

**LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Thursday, December 18, 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 7:11pm**

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

**Agenda:**

**School Committee Interview of Superintendent Finalist Dr. Mary Czajkowski,  
Superintendent Barnstable MA Public Schools**

Dr. Czajkowski thanked everyone for the opportunity to interview. She began her career in East Longmeadow as a high school science/biology teacher. She taught biology for 16 years, coached, and was the Health Education Curriculum Coordinator, then the Director of Curriculum Instruction at Agawam Schools. She was promoted to Assistant Superintendent in Agawam and as Superintendent in 2002. She was recruited to Barnstable as Superintendent in 2011 and is currently there.

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

She did not seek this position; John Connolly recruited her. She believes things happen for a reason and that the skills being looked for are what she possesses. She believes in standards. She is approachable and visible, building trust and empowering staff. As a leader, she is a perfect fit for this job.

*Where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years?*

Serving as the CEO at Lexington Public Schools. She is very active in the MA Association of Superintendents and wants to continue being active there. Her love and passion is teaching.

*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?*

A leader must have good listening skills. She would be doing a lot of listening and learning for her first 90 days. She respects and values others opinions. She would involve staff, and the community. She needs to model those characteristics and have open/honest communication.

*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:** There are a number of issues that come to you as a superintendent. She deals with the issue at hand first and foremost. Recently information about a preschool teacher came to her regarding the teacher's actions with students and was very sensitive for all involved. The teacher was placed on administrative leave. She met with the Director of Special Education and parents of preschool students. She decided to send out a communication only to the preschool classroom affected, rather than whole preschool and the elementary school it is housed in. Parents and the community were upset about that. But due to the sensitive nature of it, she did not inform the whole community. Looking back, she would have probably done it differently and reached out to all.

**Success:** A new early learning center. Barnstable's early learning center was around for many years but did not have adequate space. She lobbied the school committee to build one for years, but it required approval of the community, school committee, etc. She put together a communication plan, brought in architects and parents. It was truly a collaborative effort and took years to get this to happen. It was an important decision for community, staff, and she is looking forward to breaking ground.

**Controversial:** Horace Mann Charter School is a school that was in the district for 9 years but with no oversight. The school committee asked her to investigate it when she arrived in Barnstable. It was a sensitive issue. She did a survey with all staff in the school and the evidence was clear that the staff was not feeling respected by administrative staff there. The teachers asked to meet with her alone without the school committee or union representatives, so she did and they shared their feelings. It was clear to her the school had to be dissolved. She brought trustees and the school committee together and the charter surrendered its charter back to the town. They also agreed that the leadership team be replaced. She brought in temporary leadership and it took 2 years to heal the school. The staff invited her to a gathering at Sandy Neck Beach, had a bonfire and let their feelings go. Staff, teachers, and parents were all there. The school is now thriving.

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

Agawam had a strong Russian and Ukraine population. It was about educating the community and staff about the culture and embracing them to be part of the school community. It raised awareness about diversity in community. The Barnstable schools have a strong population of Brazilian and Portuguese. It brings richness to the school. She believes diversity is important because it brings cultures together. It has been very successful; they have a parent center, translators, and an international night. Students share projects about where they came from. She believes we need to do a better job of attracting other cultures.

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

She developed a comprehensive K-12 School Counseling Program in Agawam. She brought a team of consultants in with a team of professionals, conducted an assessment, and findings and recommendations were done. A K-12 Director of School Counseling was hired and it brought a

unified group of counselors together. The Massachusetts Association of School Counselors awarded her their Administrator of the Year award for creating this. Her success as a superintendent would be that program. With respect to students, every student has the right to achieve. Our job is to touch upon their unique talents. Success is how we prepared them to reach their potential. Academically, emotionally, and socially prepare them.

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

The biggest challenge is the concern for social and emotional health of the students, which directly relates to the recent student survey. It is an issue. She would want to learn why they are stressed, what coping skills they have, what adults do to contribute, and how they can work together to help stress. It was very alarming to her that so many have thought of suicide.

*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.?*

The first people she sits with are the town manager and the Chair of the school committee. She then meets with the town manager and his staff to review agreements and talk about priorities. She uses a very collaborative approach with parents, staff, principals, directors, school committee, councils, and central office staff. Does it reflect values? Is there a long-range plan? Is there evidence and data to support what's being requested? Is it aligned with district and school goals?

