



**MALDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Superintendent Search Committee**

**City Hall, 215 Pleasant Street, Room #105
March 14, 2024**

Attendance:

| NAME | Present | |
|---|----------------|--------|
| Jennifer Spadafora, | √ | |
| Sharyn Rose-Zeiberg, | √ | |
| Adam Weldai, Forestdale | √ | |
| Jane Wright, Salemwood | √ | |
| Todd Cole, MHS | √ | |
| Sonia Miller, Linden | √ | |
| Dr. Brian Sheehan, Salemwood | √ | |
| Cara Hovhanessian, District Wide Stem Director K-5 | √ | |
| Stephanie Scalese, District Wide SpED Program Mgr. | √ | |
| Sammantha Dorazio, District Wide Subs. School Nurse | √ | |
| Dawn Marie O’Toole, Beebe ESP | √ | |
| Ashanafi Befekadu | √ | |
| Joshua Gold | A | |
| Heather Segal | √ | Remote |
| Amanda Ceide | √ | |
| Meklit “Meki” Abel | A | |
| Kashawna Harling, DEI Officer | √ | Remote |

Also Present: Maria Luise of the Mayor’s Office serving as Clerk of the Committee and consultant, Glenn Koocher, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC).

1. Call to Order and Roll Call:

Co-Chair Jennifer Spadafora called the meeting to order at 6:10PM and stated that there was a quorum present to conduct business. Maria Luise conducted roll call and the members of the Search Committee (the “Committee”) present are noted in the Attendance Chart above. As also noted, some members participated in the meeting remotely and a zoom link was also provided for members of the public who wished to attend.

Each member of the Committee introduced themselves and attached hereto is a listing of the members with their titles (*See Attachment A*).

Glenn Koocher introduced himself and shared his experiences and background. He has been with MASC for 25 years and has had the opportunity to work with Malden on several occasions. He has an extensive background in assisting School Committees with this process.

2. Orientation of Committee Members

Ms. Spadafora described the timeline and that the hope was to finalize the process by mid-May. She explained any questions and/or concerns from the members can be addressed to her or Sharyn Rose-Zeiberg.

Mr. Koocher explained the role of the search committee and what the process will entail and encompass. He distributed Orientation Materials which are attached hereto. (*See Attachment B*). Members of the Committee were able to ask questions throughout the meeting.

The following topics were discussed:

- **Applications/Process**

The application has been dispersed as well as posted on the MASC website and in the usual places for this information. It is also posted with the Mass Association of School Superintendents which covers New England. The deadline for applications is April 5th. The applications will be scanned to the Cloud so that members will have access. The applications usually include a cover letter, 3 letters of reference and academic credentials. There have already been some responses.

Mr. Koocher explained that the Committee will be reviewing the applications, selecting candidates for initial interviews, and then recommending the candidates to be considered by the School Committee. He also explained that the Search Committee is a public body under the Open Meeting Law, that agendas needed to be posted, and that Maria Luise would be taking minutes which the Committee needed to approve.

He noted that the initial screening phase would be conducted in executive session and that confidentiality was critical to the search process. The body would first meet in open session where members will vote to enter executive session. The names of applicants are confidential until a finalist is presented to the School Committee. Ms. Rose-Zieberg stressed the importance of confidentiality.

- **State Ethics**

State Ethics Law was also discussed since committee members are considered “municipal employees” for Ethics Commission purposes. Mr. Koocher explained the relevant parts of the law and further explained that current municipal employees may have to disclose their status using the forms provided relative to Disclosure of Financial Interest and Disclosure of Appearance of Bias.

- **Developing Questions**

One of the next steps is for the Search Committee to develop questions. A resource to assist was distributed and is attached hereto. (*See Attachment C*). The questions will be developed and finalized in an open meeting and should be consistent for all candidates. Follow-up questions are allowed. Members should submit their draft electronically by 7:00 p.m. on March 23, 2024 so that MASC can aggregate them and organize them for consideration by the Search Committee.

- **Setting up Interviews**

Usually, 6 to 10 applicants are moved forward for interviews. Each interview should be given 75 minutes as far as time necessary to complete. The Committee can schedule more than one for a night and Saturdays are an option. It's up to the Committee whether there is a debriefing after each candidate.

