

**Joint Cranston School Committee Meeting
And the Superintendent Search Committee
Hope Highlands Elementary School
300 Hope Road
Cranston, RI 02921**

July 23, 2012

5:00 p.m.

Minutes

The meeting was held on the above date with the following members present: Chairperson Iannazzi, Mr. Lombardi, Mrs. McFarland, Mrs. Ruggieri, Mrs. Culhane, and Mr. Bloom. Mr. Traficante was absent.

The meeting was called to order at 5:10 p.m. and convened to Executive Session pursuant to RI State Laws PL 42-46-5(a)(1) for Personnel to discuss candidates for the position of Superintendent.

Call to Order – Public Session was called to order at 7:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was conducted.

The roll was called; a quorum was present. No votes were taken in Executive Session.

Executive Session minutes sealed – July 23, 2012

A motion to seal these minutes was made by Mr. Lombardi, seconded by Mr. Bloom. All were in favor.

Public interviews with candidates for the position of Superintendent.

Chairperson Iannazzi stated the following: there are feedback forms in the front of the auditorium. We would ask that members of the public fill out one form per candidate. At the end of the evening you can submit the form to the box in the back of room. We would also

like the audience to know that each of the three candidates will be asked the same questions and the candidates have been sequestered.

Good evening and welcome to our public interviews. We will begin our interviews with a 15-20 minute presentation outlining each candidate's vision and plans for Cranston Public Schools, with particular focus given to the following four questions:

1- What do you believe our vision for the future of Cranston Public Schools should be?

2- Describe your first 90 - 180 day plan of entry

3- How will you promote accountability through the use of performance data and how would you align the standards, curriculum, instructions, assessment, and professional development, and

4- The demographics of Cranston has significantly changed over the past several years to a point where over 40% of the population is now classified as poverty level and 20% is classified with disabilities or ELL- what strategies would you employ to reduce the achievement gap of these students?

Following your presentation, members of the School Committee will pose questions that have been submitted from the larger Cranston community. We ask that you keep your answers to those questions to 2-3 minutes.

Dr. Judith Lundsten did a Power Point presentation (attached for the record and on file in the Superintendent's office) and after her presentation answered the following questions:

QUESTIONS:

Mrs. Ruggieri asked: Please explain how your experience as a classroom teacher and building administrator has prepared you for the position of Superintendent and how you will use those experiences to shape decisions that you make.

Dr. Lundsten replied: I love teaching, it's the only thing I have ever wanted to do. I love being a teacher of the visually impaired, I loved being a third grade teacher, I loved being principal. I think those experiences shaped my decision making. When a principal comes to me with an issue and talks to me about that issue I have the prior knowledge I can basically put myself into their shoes. I will tell you that the shoes are a little awkward on occasion with middle school and secondary but I think it is important with a district this size to have leaders who you may know the central office has been organized around that principal that we have someone who has expertise in secondary, someone who has expertise in middle school and I am the elementary person. I listen carefully to what they have to say because there are some differences that you may not know. For example, our elementary principals are very skilled at developing the itinerant's schedule. It is a little bit different for the classroom teacher at the elementary level. However, at the secondary level I have learned that the schedule drives the building and so over the course of years and from sitting in the central office with other experts in other areas I have certainly learned from my experiences about that. I also realize, in this case, having been in all 17 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, the 2 high schools and the charter school, that they

each have their own culture, their own climate and their own flavor. Sometimes parents ask me is one better than the other and I tell them it's like Baskin Robbins. That I love strawberry but that doesn't mean everybody loves strawberry so we need to take that into account. What works in one building may not work in another building but we do need to have accountability. We need to have the non-negotiables as well as the activities that give the school the climate that's going to not only push student achievement but be family friendly. So I think my experiences have lent themselves to that. I am a National Board Certified Teacher. When the new rubrics came out for the new teacher evaluation tool which I know many of you have heard about and know how rigorous it is. I looked at the rubric and thought, oh my, this looks like the standards for a national board teacher. Think about what that says. What we want in front of our children. What we require to have in front of our children, that type of thing. I will also tell you as a central office administrator I have gone back into the classroom. My National Board Certification was up and I felt like I was losing my edge in regards to teaching and so a teacher very generously loaned me her class to teach the math instruction, investigations. That is a piece of your recertification if you want to be a National Board teacher. So this was at Gladstone and I went in and I was enthusiastic. I did my homework, I worked through everything. I videotaped myself that day and you want to talk about formative assessment? One day I came home, put the video on and said, oh my, it was quite clear to me from the student work that was sitting on my kitchen table, and the video, that they didn't get it and that was my

responsibility. I had to go back and rethink how to teach that. It was a huge “aha” moment for me. So I will continue to do those types of activities to keep myself, if you will, with the edge you need to be a superintendent.

Mr. Lombardi asked: Dr. Lundsten I hope your answer will be shorter than the question I am about to ask you and I will piece it out for you. What is your vision of the “ideal” professional learning community and how will you work toward developing a professional learning community (PLC) throughout the district as well as support school-based efforts to develop, implement and sustain professional learning communities within individual buildings? Please provide specific examples of some of the roles/responsibilities you will expect administrators, teachers, support staff, parents and students to assume in an ongoing effort to create an effective PLC(s).