*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?*

The first thing she would do is look to see if there had been any long-term planning in facilities. In Agawam, there was a courtyard and they enclosed it to add 6 additional classrooms. In Barnstable they're going through space issues and are looking at permanent modular construction. She would want to look at options here. She does not think it is appropriate to put classrooms on stages, etc. You need the educational space.

*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?*

The first thing she asks what is driving the cost increases? Were they after the budget was approved? In Barnstable, they put a years worth of circuit breaker aside for a years worth of special education funding. She receives reports of students coming and going. Another area to look at is bringing students back into the district as it reduces costs. Make sure they are planning ahead; close monitoring. She has found that bringing programs back in place reduces costs rather than out of district.

*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?*

She involves the stakeholders in the process – parents, staff, and the community – and sees what the community values. What will have the least impact on students? She then has to go and

reduce budgets in those areas, whether it is facilities, supplies, etc. Direct instruction is something she holds very sacred and she would not look to reduce staff.

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

This is a stressful time for teachers. Each year she begins the year with a theme, new beginnings, above and beyond, be the change are some examples. You have to celebrate. There is not enough celebration of the work and practice.

*Describe your leadership.*

She has a very collaborative style. She is very visible and students and staff know her. She does not have a top down management style. It is important to listen, problem solve and embrace conflict. Inclusiveness, working together, being adaptable and flexible, agree to disagree professionally. It is about building relationships with people. A good leader needs to be with the people and bring them to the table. It is important to hear from the stakeholders. Leadership is adaptable and technical. You need to have both.

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

You have to embrace conflict and you cannot let it fester. It is important to have the principal confront the conflict and she is there to coach and help. She will intervene if necessary. She once had a director and a teacher who could not work together. She felt it was affecting the staff and school so she contacted union presidents and got everyone together. They established ground rules, had each of them share feelings about why they had an inability to work together. They drew up a contract, but one of them broke the contract. It continued to fester so they brought in a mediator to work with both of them. It helped, but the problem never went away. The director ended up retiring and the teacher is now thriving with a different leader.

*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?*

She would have events for teachers. Celebrations inspire teachers and families, when teachers can celebrate. A wellness program, special events and recognitions for teachers are all things she would do.

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

Coaching and encouraging people to take more initiative. Delegating more is also something she needs to work on.

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

Good instruction - modeling behavior and expectations; Providing effective, immediate feedback; Scaffolding - taking a concept and breaking it down so students can be clear about what it looks like; Differentiation – differentiating to meet all the different learners in the classroom.

*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.*

The purpose of data is to inform practice. Sometimes we get overwhelmed with too much data. See what is the purpose of it is, use multiple sources of it. She has CIA teams – curriculum, instruction, and assessment - in Barnstable. It works with principals and teachers. The teams look at data. Data is only as good as how it is used. Is it user friendly? Is it time sensitive? Look at the data and ask why. It is important for teachers not to be overwhelmed with the use of data.

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

MMSI – Exxon Mobil came out with funding Mass Math Science Initiative. It is to increase advanced placement of all students and lay the foundation for students taking AP courses in math and science. Teachers thought it was the most meaningful professional development they've ever had.

*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?*

There are different kinds of stress – class rank, admission to college, classes - and she would want to reach out to the admissions in colleges to have a conversation with them. We need to find ways to look at start time, kids getting pressured to stay up late, getting an A vs. an A-. We need to do a better job educating parents on this. Bring people together to have a conversation. It is a problem solving process we need to engage in. Educate staff around stress and train them on how to deal with stress.

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

She partnered with the Falmouth superintendent, both towns directors of finance and transportation, and 2 physicians. They had a forum in each town with good turnout about what can be done about tweaking the start time. They discussed the impact on transportation, sports, etc. Their school committee is working on it by reaching out to different committees, impact on budget.

*If you were doing a walk thru, what would you be looking for technology wise?*

How teachers are using and integrating initiatives. Using technology as a tool. For it to be effective, what is the purpose of it? Achievement or to inform our students to be better consumers on accessing research, using it better and smarter. Students are far more advanced than teachers. How are students using it? Is it being used for instruction? Are they using it responsibly?

*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?*

Dr. Ash has established good structures and systems. She would want to be working closely with guidance from the administrative leadership team. What has been effective? What do we need to focus on? Transition is an important piece to continue the work that is already being

done here. It is important to be well prepared and hit the ground running. The relationship between the outgoing and incoming superintendent needs to be an open supportive relationship.