3. Schedule and Planning Next Steps

The next meeting will focus on potential questions and preparation for interviews. The Committee agreed to meet again on **Wednesday, March 27th at 6:00PM** in Room #105 at City Hall.

Other steps that will be pursued include a survey, focus groups with various stakeholders, including teachers, community members, SEPAC, Central Office, etc. A Committee member reminded the group that interpretations need to be included.

Future meeting dates discussed included April 9th, 23rd, 25th and 30th at the Forestdale School April 27th (9:00AM) potentially at City Hall.

4. Adjourn

On a motion by Ms. O'Toole, seconded by Ms. Miller, it was voted unanimously to adjourn.

The Chair declared the meeting adjourned at 7:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Maria Luise

ATTACHMENT A

Superintendent of Schools Search Committee

The Malden School Committee has secured the services of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) to facilitate the search process for a Superintendent of Schools.

Mayor Gary Christenson in his capacity as Chair of the Malden School Committee appointed School Committee members **Jennifer Spadafora** and **Sharyn Rose-Zeiberg** to co-chair the Superintendent Search Committee.

The following members of the Search Committee represent educators, administration, and parent/caregivers.

Malden Public School Superintendent Search Committee

Principal Representative

Adam Weldai - Forestdale School

Assistant Principal Representative

Jane Wright - Salemwood School

Unit A Representatives

Todd Cole (MHS)

Sonia Miller (Linden)

Dr. Brian Sheehan (Salemwood)

Unit B Representatives

Cara Hovhanessian (District Wide Stem Director K-5)

Stephanie Scalse (District Wide SpED Program Mgr.)

Unit C Representatives

Sammantha Dorazio (District Wide Subs School Nurse)

Dawn Marie O'Toole (Beebe ESP)

Parent/Caregiver Representatives

Ashanafi Befekadu

Joshua Gold

Heather Segal

SEPAC Advisor

Amada Ceide

Student Representative

Meklit Abel

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator

Kashawna Harling

ATTACHMENT B

Massachusetts Association of School Committees

ORIENTATION MATERIALS

for the

Malden

Superintendent Screening Committee

(Updated with Guidance on Meeting Minutes)

**Massachusetts Association of School Committees
One McKinley Square, Suite 200
Boston, MA 02109
www.masc.org**

SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH COMMITTEE ORIENTATION MEETING

KEY OBJECTIVES FOR INITIAL MEETING

- 1. Introduce Search Committee Members and Search Personnel**
- 2. Distribute and Confirm Contact Information**
- 3. Identify Key Questions of the Search Committee Members on Search Processes and Protocols**
- 4. Understanding the Search Process**
- 5. Role of the Advisory Committee**
- 6. Importance of Incorporating Anti-Bias Strategies**
- 7. Review Timelines and Reserve Dates**
- 8. Review or Schedule Focus Group Survey and On Site Meetings**
- 9. Begin Question Development Process**
- 10. Address Any Outstanding Questions**
- 11. Next Meetings**
 - a. Scheduling**
 - b. Candidate Screening**
 - c. Question Development**

NOTE: The law makes no distinction between the statuses of superintendencies. Interim, provisional, temporary or acting superintendents have the same duties and obligations as a superintendent under long term contract. Similarly, the hiring process is treated in the same way. Interim superintendencies are simply superintendents working at the discretion of the school committee or under a short term contract.

1. INTRODUCTIONS

Introduction of Search Committee Members and MASC Resource Staff

Search Committee Chair's Role

Minute Taking Function

Gathering Member Contact Data (addresses, phone #s, e-mail, etc.)

What questions to you want to make sure get answered this evening?

2. POLICIES AND LAW

Background Issues That Affect a Search

 The Superintendent Employment Environment

 Employment Law Related to Searching

Open Meeting Law and Confidentiality

Official Spokespersons and Media Contacts

Dos and Don'ts

 > Background Checks

 > Candidate Questions*

3. SEARCH TIMELINES AND PROCESSES

What Happens in a Superintendent Search?

Issues about the Media.

How will we reach decisions on whom to interview and whom to recommend as finalists?

