in the Dr. Henrietta S. Attles Meeting Room, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of considering the appointment of the Superintendent of Schools. The Committee may convene in Executive Session for the purpose of discussing strategy for contract negotiations with non-union personnel, the superintendent, as an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the strategy and negotiation position of the School Committee.

Members Present: Ms. Cronin, Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding, Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Osborne and Mayor Maher

Also Present: Ms. Barbara Allen, Executive Director of Human Resources

Also Present: Student School Committee Members: Griffin Andres and Ben Austin

Mayor Maher in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:15 PM.

The Mayor entertained public comment.

There being no one signed up to speak, on a motion by Mr. Osborne, seconded by Ms. Kelly, it was voted to close public comment.

The Mayor turned to the School Committee Members for their comments as follows:

Ms. Nolan spoke of her experience as a member of the 19 person Superintendents Search Interview Committee (SSIC) and on the process for the search. She indicated that she had received great input from her fellow members on the SSIC who had reviewed a wide range of candidates from across the country. She approached this decision with due diligence and talked to everyone she knew in Boston, Framingham, Weymouth, Holyoke and Worcester. She spoke with school administrators, leaders, parents and teachers of each district as well as doing a site visit to Weymouth. She noted that she found Dr. Páez to have a wonderful personality; she respected his work specifically on early literacy in Holyoke, and noted that signs indicated that his work was beginning to take root. She expressed her concerns that Dr. Páez did not have enough time in Holyoke to prove himself. She felt that the "data walls" issue may have been overemphasized but she felt it could have been handled differently. Ms. Nolan spoke about Dr. Salim's experience in Boston and in Weymouth. She noted that his description of teaching at Brighton High School stayed with her and she commented on his compassion for a sick employee. She indicated that on her site visit to Weymouth she saw that with far less resources than Cambridge, Weymouth was doing what we hope Dr. Salim could bring to our community. Ms. Nolan noted that she is willing to take the risk on Dr. Salim "happily and hopefully".

Ms. Kelly indicated that this was her first involvement in a superintendent search process. She noted that the many community meetings were an important part of the search process. She was happy that the SSIC included such a wonderful range of individuals from our community. She indicated that it was very important for her as a new member to do both site visits. She found both finalists had a lot of similar strengths and operated with limited resources compared to ours. They both had created community partnerships; invigorated people who reported to them and were very hands-on in both districts. Ms. Kelly indicated that she also saw the differences in the districts in what was occurring. She commented

that she sees Dr. Páez as a mission driven leader and she was very impressed by his work ethic and the incredible partnerships used to create Pre-K in the schools. She indicated that she was also impressed with Dr. Salim and talked about his experience at Brighton High School where he was involved in creating AP classes for his students. Ms. Kelly shared her feelings that based on the district Dr. Salim comes from, the population he is serving there, the programs he has created in ELL, and his inspiration to his staff, he would be an excellent superintendent for our district.

Mr. Osborne shared that he feels very proud to be a part of this superintendent search process with his colleagues. He indicated that he hoped the public realizes how much due diligence was done by this Committee and that he appreciates the solid work of the search firm and the 19 person SSIC. Mr. Osborne noted that this process was substantive and authentic and brought us here tonight with two special candidates. He spoke about Dr. Páez as being a leader that could bring something special in the way of early education to our district. Mr. Osborne shared his thoughts on Dr. Páez's integrity and directness. He noted that Dr. Páez's experience shows that he has a willingness to address the population among us very directly. Given the right experience and situation, Dr. Osborne shared his thoughts that Dr. Páez has the potential to be a transformative leader in education. Mr. Osborne indicated that he has some uncertainty and a sense of some unresolved detail regarding this candidate which gives him pause. Mr. Osborne indicated that both candidates seem sincere, energetic and had compelling personal stories. He likes Dr. Salim's ideas on the un-conference and feels he is committed to the future of what education should look like. He noted that Dr. Salim has a sensible approach to integration of technology. Mr. Osborne indicated that he has talked to families of students he knew in Weymouth. He hopes that Dr. Salim will bring a willingness to get into the granularity of the social and cultural issues in Cambridge. Mr. Osborne expressed that he feels comfortable making his decision tonight.