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

When she visits schools, which is often, at least once or multiple times in a week, she enjoys being in classrooms, having lunch with students. Teachers and students know her. She is visible and approachable. She will go see programs, and then have lunch with the staff. It is a good opportunity to be informal with them. She looks for specific instruction/patterns when walking through with principals. Providing principals support is important. The custodians, support staff, and teachers all know her. They value that she takes the time to be in schools. She does superintendent health calls with the community and parents. She has a potluck informal meeting. Being visible in the community is very important. She is also a member of the rotary. She attends town events, concerts, and school events, as it is important for parents to see her in the community. Every Monday morning she meets with the town manager. She is live on the town radio and television talking about upcoming events and what's going on in the schools. After that she meets with the town manager and his staff.

*How would approach doing a school without money/aid/help*

She would reach out to the town manager/council and make sure they see the need for money for schools. Having those conversations, with school committee, town council, and preparing documents. It should be a collaborative effort with town councils. Involving stakeholders, communicating the need, bringing them to the site, and looking for solutions.

*“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 is access, fairness. Policies are in place to support equity. How do we distribute those resources? Access to all - all means all - it is an important core value. When you do it, it is a value that people respect.

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

The role of superintendent is the CEO of the school district. The relationship between the superintendent and school committee is critical in order for district to move forward. Building relationships, keeping people informed. She communicates every Sunday night keeping the school committee informed. The school committee hires/fires the superintendent, improves budget, sets policy, but beyond that the working relationship needs to be transparent. Trust, difficult conversations will happen but will be providing a quality education for all students.

*Can you have both strong school committee and a strong superintendent?*

She says yes, need to have both be strong. It's the ability of school committee members to voice their passions, as they're the advocates and elected officials for public education. They need to be strong, part of the decision making. May disagree and agree to disagree, but need the respect to be able to disagree. She needs to develop a working relationship for the best interest of the district. Her job is to keep them informed and able to come to them. She has to be able to express her concerns and seek their advice. But it most important that when there are issues with

parents and members of community they pass them along to her so she can try to solve them. Giving her the opportunity to solve things sends the message to parent that she's willing.

*Do you have any questions for us?*

Dr. Czjakowski's question was: What do you, as a school committee, see in the next few years as the top priorities you want the superintendent to address?

The committee's answers were space needs; Elementary World language – reinstating it as it was lost in 2006; Taking us to the next level – how we learn, how to handle what life throws at them – that staff is stress free as our students; Social/emotional stress; Multicultural community – find ways to embrace and find balance of what people are used to, and being open to different ways of doing things. It's a constant challenge – need to do something about it; Focus on learning and education; Community based facility – for people to see school buildings as more of the town; Academic based after-school activities – how they put stress on teachers students.

Dr. Czjakowski's second question: As a school board, what do you see as systems that are in place to support the superintendent's success?

Judith Crocker: there are organizations already in place that would love to share – PTAs, PTA president council, school based site council

Jessie Steigerwald: the leadership team – central office, principals, department heads, teachers, professional development; School master plan committee; MASC

William Hurley: You have a school committee that wants the superintendent to be successful. We will help you with the transition.

Alessandro Alessandrini: The staff is wonderful - teachers, central office, municipal side.

Margaret Coppe: The relationship that has been established with the superintendent, town manager and facilities.

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

She thanked all for the opportunity to be interviewed and selected. She values their work. She believes in a culture that is student centered. It needs to be a climate of a shared, strong work ethic with shared responsibility and accountability. Involve parents. She believes all her experiences have prepared her for this job and she has an ability to empower others. She then shared a few emails from teachers and a parent in her current district which stated how much she is liked, how much she will be missed, the impact she has had and wishing her luck.

The committee recessed at 9:05pm.

The committee reconvened at 9:25pm.

### **Update on the Ad hoc School Master Planning Meeting of December 18.**

Judith Crocker updated the committee on the meeting. Bridge, Bowman and Clarke would be prefab; Fiske, Harrington, Diamond would be brick and mortar additions; Diamond would also have a prefab addition; They are not addressing LHS at this point in time; Looking at a rebuild for Hastings; There was preliminary discussion about HVAC at LHS.

Everything is dependent on finances and is a 5-year plan. They are very rough sketches, and details need to be figured out.

Members discussed their personal preferences.

The Friday meeting of the school committee will be at 4:00pm. Their lawyer will be there at 5:00pm and they will go to executive session to discuss contract negotiations. They will then go back into open session to vote on the world language motion. They will not be talking about the ad hoc master planning issues.

***MOTION to adjourn (Hurley, Crocker)***

***The Motion was approved 5-0.***

The meeting was adjourned at 9:46pm.

Meeting Materials: Agenda

Voted by the School Committee February 10, 2015