Dr. Lundsten replied: Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s), the research suggests that the PLC’s is one of the most significant ways to improve student achievement so let’s take a look at what that would look like. In an elementary, middle or high school we are on our way to doing that through collaboration with the Union we now have common planning time in all our schools, elementary, middle and high schools. That gives us, if you will certain resources to develop that professional learning community. I would suggest that you need to frankly do a pre-assessment of the building to determine where the building is. There are certain buildings that are further along with professional learning committees than others. I would suggest in a school that is just beginning that we start with a book

club to read about professional learning communities. There are some superb reading resources out in the market that I would say to you that is one way that we could support the schools by providing that by getting a basic understanding of what a professional learning community is. Let me give you an example of what a professional learning community would be. All the fifth grade teachers would be meeting at the same time; they would be looking at student work. They would be taking the student work and not necessarily grading it but looking at it to say what worked, what didn't work and what do we need to do better. How are we going to go back and reteach this? Having those frank and honest conversations, that is one way a professional learning community works. Now, not only does it need to go across grades but horizontally if you will but it needs to be vertical too because we need some of our common planning time in a professional community for our first grade teacher to know what our second grade teacher is doing what our third grade teacher is doing so for example when I as the principal at Oak Lawn we took student writing. We took the student's name off of it; we said this is what a good piece of 5th grade writing looks like. This is what a 1st grader's writing would look like. The big "aha" was when the 1st grade teachers looked at this and said, this is really rigorous. We used a rubric with it, likewise we need to have the 5th grade teachers see what the 1st grade teachers are doing. So when you do a professional learning community it needs to be horizontal as well as vertical. In a district this size I have also suggested that we need to have quarterly meetings of all the fifth grade teachers focused on the particular topic

and I think the topic can be aligned to what is in our district strategic plan and we go after it based on our priorities. So let's say we look at math this year and maybe we look at the geometry strand. Once we look at all the data and then we have quarterly meetings and we have teachers bring forward student work, what worked for them in strategies, and what didn't work? How are they using the materials and resources? What other resources do they need to make this happen? Is there any piece of that question I missed? I think the PLC, one - that we need to be transparent, you need to be communicating with the parent as to what is happening in the PLC and I think that in certain places of it like development of the Strategic Plan and the Goals, parents need to be at the table, they absolutely need to be at the table. They bring valuable insight, they bring a different perspective and they need to be participating in it. Frankly, the district-wide PLC, one of the things that I would like to do is have a district-wide book club. I am very concerned that there is some new research out that says that we are great with our kids that are extroverts. But the little quiet kid that is sitting in the back that is the introvert, are we really getting to that youngster. There is a new book out that has been reviewed by The New York Times and other places. I have been reading it but I need to read it with someone else. That's what a PLC does. I need to have parents come back and talk to us about that because it is shaking one of my own beliefs about education. For a long time when I worked in the classroom I believed in cooperative groups, group work, group work. I am wondering if that is the best thing for our children who are the quiet, deeper

thinkers. Are we giving them enough time? We need to explore that as a community.

Mrs. McFarland asked: Dr. Lundsten, while you talked about some of the strategies for the low income and ESL population the question her is - How will you help and support our Title One schools especially the ones with high poverty. What do you see as the challenges and how will you support our ESL students in these schools?

Dr. Lundsten replied: We presently have 11 schools that are Title I and I am concerned that we are going to have more schools. We obviously have generational poverty in the district but we also have poverty that is caused by having two well-educated parents both lose their jobs and to be out in the job market trying to find jobs... We need to find out how to support all families with that and our Title I schools, we need to be thinking about the strategies that we use to bring people to the table. Let me give you a somewhat detailed example. In Title I schools you are required to have parent/teacher conferences. I think they are very valuable and we need to schedule them so they are convenient for parents but I also think we need to help folks with it. Not everybody knows what to ask at a parent conference. When I was a principal at Arlington which has one of the highest poverty levels in the city, we had a strategy doing the Five Q. The Five Q was five questions that you should ask at a parent conference and I suggested to the teachers that when they set their classroom up for the conference that they put the questions up behind them to give the parents a visual. It would keep the

conference focused, the teacher would hopefully be well-prepared based on those questions and it would raise the comfort level of parents. Those are the type of things we need to be thinking about carefully. The parent who is coming in for the parent conference who is highly educated does not need those five questions but in a Title I school, and generational poverty who may have had bad experiences themselves in school, we need to be providing them with these supports. So I would be looking for strategies like that. We need to be very specific about the professional development that the teachers have in those buildings, we need to understand how to question children appropriately so we get to the above and beyond the recall level. In other words what color is Red Riding Hood's coat? That is a recall type question. We need to make sure that all of the teachers have those strategies to help children to help demonstrate that they have the knowledge and skills to move forward.

Mrs. Culhane asked: Please detail your experience budgeting, explaining what process you plan to use and who you will rely on in building the budget.

Dr. Lundsten replied: When I first went to the Central Office I was responsible for Title I, II, III, IV, and Title V, all having extensive budgets with different amounts. Title I being the largest, and right down the line, different sizes. So I am very familiar with budgeting in regards to the Titles. I am also very familiar with several grants that I have initiated or the state or other agencies have brought forward and we have been fortunate enough to receive those grants. Mr. Nero has had me at the table for the past three years as he has developed the

budget. I would use a similar process however, as I spoke to you earlier, we have some other details we need to address now. We have other information, other data that we need to look at. We need to take those UCOA accounts and really look carefully at those to see where we are being efficient, where there is a flag as maybe we're not being so efficient and take a look at how we can realign those resources. I will tell you right now I will not vary off the course that Mr. Nero has taken. We are going to repay that loan. It is imperative that we do that. It is morally right to do that for the community and we will do it. We are well on the road. We made a payment this year; the forecast is that we are in a good spot for next year. I will monitor the accounts weekly and I will depend on Mr. Balducci who is the chief financial officer to help me with that. As I develop the budget I will be seeking input from the principals. We meet monthly with the principals at the different levels but we also meet with them quarterly to hear what resources they think we need to bring forward. That would be the process that I would use. We would be looking at having those resources and the budget information ready to start in December. Once we have the budget and the School Committee has reviewed that budget and accepted it we will need to take that budget on the road. We will need to show it to our constituents and we need to seek their input for any other changes we need to make to have it ready to go in front of the City Council. This year Mr. Nero had Mrs. Nota and I present at that meeting so we are familiar with the format and how to do that. I will certainly be seeking the advice from other superintendents on other ways we should be improving and looking

at that piece.

