

**APPROVED – 7/14/2011**

**There was a special meeting of the Cumberland School Committee on Thursday, June 27, 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**

**Administration Present: Dr. Susan Carney, Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Lisa Colwell, Director of Special Services, Joseph A. Rotella, Director of Administration**

**Agenda Item #1: Call to Order**

**Chairman Mutter called the meeting to order at 7:03 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 Dr. Philip Thornton, he is currently the Superintendent in North Kingstown. Mr. Mutter asked Dr. Thornton to give everyone a brief overview of himself. Dr. Thornton said that he had started his career as a history teacher, he also coached girls cross country and track and field. He has been an assistant principal and a curriculum director, he has also been a school administrator, then he was the**

**assistant superintendent in North Kingstown, then the interim, then he became the permanent superintendent in 2009. 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: Need clear and concise communication for students, teachers and parents – folks are looking for it. North Kingstown is very similar – although we spend two million dollars more – the money that you do have needs to be spent on teacher training, technology is needed – need a bigger investment. There needs to be more conversations regarding grading and assessing students – can we help them improve – need to build a comprehensive assessment system – mini assessments – so that we know in advance who needs what – it took North Kingstown two years to build the system, but we could start, everyone needs to be on the same page – equally and fairly.**

**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: North Kingstown has five elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school – very similar to Cumberland. We have**

**the right people in the right positions – give people funding for training. Thinks the community is ready to make moves and thinks the SC is eager.**

**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: Was a History teacher, coach, and assistant principal. The North Kingstown Superintendent left abruptly and at the time he was the acting superintendent so he became the superintendent. Having the right personnel and funding is key – people want to get on board.**

**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: Couple of walkthroughs – geared toward education more, not budget. The high school has had some recent renovations but there are things that are still unfinished – they need to be completed. The NCMS needed some repairs, schools need to be more inviting – he walks but also makes a punch list as he is going through the buildings. Communication – he will be out and about in the community – if people see success in school, they may buy in and fund more dollars.**

**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: Welcoming school district – rigor or making classes more challenging – open and honest communication – students and parents are the customers; we need to make them happy, we need open communication.**

**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: Teacher and principal training matters. In North Kingstown we did a comprehensive plan – we have goals for our principals and from that we have sent principals and teachers for training. Setting goals, training and follow-up. Results – all have NECAPS, but in North Kingstown they have benchmarks – everyone will know what the bar is and how many students are doing well, etc. I can check which schools are lagging behind and what is good too. Also, you can hear from the parents as well.**

**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: There is a new state evaluation tool coming out – we are not yet sure of teacher training, practices and responsibilities. The**

**superintendent's response with teachers and principals is important. Being liked, not here to be liked, just to do a good job – he always asks himself if he would be happy with the district if his children were attending schools there.**

**Mr. Wood 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: Convened a team, met for two or three months and reviewed maps of the town – regarding K-5. He believes students should go to school where they should (based on the maps), not based on how much money their parents are making.**

**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: In the first year, did not renew a veteran principals contract – knew it would not be popular but knew it was the right thing to do – it was very challenging.**

**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: Several teachers were teaching small groups of smart children, had to be eliminated. Some sports programs had to be eliminated. Motivation – merit system with administration – tied to goals – non-monetary – when people see results in the students, it becomes contagious, show value added with what you are working on with the students.

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: Have 24 smart boards, some thru grant money. Technology is very important. Training students is important because they do not use all the technology available because they need more training – there are free applications – tech applications. Technology has to be integrated; the teachers need to be trained. Example, smart boards, send one teacher to get the training and then have that person come back and train the others.

Mr. Mutter then asked about distance learning – response was that it does have some value for home bound students – students that fall behind – if a high school student needs a couple extra credits to graduate – it would help with that.

**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: Two – technology has its place. Technology will never take the place of a human – I don’t see smart boards teaching children – you need to be face to face.**

**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: Time tested – schools that offer more rigorous courses – start out and then keep raising the bar. Policies need to be in place – make a huge impact and can change the culture in the district. You need to train, and pay for good help. Setting the vision – everyone has to know where they are going – it is a constant conversation – challenge the children – do not tolerate students that are not succeeding.**

**Mr. Wood 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: Policy and budget – personnel is on my side but I bring you everything for approval. My job is to give you briefings and keep you informed – it could be an article, it is easy to focus on some things but education is tricky – we need to learn from it as we go forward.**

**Mr. Gibbons then asked about the controversy regarding cell phones – all students have different financial backgrounds and some may not have them, so what would the policy be regarding cell phones?**

**Response: Not on during the day, most schools have policies - most school buildings are made of concrete and the phones do not work anyway.**

**Mrs. Teel then asked what would he do to help out struggling Math and Science scores.**

**Response: Identify what Math the students will master by specific grades. See where we are, look at more strategies, look at data, chart progress, ask the question – has the student responded and what would be next, keep trying new strategies. Science, high schools need to do a better job of what they are teaching – there may be things that we are teaching but that are not on the tests – realign what we are teaching.**

**Mr. Mutter then asked during different financial times, do you attack the above problem at the younger level or the high school level?**

**Response: We have coordinators, we have professional days that are**

**built in to our calendar. At those training sessions our teachers meet and see where they are and what is working and what is not working. Give teachers time to get together to talk about what is working and what is not, and then make corrections. Professional days should be one per quarter.**

**Mrs. Beaulieu asked what the first six months would look like if he got the position.**

**Response: Put the sneakers on and go – start talking to principals, parents, and staff – communication is key, ask what is working and what is not. Do some classroom observations.**

**Mr. Wood asked that if Cumberland had schools of choice, what would he bring to Cumberland to make them the schools of choice?**

**Response: Clean welcoming schools, let the community know that we are on the move, we have a plan.**

**Mrs. Teel asked how would you get the message out?**

**Response: Have parents come in, put out a newsletter on the website, re-do the website, be transparent with folks, get out there – personalized meetings.**

**Mrs. Sanzi noted that there are not enough AP offerings, what do you see for a timeline?**

**Response: Get a printout of the high school schedule, what has value, maybe we could drop one old offering and replace it with a new**

**one – make a trade off.**

**Mr. Mutter asked for Dr. Thornton's thoughts regarding the natural barrier between the school department and the town administrators (funding people).**

**Response: People think we have a bucket of dollars hidden, but we need to have dialogue and a good relationship – if they have more investment in the teachers, they will be apt to give more dollars for the budget.**

**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: Active guy, high threshold for interactions. What do you want first, student achievement – our work is talking and focusing on educating the students – we want the children to want to come to school. The SC told Dr. Thornton that they wanted strong leadership, someone to challenge the SC, someone to bring things to them, someone to make sure that they follow thru on items that are important. They want a good communicator.**

**Mrs. Sanzi thanked Dr. Colwell and Mrs. Beaulieu and all of the administration for all of their efforts throughout this entire process.**

**At this point there was a short break – 8:05 p.m.**

**They resumed the meeting at 8:12 p.m.**

**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. Wood made a motion to go into executive session, 2nd Mr. Gibbons, approved 7-0.**

**Agenda Item #4: Adjournment**

**The meeting was adjourned at 8:13 p.m.**

**Meeting minutes respectfully submitted by Linda A. Jackvony**