Ms. Cronin, like Ms. Kelly, indicated that this was her first involvement in a superintendent search process. She shared how proud she was of this search process and in the many ways in which the community was given to engage such as the online survey, the targeted community focus groups, the community meetings, and the superintendent search interview committee consisting of 19 diverse stakeholders. She stated that she had asked members of the SSIC the following two questions: "what did you think of the process and do you think that the three candidates you are putting before us could equally serve as our superintendent?" All responded very strongly that each could be an excellent leader for our district. Ms. Cronin indicated that due to personal reasons she was not able to go on the site visits, but did her own due diligence in the way of phone calls and research. She commented that Dr. Páez was perfect for Holyoke at the time that its community was in crisis; he brought passion, focus and commitment to them and is much beloved and respected there. She noted that he did incredible work there and has tremendous compassion for people in his community and the struggles they are going through. Ms. Cronin indicated that she explored special education in Holyoke and in Weymouth and got positive feedback. Ms. Cronin commented on Dr. Salim's personal narrative, education and experience and indicated her thoughts that he would better accommodate our community. He understands the industries here in Cambridge, how to bring these resources into our schools and to develop our partnerships. He has an affinity for those industries in biotech and pharmaceuticals. He is viewed as a leader in the field of education. Ms. Cronin spoke of Dr. Salim's experience in Boston and his very strong credentials in a large diverse district. She was impressed with strategy he developed in Weymouth which includes three levers to improved student achievement: professional learning focused on the instructional core, effective use of data, and partnerships with families and community.

Mr. Fantini shared that he went on both site visits. He noted that he and Ms. Kelly had dinner with Dr. Páez while in Springfield and discovered what a special individual that he was. Even though Dr. Páez is not a sitting superintendent, Mr. Fantini said that he was impressed with the number of individuals who came out on their own time the next day to speak in favor of Dr. Páez. Mr. Fantini indicated that the reason why Dr. Páez received a "needs improvement" on his evaluation was that he requested that the School Committee give him that rating. He felt that in a system such as that, it would not look good for a superintendent to get "proficient" and he wanted everyone on board so that he could move the system forward. Mr. Fantini stated that they uncovered a lot on these candidates. Mr. Fantini referred to these

two candidates as the “new generation of superintendents” who are strong in technology, have a no excuse culture, strong in passion, strong in making decisions through the use of data, work long hours and love it, and quick to take action and make changes when needed. Both candidates had a student centered leadership with everyone on board to improving student lives and willing to commit to make a difference. Both had a strong leadership team and powerful strategic plans. Mr. Fantini stated that both would do a great job in Cambridge; we will select one and the other will go to another community which will be very lucky to have him. Mr. Fantini shared that Dr. Peterkin of Harvard University’s Urban Superintendent program considered Dr. Salim to be in the top 1% of superintendents across this country and felt he could bring that leadership to Cambridge. Mr. Fantini indicated that with Dr. Salim’s science and technology background, he would fit in well with our biotech industries. Mr. Fantini expressed his pride in our exceptional School Committee and in this process. He shared that Dr. Salim is a great educator and feels he could take this system from good to great.

Mr. Harding shared that the School Committee really showed why they were elected to do this job. He thanked the Mayor and his staff and Ms. Allen for guiding us through this expedited process. He indicated that no process in this city has ever been more inclusive. Mr. Harding stated that for him he looks at a candidate’s potential and asks who would be most effective in the moment for Cambridge. He sees strengths and weaknesses in both candidates and the risks involved. He indicated that Dr. Salim is well rounded and would bring depth and experience to the position but Mr. Harding expressed concerns on how he would fare in the very volatile climate of Cambridge. Mr. Harding noted that he was very impressed by Dr. Salim’s personal story noting that he lives locally and has familiar ties here. He indicated that he found Dr. Páez more intriguing and was very compelled by his strengths in thinking about the moment here in Cambridge. He stated that he felt Dr. Páez would literally “lay down on the train tracks for our children”. He found Dr. Páez’s passion so intense and noted that he chose to work in Holyoke because it was a challenge for him. Mr. Harding noted that our mission is very simple, excellent education for all students and that if we are going to take a risk, Dr. Páez is the risk he would choose to take. Mr. Harding noted that Dr. Páez understands that accountability starts with him. Mr. Harding shared that in this moment, Dr. Páez could take us from good to great.