Mr. Bloom asked: Have you examined the performance of our school system both prior and post program cuts and what is your plan to reinstate the budget to make such programs, like EPIC and music, possible again if deemed of value?

Dr. Lundsten replied: I am going to take the last question first because I think I alluded to this earlier. Once we have repaid the loan, we will go back and look at EPIC, the music program and after school sports. We will also look at the Basic Education Plan (BEP) and by that point we should have it aligned it with our policies and make sure whatever priorities we have and need to address. The year prior to the final payment, so that would be 2013-2014 we need to put together committees, if you will focus groups, of parents, city council members, administrators, teachers, all the stake holders based on what your interest is, what your need is to give us input as to what that is to look like. I know that already Mr. Colozzi has ideas for the music program that may not look exactly like what we are doing. We now have more research on gifted programs. I would certainly be looking at the University of Connecticut's gifted program to see if we might use that curriculum and that might be aligned to support our students. I think it has had an effect on our school system. I think just in the fact that if you take any one of those it affects the climate of the building, the culture of the building. I mentioned to you earlier that when I was the principal at Oak Lawn I wanted to get to know the 3rd graders better and most of the third graders took violin so I decided I would take violin with them. It was a huge learning experience for me,

I loved it. The teacher was phenomenal. If every teacher could teach like this teacher – there were 14 of us. She could chunk the learning, she gave instant feedback, she knew how to set the correction, she was positive even with the youngster and the adult who was finding this exceedingly challenging. I will share one little story with you. We get to the end of the year and you know how they do the celebration? I struggled and I didn't know if the kids knew I was struggling with playing the violin and this little one says to me one day in the cafeteria, Mrs. Lundsten don't worry about it, I can tell you how to fake it. I did do the celebration, I got through it; it wasn't my best performance but it was a real learning experience for me and I want to see that opportunity back for all of kids. I think some of our kids stay in school because of sports so we need to be looking at how we do that. I will tell you that Cranston has one of the best youth's sports programs in the state. Frankly, I am jealous for my own boys who weren't able to participate in that but we need to make sure that access and opportunity is available for every child.

In regards to the gifted program, I know we've talked a lot about the achievement gaps for different groups. We need to be equally concerned about our students that are gifted. We need to look at this. We need to be differentiating in our classrooms. Why is every child getting the same spelling list? That child knows how to spell those words. Shouldn't it be differentiated for that child? We need to be pushing the growth. We need to be making sure, as I said in the Vision, that every child is challenged and we are treating every child as if they were gifted.

Ms. Iannazzi asked: What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the Cranston School Department and how would you use the strengths/weaknesses to improve the teaching and learning in Cranston?

Dr. Lundsten replied: The strengths of the school system are within our human system, our teachers and our administrators. We have hard working teachers and administrators and I think that is truly one of our strengths. They have stepped up when we had financial difficulties, they have increased their co-share, they have not taken a raise, our administrators have not taken a raise in several years, five years, and yet they continue to plug. I was amazed to have an administrator in my office at 8 a.m. talking to me about the accountability measures and what she wants to do about it. I can tell you what a pleasure it is to work with the human capital side of this school system. I would also tell you we have parents who care, they step forward, who advocate effectively for their children because they are the best advocate for their children. We have agreed to disagree but we need to continue to do that kind of work so we can improve the school system. So, it's all about the human capital. I think that is our greatest strength. I think, frankly, I love that we're all so diverse. There are many different things for folks in this school community and we are more flexible to be open to those ideas.

Our weaknesses, I am very concerned about the conditions of our buildings. The fact that \$50,000 is the only amount of money in the budget to take care of some of our building needs. The other day I was at Park View and I don't know if any of you have been by Park

View in the past few days but I happen to go there to visit with the principal. The outside of the building looks cosmetically beautiful except for the big wings that go up. So it's important that our buildings look warm and inviting to people. So the whole face of the school looks really great. It's clean, it's neat, and the signage is great. I look up and the two wings, the paint is chipping off of it so I got back and I talk to Joel about it. We don't have the money right now to take care of that. To me it looked like a simple job but when he explained to me they would need to bring a bucket truck in, that's a little more detailed and a little more costly so I am concerned about that. I am concerned about our buildings to make sure they are safe, they are heated well, that they have the right window shades, the right door locks for safety.

Mrs. Ruggieri asked: Adding on to human capital, what are your plans to recruit and retain high quality administrators and teachers and build capacity within the district?

Dr. Lundsten replied: The district is only as great as the leaders, teachers, and the teacher leaders on it. We need to be building that capacity. We need to be providing them with the professional development, the guidance and frankly as superintendent I need to be the first learner and the first teacher. What I mean by that is it is my responsibility as a superintendent to train our leaders so they can move forward. In other words, our assistant principals at the high schools, at the end of day they should be able to walk into any high school and be a principal. Our teachers who want to be teacher leaders we need to be considering a structure so that if the teacher

wants to stay in a classroom that they can be a teacher leader. We need to figure that out, whether we need to add days to their school year and figure out how to compensate them but we need to be doing that because the school system is only as great as the leaders within it. I am very concerned as I mentioned earlier that there is very little differential between the highest paid teacher and your entry level administrator and yet in this system, and I would expect this too, our administrators are on 24/7. I have no problem and will have no problem and they know that I will pick up the phone at 8 o'clock at night and say we have an issue. They also know that they can call me if they have an issue because we are on 24/7. We need to make sure we are giving them the supports they need to make this happen.

Mr. Lombardi asked: In your opinion, in what ways do Cranston Public Schools' stand out from other similar districts? What would make a family new to Rhode Island consider moving to our school system?

