

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday, December 15, 2014
School Administration Building, Gymnasium
146 Maple Street

PRESENT: Chair Margaret Coppe, School Committee Members Jessie Steigerwald, Judith Crocker, Alessandro Alessandrini, William Hurley

The minutes were taken by Christine Ashness, Recording Secretary

The meeting convened at 7:10pm

Call to order and welcome: Chair Margaret Coppe called the meeting to order, and introduced committee members.

Agenda:

School Committee Interview of Superintendent Finalist Mr. Kaine Osburn, Deputy Superintendent Naperville Community Unit School District 203

Mr. Kaine Osburn, current Deputy Superintendent of Naperville Illinois Public Schools. This is Mr. Osburn's second year there, and he was previously principal in a suburb of Chicago with 2700 students.

Interview Questions:

Why are you considering leaving your current position and coming to Lexington?

It is not about leaving his position; it is about coming to Lexington. Lexington is very well known and invested in their schools from top to bottom. He wants to be part of the Lexington community. With how committed the community is, he believes we can do amazing things together

Where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years?

Hopefully right here in the Superintendent's chair. He is interested in what we can do together. Looking at what is possible to do next is something that will take time, not less than 5 – 10 years. He does not see himself wanting to be anywhere else.

What characteristics do you, as leader, need to exemplify in order to build collaboration amongst administrators in order for the group to be able to work together in the best interest of the district?

He thinks he has to exemplify a good listener by being present in the conversation, being able to hear the experience being shared and collaborating to solve it. He believes in active listening, being present at schools and events. He cannot just sit in his office. He would be present in schools as much as possible. He would be a good communicator, being able to reflect back clearly and effectively. He has to be willing to make clear in his communicating that he does not have a predetermined outcome, as it would be a disservice to have the answer based on previous experience.

Describe examples of difficult decisions that you might consider to be 1) a failure, 2) a success and 3) controversial – how you handled it, how you arrived at your decision, and what you learned from it.

Failure and Success: In Naperville there is a long-standing reading intervention program. As they transitioned and rewrote the literacy program, the curriculum no longer aligned and they had to reallocate in a different way. He met with colleagues on how to approach the change in October. At the time they did not take the actions and steps for communicating the change. It was the right decision and got revisited in the spring, but they did not have time to communicate with families. The perception was that it was a snap decision without consideration. It was however, the right curricular decision. It was not as well received as it could have been and should have been. The change has been successful because the program gives more help to more kids.

Controversial: Same topic as above. Parents came and spoke to the board.

Also controversial, was an unfortunate issue with a staff member. There was a knife on school grounds and it was questioned how the situation was approached. How he decided to communicate was somewhat controversial because it involved law enforcement, the medical examiner, parents, staff and kids. He always approaches things with what will most keep kids safe and secure.

Please describe your experience in working with ethnically/culturally diverse student population? And why is diversity important?

Diversity is important because it makes all of us stronger in how to learn, communicate, share, and support each other. You never know what situation you'll find yourself in. It is a very diverse community where he is now. 60% don't speak English in the home. It is wonderful to include them all in school. Translation services are available in all programs and they are able to reach out, with liaisons in each language group.

How would you define success for yourself as a Superintendent, and how would you define success for our students?

The short/common sense version: The house is for sale next door. Success: that is awesome. If he doesn't feel that way, he hasn't succeeded. How ready they make their children for success later is not just a test score. You need a major foundation piece, social and emotional pieces, and readiness.

Success for Himself: How well he has included everyone in making things possible. Can people offer critical feedback? If they can, it is good/successful.

What will be the single greatest personal challenge you anticipate in transitioning to the role of superintendent in Lexington?

To exercise the requisite patience and balancing it with passion, and taking the time to learn what that is. This community is committed to their schools. It is important to find out context in community for how all the pieces fit together. All pieces that people are working on.

Can you define for us the roll of the superintendent and the role of the school committee as you see it?

He sees the school committee and superintendent working together. He's not a believer that we are in different boats; we are all in one boat. The school committee is the compass saying this is the course, and it is his job to get everyone on the ship to be a part of it and work on it. Making the ship run as well as possible and maybe in new ways that they did not think it could. The school committee is getting feedback from community, and he gets that power to make things happen.

Please share a general overview of your approach to developing a budget. Who do you involve? How do you include various stakeholders, including the School Committee, principals, teachers, community, etc.?

He would start with kids in the classroom. He doesn't believe in zero-based budgeting, and would look at where we are, making sure due diligence has been done. He would rely on principals to tell him where they think core values are, including strengths and weaknesses. This district has the track record in investing heavily in the schools. Budgets are built on calendars, and he would look ahead and value feedback. He would communicate with principals and administrators, would then share with school committee.

