

UNAPPROVED

There was a special meeting of the Cumberland School Committee on Thursday, June 23, 2011 at the Cumberland High School Transitional Building Cafetorium, 2602 Mendon Road, Cumberland, Rhode Island.

Members Present: Jeff Mutter, Lisa Beaulieu, Linda Teel, John Gibbons, Daniel Pedro, Erika Sanzi, Earl Wood (arrived at 8 p.m.)

Administration Present: Dr. Susan Carney, Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Lisa Colwell, Director of Special Services, Fred Schockaert, Dep. Director of Special Services

Agenda Item #1: Call to Order

Chairman Mutter called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

Agenda Item #2: Discussion/Interview with Candidate for Superintendent's Position – Chairman Mutter first took a moment to thank Dr. Colwell and Lisa Beaulieu for handling the scheduling, etc., of today's events. The candidate being interviewed tonight is Michael Lazzareschi, he is currently principal of the Nathan Bishop Middle School in Providence.

Mrs. Teel asked the first question: Please share three specific things that you know about the Cumberland Public School District. Based on what you currently know, what specific areas you would identify as needing directional change to enhance Cumberland's desire to

provide all students with an outstanding educational experience that prepares them for the next stage of their lives?

Response: Thought that we have dedicated teachers. Students seemed to be having a good experience. There is a good foundation in Cumberland – need to optimize the needs of every student. We need to build trust between the parents and the school department.

Mrs. Sanzi asked the next question: In what ways is your current district similar or dissimilar from Cumberland? How will these similarities and differences impact your leadership of the Cumberland Public Schools?

Response: Believes that Providence and Cranston have a strong foundation for creating programs – building relationships. He would like to develop schools that parents can see as the school of choice for their children.

Mr. Mutter asked the next question: What is the driving force that motivates you to serve as a Superintendent of Schools? When did you first recognize this driving force?

Response: Is focused on teaching and learning – successful learning. Would like to have interaction between him and the teachers and the parents. Develop solutions – impact as many students as possible.

Mrs. Beaulieu asked the next question: What are some of the steps you would take to prioritize short and long term goals for the district?

Response: Develop a better understanding of what is happening in the district. He spoke with a number of groups today – he would develop steps – improve teacher morale and parents attitudes – would like to update the technology – create realistic action plans.

Mr. Pedro asked the next question: If given the opportunity to develop a school system from scratch, what three things would you want your school system to be known for?

Response: He has created a school from scratch – the school that he is currently the principal of. He wanted the best teachers for his school. He wanted to be accessible to the needs of the students and parents. Wanted a safe school environment.

Mrs. Beaulieu interjected with a question – she wanted more clarification on creating a school from scratch.

Response: The school had been closed for five years – it was the feeder school to the school he was principal of. The neighbors rallied for the middle school to open in their neighborhood – it was a \$35,000,000 project – major renovations – at the end of the project he wanted the best-qualified teachers in front of the students. He interviewed over 500 applicants for the teachers/staff positions, hired 53 – he picked the ones that he believed to be the best fit for the school. He believed them to be strong and dedicated – he wanted them to want to come to work for him – he had the authority to do the hiring.

Mr. Gibbons asked the next question: How would you go about empowering building level principals to achieve the goals and mission of the school district? What are some of the considerations you would use to measure the results?

Response: Need a clear set of expectations – goals need to be mutually set – evaluations for administrators. He has 13 years of experience and he knows what he is looking for. It should be an individual process – but one that gets support – best needs of the students – team concept is good – clear guidelines. School system not a system of schools – principals can have authority to customize, but all must move in the same direction.

Mrs. Sanzi asked the next question: Describe the important components you would include in an effective system –wide staff evaluation initiative. Provide an example of how you balance setting high expectations and holding people accountable while maintaining the respect of the faculty and community at large.

Response: Staff/students progress – success. Student achievement – define student success – serious considerations/curriculum in classrooms needs to be consistent. Student achievement is very important – we need to provide support where needed. Professional development is extremely important as is mentoring – we need to involve the teachers and the community. This job is to make difficult decisions – not necessarily to be liked. We need to put good teachers in front of the students – support teachers and administrators – morale is always good if the teachers are happy and

they are working with other teachers that are also happy.

Mr. Mutter asked the next question: Provide an example of something innovative that you have been responsible for implementing. How did you gain the support of others and what issues did you have to overcome?

Response: An open door process. Meet with people in their living rooms, at the community center. Get everyone involved. You need to involve the community, multiple stakeholders – answer their questions, always be accessible. This is a good way to build trust, gain support – always have time and make time to meet with parents, listen to them and react to their concerns. Be truthful, accessible and transparent.

Mr. Gibbons asked the next question: Tell us about an unpopular stance you took regarding a school initiative/circumstance. Why did you feel it was necessary to take that stance and how did you garner support among teachers, administration and the public-at-large?

Response: Started the middle school with only a sixth grade – very unpopular – it was not the normal thing to do, but met with parents, got them involved in the process – involved the community and it was a reality.

Mr. Pedro asked the next question: During challenging fiscal times, it is often necessary to make critical decisions about what the district will or will not fund. Describe the process you use when making

critical budget decisions and the reductions or cuts that you would be most apt to look at first. A) Share how you might go about providing non-monetary forms of motivation to encourage extra effort and greater achievement by staff and students? Which of these have you implemented and what was the result?