Dr. Lundsten replied: Years ago when we came to Rhode Island, as you can tell from my accent, I am not a native Rhode Islander. My husband is from Attleboro and that was one of the reasons we came back this way. We looked at Cranston and at the time it was the housing boom and there wasn't anything available but what drew us to Cranston were the schools. The fact that they were neighborhood schools, that there were reasonable class sizes, that they had an outstanding special education program for children with different needs, that there were all these other activities that surround the schools like CLCF. So to me that's what makes a parent want to come

to a community. We can offer to them the kind of education that is going to prepare them to graduate. As the principals that are sitting in the back rows can attest, to graduate now, it is quite rigorous. We have a lot of work to do and we are prepared to do it and I think that's what makes Cranston stand out

Mrs. McFarland asked: What are your beliefs about parent involvement in district issues and how would you convince parents that it is worth their time to become and stay involved?

Dr. Lundsten replied: I think there is all kinds of parent involvement and I think we really need to be very careful when we talk about this. Parent involvement is more than baking for the bake sale. I would equally tell you that a parent, who works all day, comes home and sits down at the kitchen table and helps their child with their homework and then reads to them, is equally engaged and an involved parent. We need to be very careful that we structure that so they can be involved so for example, at the elementary level when we give a homework assignment maybe once a month we put a little tag on the bottom of it asking the parent if they understood the homework assignment. What did your child feel was difficult about it? What was the best part of the homework assignment? I think that is one way to involve parents. I think we need to be proactive. As a classroom teacher I made sure I called parents every single month with good news before I had to call them with bad news. If I am the superintendent, one of the things I will focus on is I will ask Mr. Dillon, who is our data manager, if he can pull for me random names, pick 10 families from each school and I will call 10 families and ask

them those questions. How's it going, are we family friendly, what else can we do to support parents, what else can we do for you to be engaged in our school system? That's one way we could go. We need, as I said, to improve our website so parents have the information and they know. We need, I don't know how many parents are in the audience but how many flyers come home in the backpack and do you see all the flyers about the different activities? So on the website we need to have a little backpack icon where we can not only send the flyers home to parents who don't have access to the internet but you can click on that backpack and it will list all the flyers that have been approved by the district so you know what all the activities are and how to be engaged. That's some of the ways I think we need to move forward.

Mrs. Culhane asked: Could you please summarize your experiences in special education, including whether you have ever been involved with a Special Education Advisory Committee and what role you think a local advisory committee should play in the district.

Dr. Lundsten replied: The resumes of the three candidates were posted, if you look at my resume you will see that I started out in Cranston as a special education teacher, a teacher of the visually impaired. I have a master's degree in special education. That does not make me an expert. However, it does give me the framework to look at special education. In addition to being the teacher of the visually impaired, once I got started as a part-time teacher here in Cranston, Dr. Myers suggested that I also be a resource teacher so I do have resource certification. For 12 years I served all 17 elementary schools

in one of those roles so I have a working knowledge of it. On the executive team we have a Director of Pupil Personnel, who is at the table every time we talk about assessment, curriculum, instruction and shares with us what the special ed policies and regulations rules are so we make sure we are aligned. In regards to the Special Ed Advisory Board, years ago when it was first started I did participate. I have not recently participated in it but I can tell you it would be my plan as part of being more visible in the community to regularly attend not only the special education advisory board meetings but the Cranston Education Advisory Board which I was responsible for as an executive director. I think the role is that of advisory, I think they need to work within the structure of their bylaws, that they need to advise the special ed director on issues and concerns that may be in the district but I think they need to become very knowledgeable about those policies and regulations because they are very specific and many times I think there are misunderstandings about them and people may think it's Cranston Public Schools policies when it is either a State or Federal Government policy. For example, the criteria for attending extended school year programming for special needs. That is based on state regulations and state policy where you are told that is how we to determine eligibility for that and you need to follow those rules.

Mr. Bloom asked: Cranston is a large district that covers a wide socio-economic range. Sometimes these differences show up in a school's infrastructure, sometimes these differences show up in test scores and high-school graduation rates. What would you do as

superintendent to ameliorate these differences in building infrastructure and academic outcomes?

Dr. Lundsten replied: I discussed earlier with the school committee, we need as a district what I call a Theory of Action. A Theory of Action is the overarching framework for the district. An example, one Theory of Action could be top down. Central Office tells every school exactly what they need to do with no variations from that. I am not a proponent of that. Another Theory of Action is, let every school do what they want. I am not a proponent of that. What I would be recommending to the school committee is a Theory of Action that I call "Bookends". We have non-negotiables on either side, whether it is on the west side of the city or the east side of the city. In between we differentiate each school based on their needs. Not only about accountability, we look at the safety issues, the family friendly issues and we determine plans for them. Then as a central office, as the superintendent, I monitor that so they meet. We may need more resources in a warning school or a school that is not family friendly but that's the way we need to do it to move an entire district forward. Each school has its strengths and weaknesses. If you dig into the data of just that one accountability measure you will see that while one school did an amazing job of closing the achievement gap, another school did a superb job on growth, but we need to look at all those different measures and have a Theory of Action. Put it out there for our principals and for the entire community so they know how we operate. I know if we get on the same page we can make that happen for the entire district.

Ms. Iannazzi asked: What are your feelings about all-day kindergarten? Do you see this as a priority to bring to Cranston?

