

MINUTES – WAYLAND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Special Meeting – April 10, 2023

A Special Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held on Monday, April 10, 2023, at 6:30 P.M. at the Wayland Town Building.

Present:

Chris Ryan, Chair
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair
Jeanne Downs
Erin Gibbons
Jessica Polizzotti

Chair Chris Ryan convened the regular session at 6:33 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded by WayCAM.

1. Special Matter:

(a) *Discussion regarding Appointment of Acting Superintendent, including Process, Interviewing of Candidates and Next Steps:*

Chris Ryan made a brief statement regarding the purpose of this meeting and the Committee's next steps. There have been many questions about this hiring process. The Wayland Public Schools must have a Superintendent in place by July 1 given that Dr. Graham is leaving June 30 and the current Superintendent is on leave. Chris spoke to the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) and school counsel regarding this process. In the meantime, one potential candidate reached out to him unsolicited and then he and Erin Gibbons met with this person. However, several have raised concerns about considering only one candidate and tonight's discussion will be about the process and if the Committee would like to modify this process.

There was a brief pause because the meeting was not broadcasting on the Government Channel but was broadcasting on the Public Channel 8.

The meeting resumed and Chris commented that a search is usually not the typical search process when an Acting Superintendent is hired. However, five people would be interested in interviewing in public, but others are not willing to do so. Four have been or are superintendents, one is an assistant superintendent and some are in discussions with other school districts, such as Westwood, Natick, Weston, and Melrose.

The options are to conduct a full search, follow up with potential candidates who are interested, or receive potential candidates' names from MASC. Conducting a full search in this circumstance is typically not done, and there are many reasons why it is necessary to move forward quickly and thoughtfully. A discussion ensued regarding the Committee's thoughts around next steps to move forward, as it is important to do what is in the best interest of the students and to create stability and healing in the district.

Some of the concerns raised were paying two superintendents at the same time and the impact to the FY24 school operating budget as well as the healing process which is best when the whole community works together and not just rely on one person. The Committee agreed to publicly interview the five candidates, discussed the format and logistics of the interviews, and will submit pre-determined questions to Jeanne. The interviews will take place on Tuesday and Wednesday nights of this week and, after checking references, a decision will be reached during a meeting on Friday via ZOOM. A message drafted by Jeanne and Ellen will be sent out to the school community regarding the process going forward.

2. Public Comment:

John Ballam, 344 Old Connecticut Path, commented that this process doesn't seem transparent, he does not understand what has happened, and believes that there has been much turmoil since the Superintendent was put on administrative leave. The community cannot heal when it is not known what has happened. Mr. Ballam does not want Wayland to be a place in which people of color would not live. He asked if the Superintendent had any interest in coming back.

John Pierce of Newton is a consultant and has worked with Dr. Easy over the years. He commented that scheduling public comment at the end of the meeting feels that the School Committee is not interested in what the audience has to say regarding their decisions. Mr. Pierce's opinion is that the meeting this evening and the recent investigation for which there were no findings are similar in that there has been no transparency. If people are held accountable, there

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will be consequences to those seeking accountability, particularly around the ever-present bullying in Wayland. He added that Wayland is a place that needs change.

Mary Ann Borkowski, 251 Lake Shore Drive, commented that she was hoping to learn at this meeting why Wayland is in this position today, but she did not as transparency has not been forthcoming. She is constantly asked “What is the matter with Wayland,” as she is very active with diversity events. The town has been written about in the Boston Globe and is not being perceived well in other communities. Ms. Borkowski added that words such as tone, management style and congeniality are code words that represent racism, even though many say Wayland is not racist and this is not about race. Finally, she commented that paying two salaries is difficult when the district is struggling to pay for Special Education services.

Jeff Sklar, Brooks Road, referred to several Open Meeting Law Complaints filed against the School Committee recently, many or possibly all will cost the Town money, as did the recent investigation for which he says there was no report. There is also an MCAD filing, an arbitration, and another superintendent being hired that will all cost money. Mr. Sklar directed an accusation toward a School Committee member to which she replied that his statement was false. In Mr. Sklar’s opinion, the School Committee did not follow HR protocols and has been dysfunctional. He acknowledged that his questions cannot be answered during the meeting, but asked to be contacted at a later date but he has not been contacted.