Enrollment is growing and space is limited. Aside from adding additional space, what other options would you explore? What information would you need, and how would you obtain it?

He would look at the quality of facilities and the over crowdedness, making sure both are meeting instructional needs. He would see if there is a way to reconfigure things. Time and space effect overcrowding. He'd make sure his decision would be able to improve instruction in the future.

Special education is a large part of a district's budget and can be impacted suddenly by unanticipated costs. How do you plan for unanticipated costs and what preventative measures would you take to mitigate them?

He would work through the budget process, trying to see highs and lows. He knows they are unpredictable but would have reserve in place to cushion. Getting support for kids early on cushions the costs early and over time.

Have you had to pare down a school budget? If so, how did you manage that process? How would you set priorities if you had to pare down a budget in the future? How do you incorporate community input?

Yes he has. He incorporated community input and shared with PTA's before making decisions, explaining how the decision he was proposing was appropriate. He focused on priorities and finding common ground with the parent group, then walked them through why he was proposing his decision. People understood it was a rational thoughtful process. He then listened for feedback.

Technology Question

He would look for a high level of student engagement and see if the learning paced to their speed. He tends to look at his IT group, how are they allocating, and is it as efficient as possible. There is a balance to be had.

Where is the best place to invest in technology?

Those places having the students engaged and preparing for what comes after high school. Collaboration – what enables them to engage with their teacher. Online learning – high school students thrive on this model, which is happening in his district now. There is a lot of collaboration. Community members really wanted it for their kids so they tried it with neighboring districts. It is a great way to collaborate with other districts.

Across our state – and even country – we often hear that educators feel that the joy of teaching and learning is being compromised by an onslaught of mandated assessments. How will you inspire our teachers and staff during this era?

He looks to inspire the people he works with, with their ethical core, wanting to be present with students. Work again on core values, mission, beliefs and how to accommodate without putting integrity at stake. Kids are assessed all the time, in different ways. If he could find a way to do that then he will work with appropriate staff to do so.

What is a successful teacher to you?

Someone whose engagement with a student results in a student who is self-directive. That teacher who is able to build relationships and has a student who wants, and is ready, to do things.

Please give us an example of a situation where you had to build collaboration amongst administrators.

In Naperville, when he first arrived, summer learning was given to him. It was run the same way for many years. He learned that he could do something with it. He got a group of teachers and administrators together to see what they wanted and formed a committee to maximize each student's learning. Over six months, they were able to come up with distinct recommendations for 22 schools.

How do you manage interpersonal conflict? Please give an example of an especially taxing problem you have handled. Would you do it differently today?

Early on in Naperville he was a new person in a new position that didn't exist before. He had to work hard to figure it all out and along the way there were conflicts on territory lines. He honored norms on communicating, went to colleagues and told them he needed help and problem solving support. It is important to look at yourself from the outside to see where the conflict might be. He was able to go back to the person and work through it with a constructive conversation.

Staff conflict: When he was principal, a department was having trouble collaborating with their director. Both sides felt disrespected. He went to both groups on a regular basis, needing to find common ground for the conflicts. It was about being patient and making sure the heat of the moment exchange doesn't become the final exchange between the people.

What would you do to maintain teacher morale and to support teachers – even in the face of budget constraints, state mandates, increasing testing and standards?

He makes sure teachers are part of the community on a regular basis by celebrating student achievements and teacher achievements. If we can tell the story of the teacher in the classroom, people can see what learning is and what teachers are doing to make it happen. Community needs the feedback so they understand why decisions are being made.

How would you address teacher morale in other situations?

Teachers invest so much of themselves it is natural for them to feel disrespected in those cases. Faculty and support staff need to work together communicating. Identify what the pieces are that are common throughout and identify opportunities for staff to recognize they are in this together and should support each other.

In what areas of your professional practice do you feel you need to grow?

Budget and finance is an area where he needs to grow. He would rely on his people but needs to be learning so he will know the technical areas. He could use professional development on it.

How do you integrate data with your decision-making for the school district? Are there other lenses from which you view a school system? If so, please share with us.

He tries to look at multiple points to get the whole picture. What are other data points; focus on growth. It allows us to personalize learning, looking at the child over time. He looks at what time and energy is invested inside and outside the classroom. (Extra-curricular activities and keeping kids connected to the school)

Tell us at least 4 elements for effective instruction in some content area.

Self directed learning; Depth and quality of the inquiries he is engaging in with his students; Instruction that informed by how well the teacher knows their kids; How prepared is the teacher, and particularly how it relates to “plan B” (how flexible are they).

What curricular innovations have you implemented in your current or previous positions? Why?