Dr. Lundsten replied: In my wildest dreams, if I could put all-day kindergarten in tomorrow I would. What we need to do with the new Common Core Standards, we need to have all day K. Obviously we can't do that under our current conditions. As soon as we can and I talked about the priorities before, music, afterschool sports, the gifted program, we need to have all-day K right on that list. I have been sitting on that committee that is thinking about that, it's a larger issue folk's then just money. The larger issue is classroom space. I can figure out right now how to provide the resources. There is funding from the state available for us to have the resources, for example the tables, the chairs, the rugs, whatever it is we need. That is available to us now but we would need at least 12 more teachers, you can do the math, when you look at a step 3 teacher plus their benefit plan, how much that would be, you're talking about \$80,000 multiply that by 12 teachers and we need the space. We may need to have some very difficult discussions about that space because we may need to shift around the way some of our elementary schools look in order to accommodate that program. But if I could make that happen tomorrow if I could. That is a number one priority for me because the foundation for graduation starts in kindergarten. There is research now that tells us that a child's attendance in kindergarten can predict if they are going to graduate. How scary is that? We need to be looking at that.

Mrs. Ruggieri asked: Our previous Superintendent believed in honest

and frequent communication with the School Committee. Please describe your leadership style and examples of past collaboration with School Boards.

Dr. Lundsten replied: Some of you may be aware that every Friday afternoon the School Committee gets a written update based on several different things. It may be questions that the school committee has asked us. It may be if we have had a serious incident in a school. There is a report. It does not contain any children's names or any identifying data. It will say the school's name, it may say the grade. I will continue that practice. When there is a crisis, the first thing we do after we make sure kids are safe, is we notify the school committee. I will continue that practice. The school committee is absolutely right, Mr. Nero had it down-pat in how to communicate effectively and efficiently with the school committee and I would continue those practices.

Mr. Lombardi asked: If you are chosen as the Superintendent, how long are you planning on staying in this position?

Dr. Lundsten replied: My husband is my most critical friend and he is my best friend, he knows me better than anyone else in this room for forty-one years. Years ago I was fortunate enough to stay home with my children, my three boys; one of them is sitting right over there. I love the support. Now is my time and that is what Hans has said to me. It's your time because I really believe in my heart I can move Cranston forward so I will be looking at this point for three years. Let's be frank, the elephant in the room apparently is my age, I'll put it right out there. I am 65. I have a high energy level and I will balance

my life to make sure I continue with that energy level. This is an important job and I told the School Committee I was more nervous at my first interview for the teacher of the visually impaired than I am tonight. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be standing in front of you but it would be an honor to be your superintendent. It would be my goal as we move through this to build a capacity within the district to make sure there are plenty of leaders who might meet your needs as you look for the next superintendent.

Ms. Iannazzi stated – we are going to take a brief recess between candidates, however, as a school committee we would be remiss if we did not take this opportunity to thank B.A.S.I.C.S. for providing babysitting services this evening.

Mr. Lombardi stated – while we are giving out thank you's I really want to thank the members of our sub-committee, Chairwoman Iannazzi, Janice Ruggieri and Michael Traficante who streamlined this whole process and went through a myriad of applications, prescreening all of the candidates and I think they did a wonderful job of getting this done with the three finalists and for giving us the proper questions to be asking and compiling the concerns of the public and I thank them too.

The meeting recessed at 8:15 p.m. and reconvened at 8:30 p.m.

Dr. Reza Namin

Chairperson Iannazzi stated the following:

Good evening and welcome to our public interviews. We will begin our interviews with a 15-20 minute presentation outlining each candidate's vision and plans for Cranston Public Schools, with

particular focus given to the following four questions:

1- What do you believe our vision for the future of Cranston Public Schools should be?

2- Describe your first 90 - 180 day plan of entry

3- How will you promote accountability through the use of performance data and how would you align the standards, curriculum, instructions, assessment, and professional development, and

4- The demographics of Cranston has significantly changed over the past several years to a point where over 40% of the population is now classified as poverty level and 20% is classified with disabilities or ELL- what strategies would you employ to reduce the achievement gap of these students?

Following your presentation, members of the School Committee will pose questions that have been submitted from the larger Cranston community. We ask that you keep your answers to those questions to 2-3 minutes.

Dr. Reza Namin did a Power Point presentation (attached for the record and on file in the Superintendent's office) and after his presentation answered the following questions:

QUESTIONS:

Mrs. Ruggieri asked: Please explain how your experience as a classroom teacher and building administrator has prepared you for the position of Superintendent and how you will use those experiences to shape decisions that you make.

Dr. Namin replied: I think one thing that was essential to me as a

teacher, especially teaching chemistry, was important to identify differentiated instruction. The challenge of having a classroom that is diverse in terms of their learning and also their significant issues perhaps in regards to some behavior and very diverse so as a teacher I need to learn, how do I have a strategy that reaches out to all and kind of differentiates that instruction at the same time to make everyone accountable. I also learned to have a better portfolio structure where every child would come to the classroom and had a portfolio where included were the daily instruction, had the lecture, had the quizzes, and had the test, and also included all the self-assessments that a student has to do. That portfolio, or binder, was part of the parent-teacher meetings where that student had to present using that portfolio. As a teacher, I learned the difficulty of being a teacher and managing a structure where it is important to have a schedule that supports instruction. So when you have a significant number of students with learning difficulties and then you have some English Language Learners, you need to schedule that course to have adequate support structure that includes instructional support for the teacher and it's important to have that including some of the children who have 1 on 1 that is required by law. As a teacher I learned the challenge of reaching out and appreciated it as a superintendent the difficulty of doing that and making sure of that support.

Mr. Lombardi asked: Doctor, in the spirit of being both parallel and transparent I am going to preface my question with the same statement that I said earlier; I hope that your answer will be shorter

than the question itself. I will break it down for you and if you need me to fill in, absolutely. What is your vision of the “ideal” professional learning community and how will you work toward developing a professional learning community (PLC) throughout the district as well as support school-based efforts to develop, implement and sustain professional learning communities within individual buildings? Please provide specific examples of some of the roles/responsibilities you will expect administrators, teachers, support staff, parents and students to assume in an ongoing effort to create an effective PLC(s).