Mayor Maher thanked all of the individuals who participated in guiding this search, specifically Ms. Allen as the Committee’s liaison, and Ms. Mallon from his office, who helped to coordinate with the community. He thanked Ms. Kelly, Mr. Fantini and Ms. Nolan for helping the Committee gather more information on these site visits. He also thanked Ms. Martin, Executive Secretary to the School Committee, for her work in this process. The Mayor indicated that each of three candidates had great strengths and like all of us, weaknesses. He indicated that they had taken a great deal of time and effort to meet these candidates to find out who they are as leaders. Mayor Maher said that we are taking a leap of faith and we are asking the community to take this leap of faith with all of us and rally behind the selected candidate to make this a system that all children will be able to learn to their full potential. The Mayor noted that all three finalists were quite strong and both finalists being considered tonight could be very strong superintendents. He indicated that he was not so certain of Dr. Páez on paper but having met and spent time with him, he was completely impressed with his leadership style and that he will have a great future in Massachusetts. Mayor Maher indicated that you must take into account the experience Dr. Salim had in the Boston Public Schools. He shared that taking into consideration STEM and STEAM education and our community which is so rich in resources; he believes Dr. Salim can move these partnerships to the next level and would have the ability to connect with all levels of the community. Mayor Maher indicated that he would support Dr. Salim as our next superintendent and hopes to see this young, energetic visionary come to Cambridge and take us to the next level.

Mr. Osborne moved, seconded by Ms. Nolan, to select Dr. Kenneth N. Salim as the next Superintendent of the Cambridge Public Schools. Mayor Maher amended the motion to add that this appointment is conditioned on the ability of the School Committee and the stated candidate to reach a negotiated agreement. On the following roll call, it was voted to appoint Dr. Kenneth N. Salim as Superintendent of Schools with this appointment conditioned on the ability of the School Committee and Dr. Salim to reach a negotiated agreement: Ms. Cronin YEA; Mr. Fantini YEA; Mr. Harding NAY; Ms. Kelly YEA; Ms. Nolan YEA; Mr. Osborne YEA; Mayor Maher YEA.

On a motion by Mr. Fantini, seconded by Ms. Nolan, it was voted to suspend the Rules for the purpose of moving reconsideration of the foregoing vote, hoping the same would not prevail. On the following roll call, the Rules were suspended for the purpose stated: Ms. Cronin YEA; Mr. Fantini YEA; Mr. Harding NAY; Ms. Kelly NAY; Ms. Nolan YEA; Mr. Osborne YEA; Mayor Maher YEA.

The Rules having been suspended, on the following roll call, a motion to reconsider the foregoing vote, hoping the same would not prevail, failed of adoption: Ms. Cronin NAY; Mr. Fantini NAY; Mr. Harding YEA; Ms. Kelly YEA; Ms. Nolan NAY; Mr. Osborne NAY; Mayor Maher NAY. The vote to appoint Dr. Salim as Superintendent of Schools conditioned on the ability of the School Committee and Dr. Salim to reach a negotiated agreement is final.

Mayor Maher announced that he would contact an attorney to begin the contract negotiations with Dr. Salim. He also announced that the Committee would not be convening in Executive Session tonight and that he hopes to set up an Executive Session in the next 10 days to discuss the parameters of the contract.

On a motion by Mr. Fantini, seconded by Ms. Kelly, it was voted to adjourn (7:28 PM).

Judith T. Martin
Executive Secretary to the School Committee