One that addresses advanced learning. He had a science inquiry where groups weren't being challenged. They built a state of the art science lab, a model by which the teacher was mentoring kids to conduct scientific research. The role of the teacher was not working on content, but mentoring kids to conduct scientific research. Feedback was very positive and opened doors for the students.

Lexington is a high achieving/high performing school district with very high expectations placed on students. Reducing stress is one aspect of addressing student stress, but another side involves enhancing social-emotional intelligence, promoting pro-social behavior, and building resilience in students. What role should school play in developing these skills and how would you go about it? How have you coped with the issue of student stress in your current district?

Embedding it in regular curriculum takes time, large group programs, taking time out of the classroom, working with outside programs. He would look at homework, grading, and would need to examine the opportunity for perseverance and growth.

What are your thoughts about extending the school day or changing start times?

He would not just change times, he would have to look at it comprehensively, and how it affects the rest of the community. He would only change it if he would be changing the actual school day with flexible learning opportunities. He would also look at online learning, allowing some students to have more flexibility, creating less stress, empowering kids to have more control.

Regarding small programs, alternative high schools, etc.: He uses online learning for students coming back from extended absences and gradually moving back to a full schedule. Alternative high school is in Illinois, but the reentry piece is the hard part. He does believe having the kids in the school is the most important piece for their success.

How would he work with unions to make change in school start/end times: He would identify where he would need to talk to the teachers and the impact on their daily lives. It would impact the whole community. Figuring out when the teacher needs to be part of the conversation, and how it affects all would be important.

There will obviously be some transitions with a new superintendent. How do you propose bridging the gap between the previous administration and your leadership style?

He would make visits between now and July 1. He would propose a plan with Dr. Ash. His transition piece would be about learning and he would be seeking feedback.

How would you make yourself visible in the district? Why is visibility important for the system? How does it help you?

He would be in attendance at community events, showing up and making himself available; a physical presence, and being active in the community. He would be civic and business oriented, and a part of religious opportunities too.

Lexington is a community where there is a strong emphasis on citizen participation in government and community. Committees and volunteers abound. Please discuss the pros and cons of this style and how this will affect your role as superintendent.

He values shared learning, liking the connection with the community and how it affects kids lives. He would provide the opportunity to give constructive feedback, and activities he could use.

“Equity” is a frequently used word. Could you give us examples of what it means to you in the context of individual schools, the school system, and different programs.

Equity to him means every opportunity to reach full potential. Do I have curriculum, instruction, environment, and am I providing the opportunity? It is strong professional learning instruction, and our job to implement the best instruction to help kids grow. We need to be open to understand and explore new ideas.

How do you see yourself communicating, and what are your opinions about social media?

A lot of the community is on social media. He uses Twitter, focusing on the good news, highlighting wins, awards. Ultimately it should drive the community to the real resources. You have to be willing to go along with kids and take opportunities to communicate with them.

He then gave examples of how he communicated when he was a principal by using a blog.

Question about hiring principals

He looks for a good communicator, one able to explain things to all groups. He looks for someone with a natural curiosity, and who is an active listener. He also looks at who is most connected to that position - parents, students, and administrators – for their opinions.

Please tell us about your core values and how you have strived to coordinate them with your current school system.

Most important is making sure every student has what he or she need to reach their potential, and his job is to build that pathway. Summer learning helps students at his current district.

How do you reach your life balance?

He is married to a woman who balances him on a daily basis. His door is always open and he has worked to build trust and create a balance. He may not solve a problem immediately, but will eventually.

Members complimented Mr. Osburn's wife Jenny who accompanied him to Lexington. They also stated that if the public wanted to give the committee any feedback, there were forms to do so at the back on the chairs.

Is there anything else you would like to share with us to support your candidacy?

This is an incredible district and community. This day has been awesome and amazing. You can see his answers, things he's done, but he wants the opportunity to do what's "next". There is a depth of resources, and passion for schools means amazing things can be done. He is committed to coming here, bringing his family here, and being a part of the community to do this type of work.

Do you have any questions for us?

Mr. Osburn's question: What is the single most important thing to accomplish next?

A. Alessandrini: Student learning, the way they learn and what they learn; to maintain a level of importance but realizing there are more important things in life

J. Crocker: Infrastructure, classroom supplies, space

M. Coppe: For students to continue to get education at the level we provide.

J. Steigerwald: To figure out the balance; the joy of learning so teachers are excited and maximizing it.

W. Hurley: That every student graduating comes back with happy memories of being here.

Margaret Coppe thanked everyone for attending tonight. She will see Mr. Osburn tomorrow. Deliberating will be on Friday, which will be televised live.

Motion to adjourn (Hurley, Steigerwald)

The Motion was approved 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00pm.

Meeting Materials: Agenda; Lexington School Committee Press Release

Voted by the School Committee February 10, 2015