Dr. Namin replied: One thing that is important to me as a superintendent was to have a professional development committee that has fair representation of administrators, specialists, teachers, parents and students. Then you need to have a shared vision and strategic planning. So when you build your professional development and you ought to address the fact as to how it is aligned with your shared vision. You also have to address professional development about new teacher induction and mentoring program so it’s important to have a district-wide mentoring plan where every new teacher is aligned and every new administrator with a mentor. You need to create a culture and climate where the collegiality is shared and mentorship is celebrated and then you need to address the professional development in the area of special education, technology, ELA, full-inclusion, you need to create professional development opportunities across discipline, grade level, vertical and horizontal, create time and funding for them to have the opportunity to get together and have a data based discussion. They have set up

the student performances that they discussed and once they do that there is a set of plans for the students and for the teachers that includes professional development. You need to have professional development scheduled that goes out to every school monthly that lists...the professional development list that I would see in front of me would offer, for example, a teacher that is given a PD workshop on inclusion so the intent and the belief that I have is you have learning from each other, culture and climate because you have a lot of talent locally. So you have each person that is willing to offer a workshop and will offer that workshop, the list goes out to the district and then to give the opportunity for teachers to go at, for example, 2:30 or 3:00 p.m., consisting of 2 to 3 teachers that just want to learn but they have the opportunity to go there and take this course you are also going to open that to some parents. You give the parents the opportunity to do a workshop and then you have a PD online where the teachers will be able to track their PD activities. They will be able to register for a particular course and you offer a hybrid environment where in my district I have a partnership with Harvard. I offer the teachers the opportunity to take courses online. About 70 teachers came forward and in clusters of 7 they took the course online at Harvard. So that was pretty exciting. I think that was an opportunity for them to take the course online, it was an opportunity to have discussions about it. You need to have PD that is well articulated and approved and funded. It should be aligned to the core values and strategic planning. You need to have PD that focuses on so much of learning from each other rather than hiring more expensive

consultants. You need to have an opportunity and environment where PD opportunities are invested and funded appropriately. That's really important to do as an administrator but I truly believe in a well-articulated district-wide professional development and learning communities. The principals have the opportunities to form those study teams within these schools. So you may have a teacher who wishes to study or investigate differentiated instruction with three or four others so they can go through their principal and get compensated for that opportunity. I want to create an environment that when you go to a professional development, you need to come back to the school and through the principal, to really share that with others what you learned.

Mrs. McFarland asked: Doctor you spoke about some strategies and during your presentation as well, I am going to take a little different question tack when it comes to poverty and ESL. How will you help and support our Title One schools especially the ones with high poverty. What do you see as the challenges and how will you support our ESL students in these schools?

Dr. Namin replied: I would support them by engaging and reaching out to those parents, teachers, and students and having them engage in a shared vision. I want to make sure they have ownership on that first. Because if you don't have ownership and you haven't heard it and when you have a vision you want to see your face and you want to be identified. I think it is important to do our best to make sure that part of or to have fair representation in developing a vision. The next thing is hopefully you have a school that becomes a community

center so you support the principal and administration in that school. That school is a representation of that community so I want to make sure that I do everything that I can to support that principal to create this social environment that reaches out to parents. Perhaps, in my experience, bring the position of resource officer to restructure the pupil services where you have the Director of Student and Social Services as well as a clinical school psychologist district wide. We offer some clinical services onsite. We offer professional development to these parents in regards to offering them incentives to come in, one of the programs I have done was called, Providing Choices, where the parents have an incentive to come in a trusted environment. What they do is they get an incentive to attend that workshop and receive credit and also get a list of resources where they can get help. Because to be honest with you the issue is when the economy is bad we are all impacted. The home gets impacted, the classroom gets impacted. We need to be understanding to that. So when the social structure changes and the economy changes, it impacts our classrooms. So what I would suggest is to take a look at this school as a center community and making sure as a district, you provide all the resources and support structures that can reach out to the parents to have to go to places and opportunity to do workshops in a trusted environment. And to make sure that I, as the superintendent that represents, if I am honored to be your superintendent, to really go to every community that I can, every association organization and really be visible and have a connection with the parents. I think it is important to have that face to face

connection. Then when you have the face to face connection you really need to listen to their challenges and problems. I probably will not be able to understand because some of them will not be able to speak so I need to take someone with me someone who would be able to translate. Cranston has many challenges right now because social and economic, most of the social in terms of population has changed so much within the last fifteen to twenty years that we need to really need to have a plan to reach out and address that particular population. So I am really excited to reach out to that community that represents who I am.

Mrs. Culhane asked: Please detail your experience budgeting, explaining what process you plan to use and who you will rely on in building the budget.

Dr. Namin replied: I have a belief that the budget needs to bottom up rather than top to bottom. What I do if I have a site-based budget with site-based accountability. It is the principals' responsibility to develop the budget. I have cost centers, Alternative Education and Pupil Services. First thing I need to do is to make sure that there is a school council that is engaged with the principal in asking about the challenges and priorities of the school. The principal has the opportunity to present it to the school council that has a fair representation. That site-based budget is a cost center that comes into a leadership group, a leadership meeting that consists of administrators and principals. We had the first discussion about our priorities. What they have and I had done that with the school committee first is have a time-line that was published through the

school committee approval indicating what the plans are and where we are going first. That is communicated to the schools and the community. So it comes back from teachers, principals, school council and then there is a discussion at the local leadership level about our priorities. What we also have, a requirement that I have is that every budget they present they need to indicate how it is aligned to our values, and strategic planning and also what impact it has on class size. So when we go back and get together as a leadership team and the financial facility gets the opportunity to see the first draft. Before all this happens I have already attended many meetings and had communications with the city council, work with the mayor and others to know the challenges that they have and also have met with the legislatures to know their trends and some of the revenue projections so I do that for the school committee and present revenue projections and get a picture of where we think we could be in terms of revenue and so when you have a budget locally, then it's aligned to some of the priorities that the principals identifying to our local leadership and then we go to the finance. What we need to do now is when we go back to change some of those priorities, I need to make sure we go back to the leadership team and then have a collective discussion about what we need to do to get where we want to be. After the first draft I often have community meetings where I present the budget to a variety of community forums with the school committee we do it together and then the finance facility sub-committee and a public hearing. I believe from my experience in dealing with the budget was you have to make difficult decisions but

you need to let people know what they are and the transparency is the key thing. If I am honored to be the superintendent one of the things I would strive for is a shared budget with the city and one budget because it comes from the same pocketbook in my opinion.