Response: Invest in administrators; visit the schools, parents and teachers. Create timelines that are effective – teachers need things now. Budget priorities – things that impact learning in the classroom – school buildings are always a priority. Does not care for multi year timelines. Non monetary appreciation – respect – teachers want to be acknowledged for what they do – teachers in the district want to have a say as to what goes on – they want to be involved, create a system where people want to go to work every day.

Mrs. Teel then mentioned that budgets are tight – talent in our district is not all utilized, so how can we let our community get more involved like in after school programs, etc.?

Response: Let the teachers have a say in the overall picture – get them more involved, their level of expertise is very important. Increase teacher morale, engage the staff. Reach out to the community – seeking people with skills – the superintendent needs to be out in the community – he or she needs to draw that talent in from the business community and the community – let them know what is going on in the schools and that we are looking for their help.

Mrs. Teel asked the next question: Share some of your views about how technology may be used as an instructional tool to improve

teaching and learning.

Response: Teachers need to have the knowledge to use the technology. There needs to be careful planning, professional development, reliable technology – lessons on how to use the technology properly. Distant learning could be cost effective tool for all students, clear guidelines – valuable tool.

Mr. Mutter then asked about the technology in the middle school where Mr. Lazzareschi is currently employed as principal.

Response: Currently one of the most advanced schools in Rhode Island – interactive white boards in each classroom – each teacher has a laptop – they bring up lessons on the white boards/smart boards. Students can do multi media presentations to their fellow students – can have an entire classroom on laptops at once – students can log in from an outside source and for students that have no computers at home, school is also open after hours for computer use – it is a wireless building. They have trained several teachers to be experts on the smart boards.

Mrs. Beaulieu asked the next question: Consider the following statement: “The most realistic way to improve the quality of education while reducing cost is to leverage the benefits of education technology to offset the negatives of increased student – teacher ratios.” Place yourself on a spectrum ranging from strongly disagree represented as 1 to strongly agree, represented as a 5. Explain your position.

Response: You cannot replace a teacher with a computer – the

computer is a valuable tool though – as many tools and training increases our teacher’s capability of teaching our students.

Mrs. Sanzi asked the next question: How do you differentiate an outstanding school from a good one? How do you go about transforming a good school into an outstanding one?

Response: Complete buy in from every adult in the building. Every action, conversation, that they have should be for moving the students along. Provide support wherever it may be for the students – every activity in school should be aligned for the learning of the students.

Mr. Pedro asked the next question: An effective working relationship between the Superintendent and the School Committee is vital to the future success of the school district. To this end, what are your basic expectations of the committee and what should we expect from you?

Response: Mutual respect and trust – provide the best teachers for the students. Transparency, clear lines of communication at all times.

Mrs. Teel then asked what would he do regarding math and science test scores that are on the low side in our district.

Response: Look at the gap in their instruction – somewhere – build from grade to grade – see what the weaknesses are and where they are falling on the proficiency line – have a conversation with the teachers to see what the gap may have been. Make sure the teachers are working on what they need to cover.

Mr. Gibbons then asked how we could provide a safe environment – especially at the high school?

Response: Supervision is critical – everyone should realize that there would be consequences when rules are broken. Limited access of strangers in any of the buildings – controls in the main office. Need to have clear emergency plans and procedures – use first day of school thru the last day of school –be consistent. No doors should be open for people to just walk in – clear and consistent policies.

Mrs. Beaulieu then asked about programs in the middle schools and could we raise the challenges for these students?

Response: Students that are gifted should be in accelerated classes. Need to work with teachers, guidance and parents. Group the students accordingly. Careful planning from guidance and teachers.

Mr. Pedro then asked what classes are important in addition to the core subjects?

Response: Art and music could be provided to well round out the students. Students always need access to electives – gives them exposure to a variety of areas that they could eventually use in their lives after school.

Mr. Mutter then asked how someone would work around the natural barriers that exist between school officials and the town officials?

Response: Takes a lot of invitations and outreach to get people to come into the schools. We need to do a strong approach and let the

community know that there is nothing to hide in the schools – all that is going on is very positive.

Mrs. Teel asked about Professional Development.

Response: Professional development is non negotiable – needs to be a coordinated effort. Consistency – teachers need to know where they are going in September – what classrooms they will have, what grade they are going to teach – they need the skills to do this and they cannot be learning about those skills the day before school starts. They need to be prepared and knowledgeable teachers.

Mrs. Sanzi asked about full day kindergarten.

Response: There are benefits, both socially and academically – students do benefit from it, but it should not be a half day of school and a half day of daycare – it is not a babysitting service – we need to make sound decisions.

Mr. Mutter asked the last question: Is there anything we did not ask that you feel would be important for us to know about you? Do you have any questions for us?

Response: This process was very valuable – it is a worthwhile process. Has received a good sense of what is working and what is not working. Every teacher that was met seemed to love his or her job and love his or her students. All the parents want the school department to work for their children. The nuts and bolts of a good system is the teacher. Trust of teachers and parents is very valuable.

Was pleasantly surprised with what he saw and heard.

At this point there was a short break – 8:12 p.m.

Resumed at 8:25

Agenda Item #3: Vote to go into Executive Session for Discussion of Items Referred to in R.I.G.L. 42-46-5 – A) Personnel Matters – Exception (1) – Mr. Pedro and Mr. Wood made a motion to go into executive session, 2nd Mr. Gibbons, approved 7-0.

Agenda Item #4: Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

Meeting minutes respectfully submitted by Linda A. Jackvony