Carole Plumb, Bald Rock Road, does not understand how Wayland got to this point and when there is no information available, people begin to presume about what happened. In her opinion, putting Dr. Easy on leave was a form of retaliation, similar to the Stephen Cass situation, as there is a history in this town that dates back to other situations. She commented that nothing can be learned if everything is unclear because there is a lot of speculation that can lead to an ugly situation. Ms. Plumb would appreciate a better way to communicate, as Wayland must do better.

Sejal Sirinivisan, 35 Covered Bridge Lane, commented that we are stuck in a horrible place and everyone has to work together to get out of it. The students have felt the impact, and they need solutions now. The healing process can only begin with the School Committee as the leadership of the school district through collaboration and communication and through a hyper-focused lens so the students continue to get the best education possible. She referred to everyone being in a “kayak” but everyone is heading in different directions. She feels that she has learned some new information and probably will never have all the information, as the School Committee can’t provide it because this is a personnel matter and an active discrimination claim is pending. Ms. Sirinivisan spoke to the public and asked them to trust their elected officials as they are in charge to lead the district.

Kim Reichelt, Coolidge Road, acknowledged the “state of the kayak” in the previous comment, but noted that the “kayak” (situation) has holes in it and it needs to be fixed so everyone is rowing in the same direction. She referred to an open letter written by a School Committee candidate in which she stated that the next School Committee, with two new members, will be working with next year’s superintendent, and she also acknowledged the several Open Meeting Law Complaints filed against the School Committee by Ms. Reichelt and George Harris. She added that the Attorney General could find the Committee in violation on one of her complaints and could nullify the School Committee’s vote to appoint the next superintendent based on the complaints. Ms. Reichelt urged the School Committee to slow down, address the items before them, and let the next School Committee choose the superintendent.

Jeanne Downs responded to Ms. Reichelt’s public comment noting that the Attorney General has made no determinations on the Open Meeting Law Complaints as of yet.

Hope Podell, 7 Jennison Road, has lived in Wayland for 25 years and her two children attended the schools. Many families move to Wayland for its schools. She noted that all boards and committees are made up of volunteers and if the job cannot be done correctly, then the volunteer(s) should leave the job. Ms. Podell referred to this situation as a “bad play” and, in her opinion, the decision process is like a “hiccup” and has left her mortified.

Edna Vassilovski, Glezen Lane, asked if it is legally permissible to offer a one-year contract to an acting superintendent when the current superintendent has not resigned or been terminated and how can the funds be raised to pay two superintendents when the FY24 operating budget has had some budget cuts? Will there be staff cuts or will programs be reduced? She asked the School Committee to look into the legality of paying a second superintendent as there could be additional legal bills moving forward. Ms. Vassilovski asked one of the School Committee members to acknowledge that she assisted in the drafting of an Open Meeting Law Complaint. She also asked the member if she would come

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forward with the knowledge she has about the basis of the investigation and if her colleagues are unbiased, adding that trust and credibility are critical in hiring a quality candidate.

Robin Sklar, Brooks Road, grew up in Wayland, attended the schools and her daughters attended the schools as well. She is also horrified with the current situation and commented that the Superintendent stood up and did the right thing for the students, particularly when a task force was formed to reach a decision about test returns and addressing bullying in the schools. Ms. Sklar believes that the Superintendent should be reinstated and continue to do what he was hired to do as he was not afraid to do what was in the best interest of the students. Ms. Sklar acknowledged that too much money is being spent and it is not fiscally responsible.

3. **Adjournment:**

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Ellen Grieco, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn at 7:58 p.m. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Ryan, Chair
Wayland School Committee

Observers:

John Ballam, 344 Old Connecticut Path
John Pierce, Consult
Jeff and Robin Sklar, 18 Brooks Road
Mary Ann Borkowski, 251 Lake Shore Drive
Erin Mueller, 3 Pine Ridge Road
Hope Podell, 7 Jennison Road
Ann Brensley, 28 Barney Hill Road