Mr. Bloom asked: Have you examined the performance of our school system both prior and post program cuts and what is your plan to reinstate the budget to make such programs, like EPIC and music, possible again if deemed of value?

Dr. Namin replied: I think it is pretty arrogant of me to give a recommendation because I don't have a realistic view of the challenges of the budget details. But I can tell you what my values are and what is important to me. So when I look at the priorities in terms of the budget I really want to make sure I always reflect the priorities. What's important to me as a teacher and an administrator and I have experienced this is the importance of performing arts and music. I believe it impacts the student emotionally and academically and I can show you some of the research that shows the connection between music, performing arts and arts in increasing student performances. I also believe having the music and performing arts will enhance the culture and climate of the school. When you have a positive culture and climate of the school that engages with performing arts and music that is where your academics flourishes. In regards to the data itself, if I have the honor of being in Cranston, first thing I need to do with the school committee, because you have to make a difficult decision and I don't really at any point want to talk about the past. Those difficult decisions had to be made and I really honor your

courage for doing that. I wanted to share with you from my experience when I come to the school district and someone says to me you need to charge athletic fees, and music fees, we have a budget deficit. When I took the opportunity to be where I am right now, in my school district, and when I got ahold of the budget, I had the first opportunity of spending many times and having the experience to really address through transparency, where the revenues are and I worked through the collective bargaining to make very difficult decisions in identifying priorities and some restructuring and elimination of positions. The reason was I wanted everyone to know what is important as a shared vision because we collectively decided on that and when we did those restructuring and when we did the budget I had to budget a budget that I am proud of that I eliminated all of the student activities fees, I had a budget that had zero impact on assessment, I had an increase of a million dollar revenue and I had to structure the budget in a way that was transparent and I had the full support of both communities. That doesn't mean I can do it every year but at least I can try. So, to answer your question, I think for me is to get ahold of the budget first to find out where we are, working with the staff, working with the council, working with the mayor, working with the school committee and then come back and see when we have the shared vision, see how we can align our funding to address the shared vision. The shared vision we have at the end may not result in saying music and performing arts are important but I am just telling you it is mine.

Ms. Iannazzi asked: What do you see as the strengths and

weaknesses of the Cranston School Department and how would you use the strengths/weaknesses to improve the teaching and learning in Cranston?

Dr. Namin replied: I think the strength is that you have a very diverse culture and community. That is a strength that we need to celebrate. I think the strength is you have a great administration and superintendent for years gave you everything he had throughout his life and he built a stable budget and academic programs and I think for me to come into this community, first I need to do is spend a lot of time recognizing. The strength is about the stability of the administration. It's about the courage of the school committee to make difficult decisions. It's about the willingness and partnership of the mayor and your council to work with you. The weakness is, in my opinion, which again is unfair for me to make a determination because the weakness I believe that is a lack of articulation in curriculum coordination. I believe there is a huge student achievement gap that needs to be addressed in regards to the academic. I believe we need to address the issue of transition programming, to address of issue of FERPA coordination, we need to empower the parents and teachers and principals. I believe the challenge and the weakness is the lack of coordination, lack of curriculum coordination, it's about organization structure that I believe we can move forward to the next stage and address the challenges you have now and that is regular meeting administration cohesiveness with the principals and administrators, organizational structure and that everyone believes they have a voice in the future.

They got a voice now but I am talking about the future. I think the weakness is about addressing the sub-groups, ELA, and special education. I believe the sub-groups, as I indicated and the studies show that gap is very significant. What I will do is create a curriculum audit by addressing the deficiencies, and I come back after getting this committee who consists of parents, students, and community, to come back and give recommendations through the school committee to discuss and implement programs.

Mrs. Ruggieri asked: What are your plans to recruit and retain high quality administrators and teachers and build capacity within the district?

Dr. Namin replied: that's a great question because I think one of the key things...because of the retirement changes everyone is asking well, you're superintendent coming in, retirement changes and why do you want to come to Rhode Island? My answer is I want to come to Cranston because I believe Cranston reflects who I am as a person. It's not about my retirement. So, the key issue right now is some of the legislation that is going to impact some of our senior teachers and we need to have a plan because we may see a wave of exit. That is a realistic view. I think what we need to do is have a plan of who we are and have a public relation campaign to talk about all the great strengths we have, the great principals, great teachers, all the services that we do, the community that we are. I think the on-going public relations campaign and talking about who we are is an opportunity to have teachers that want to have meaningful differences like me to come into the school district. I believe we need

to have weekend recruitment sessions where we can focus perhaps on diversity to reach out and recruit some of the teachers through some of the organizations. We need to have correlation between the colleges and universities so we can have a better internship program so as soon as they come to us for internship we get a value for them to stay. We also need to target our alumni. I believe a lot of times if you have an emotional connection to the place, you always want to come back. Those are some of the specific strategies I would employ to recruit teachers.

Mr. Lombardi asked: I think you answered my question in part already with the last question but as worded is says, In your opinion, in what ways do Cranston Public Schools' stand out from other similar districts? What would make a family new to Rhode Island consider moving to our school system?

Dr. Namin replied: I can passionately tell you it's about me making an independent opinion not being from Cranston that you are family of a very culturally diverse and celebrating it. You have a lot of power and talent within the schools. You have a lot of stability with administration. You have a committee that supports the schools so to me I am very honored and excited to be here recognizing that.

Mrs. McFarland asked: Doctor, since you shared that vision and brought new families to Cranston because of our education system, what are your beliefs about parent involvement in district issues and how would you convince parents that it is worth their time to become and stay involved?

Dr. Namin replied: I think it is really important as to who I am to reach

out to parents personally and making sure that every principal and every school has a school council that has a fair representation of parents. I wanted to make sure that every parent has a voice in terms of the budget; they have a voice in regards to set priorities for the strategic planning. I want to make sure the parents have fair representation, parents of special education, and parents of ESL, parents of students with free and reduced lunch. So I want to make sure in those meetings there is a fair representation so I need to do a job on reaching out and making sure that population is represented. I want to make sure we have a parent academy where there are a list of workshops offered to the community and the parents that may include some communication skills. I also want to offer a lot of sessions through special education, pupil services, such as how to deal with a student behavior issue. The best thing I have ever had in every school that I have been in is about parents reaching out to me personally and I continue to have that to this very day.

Mrs. Culhane asked: Could you please summarize your experiences in special education, including whether you have ever been involved with a Special Education Advisory Committee and what role you think a local advisory committee should play in the district.

Dr. Namin replied: I have been involved from teaching children with special education; I have been involved in implementing policies that investigates the federal pupil services structure. I have been engaged in supporting school support structure where I engaged the whole school community in having a plan to both implement the student support team and local advocacy coordinators where we had a 504

plan and that was really important to have a 504 plan and a 504 policy that really is every teacher should have the opportunity to go and take a look on line. I implemented some of the software that allows that to be online where the teachers would be able to easily access to know where the children are in regards to the challenges, or 504, or an IEP. I am a true believer in all inclusion but I also believe in full inclusion needs to be done right because you can't have it 60% of the full inclusion and say that is 100% inclusion. I believe strongly that children that have challenges and learning difficulties they need to be given the same opportunity, and as I mentioned full inclusion is about opportunity, that they need to have the same opportunity as everyone else.

Mr. Bloom asked: Cranston is a large district that covers a wide socio-economic range. Sometimes these differences show up in a school's infrastructure, sometimes these differences show up in test scores and high-school graduation rates. What would you do as superintendent to ameliorate these differences in building infrastructure and academic outcomes?

Dr. Namin replied: I would have a district-wide equity statement and what I mean by that is we need to come together and decide what equity means in regards to the funding, allocation of resources, purchases, we need to have a fair opportunity to see what certain funds are shifted in certain locations so an equity statement is really important to me. I think it is important for us to have a data team to analyze student performances and identify the student that perhaps has those challenges and then have a support team to address that

as they move along. The truth and reality is that there is a social structure here that impacts a classroom so we as a community need to create that social support structure that when a student leaves home, has some kind of support and bridge. That's what I truly mean by restructuring. We can create a student and social work structure that can support that student that leaves home that has those significant challenges.

Ms. Iannazzi asked: What are your feelings about all-day kindergarten? Do you see this as a priority to bring to Cranston?

Dr. Namin replied: I do because as I mentioned I truly believe in early childhood education. I have experienced the power of it. As a matter of fact, where I am right now I am working in partnership with the organization in Worcester that will bring Head Start into the school so we have a Memorandum of Understanding for 17 children who will get services because they are free and reduced lunch and they get free services from outside organizations. So I am working with them instead of renting a place in town we are doing this in a school because we have a classroom for them because I want to examine and show the community how a PreK and early childhood education, in particular, is important for us to focus. I truly believe if you invest in universal PreK and have a school system that has a PreK program that is universal you will have families that will move into the school district. That's one of the first questions a young family will ask if you have a Prek program, is it half day or full. One of the greatest ways you can encourage a lot of families to come to our school district, especially young families, is about having that universal PreK.

Mrs. Ruggieri asked: Our previous Superintendent believed in honest and frequent communication with the School Committee. Please describe your leadership style and examples of past collaboration with School Boards.

Dr. Namin replied: I respect that and I believe in that as well. I may do it differently as in an open and direct conversation. I never want the school committee to be surprised. I want to make sure you have that opportunity to know. I want to make sure that we all get to know each other personally because this is an organizational structure that is a family to me so there is a mentorship, there is a relationship that is built from learning from you. I think it is important to have a relationship that also reflects a community so they can see how much trust and respect that I have to this and that is a reflection of anyone watching they can value that and see there is a good professional value. I often have attended social events with the school committee members. Sometimes they ask you to go to social events so I want to make sure that we attend those and have the personal relationship as well to get to know one another. I have tried to have email communications. I have what I call Friday events that I send collectively and here is what happens throughout the week. Like an FYI. I want to make sure the school committee can reach me at any time if they have a question. I understand the difficult role of the school committee and honor and have a lot of respect for it. I want to make sure there is a process that I have addressed and answered any questions.

Mr. Lombardi asked: If you are chosen as the Superintendent, how

long are you planning on staying in this position?

Dr. Namin replied: I think with the fact that Cranston... I truly believe that coming to Cranston and having that honor is not about work to me it's about making an impact and making a difference. I think that knowing the challenges you have, knowing the budget size, knowing the population you have, knowing the commitment that I have to be part of the community, I would say it's all about accountability. If I don't do a good job in three years, you should get rid of me. So I can tell you I'm going to be here forever but it's about accountability, I need to deliver and I want to make sure I have built that relationship but I am here to stay and I will be honored to be part of that.

Future interview/meeting will be on Thursday evening, 6 p.m. at Cranston High School East.

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Lombardi and seconded by Mrs. Ruggieri. The meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank S. Lombardi,

Clerk