Other protocol issues identified by members.

4. INTERVIEW SCHEDULING, PROTOCOLS AND QUESTIONS

Scheduling Dates for Resume Review, Selection, Interviews

Candidate Interview Protocols

Developing the Questions

Hosts for Sessions

5. KEY OPERATIONAL QUESTIONS:

- Who will notify proper authorities about meetings for posting purposes?
- Scheduled dates for future action.

*The following are inappropriate areas for questions of a candidate:

- Questions about age; sex, height or weight, disabilities, sexual orientation, marital status, dependents, or spouses orientation; religion or creed; race, color, or national origin; birthplace, language of origin;
- Questions about residential status (own or rent); arrests; membership in social organizations; military status including draft classification, reserve status, discharge, foreign military experience)

THE OPEN MEETING LAW
M.G.L. c. 30A

All **meetings** of a **governmental body** shall be open to the public and any person shall be permitted to attend any meeting as otherwise provided by this section.

No **quorum** of a governmental body shall meet in private for the purpose of deciding on or **deliberating** toward a decision on any matter except as provided by this section.

“MEETING” IS DEFINED AS:

Any corporal convening and deliberation of a governmental body for which a quorum is required in order to make a decision at which any public business or public policy matter over which the governmental body has supervision, control, jurisdiction or advisory power is discussed or considered; but shall **not** include any on-site inspection of any project or program.

*A Screening committee’s interviews with candidates for job of superintendent constituted “verbal exchange” pursuant to OML even though interviews consisted solely of prepared questions put to candidates and their answers because interviews aided screening committee in deciding which candidates to recommend to School Committee.
- Gerstein v. Superintendent Search Screening Comm., 405 Mass. 465 (1989).*

“GOVERNMENTAL BODY” IS DEFINED AS:

Every board, commission or subcommittee or any district, city, region or town, however elected, appointed or otherwise constituted, and the governing board of a local housing, redevelopment or similar authority; provided, however, that this definition shall **not** include a town meeting.

Subcommittees appointed by any governmental body are covered by the Open Meeting Law (OML).

QUORUM IS DEFINED AS:

A simple majority of a governmental body unless otherwise defined by constitution, charter, rule or law applicable to such governing body.

CALLING YOUR MEETING – GIVING PUBLIC NOTICE

THE NOTICE REQUIREMENT:

- Notice for all meetings shall be filed with the Clerk of the city or town;
- Notice must be publicly posted in the office of the Clerk or on the principal official bulletin board of the city or town;
- Notice must be posted at least 48 hrs. in advance of the meeting.
 - Excludes Saturdays, not Sundays & legal holidays.
 - Must include items reasonably expected to be deliberated.

WHEN THE OPEN MEETING LAW APPLIES

When quorums of governmental bodies meet, = meeting of each body subject to the OML.

DELIBERATION MEANS:

- A verbal exchange (via any media) between a quorum of members of a governmental body attempting to arrive at a decision on any public business within its jurisdiction.

KEEPING AND APPROVING MINUTES

A SEARCH COMMITTEE like a subcommittee is itself a “public body” under the Open Meeting Law. See General Laws chapter 30A, section 18. Therefore, as a public body, the subcommittee has its own obligation to approve meeting minutes in accordance with chapter 30A, section 22(a). The Attorney General’s Division of Open Government has recognized exceptions in situations where a subcommittee is created for a limited purpose and ceases to exist, in which case the parent body may approve the meeting minutes from the subcommittee’s final meeting. But in general, a subcommittee, or a SEARCH COMMITTEE, should approve its own meeting minutes.

The Attorney General has acknowledged that some subcommittees do not meet as frequently as the parent body. This could be the case with a SEARCH COMMITTEE. The Attorney General’s regulations clarify that timely approval of meeting minutes means within the later of 30 days or 3 meetings. So, a subcommittee that meets less frequently or on an irregular schedule need not worry that it will be in violation of the Open Meeting Law if some time passes before it next meets to approve minutes.

MEETING IN EXECUTIVE SESSIONS: HOW TO CONVENE

1. Gov. body must first convene in open session for which notice has been given;
2. A majority of members vote to enter executive session after roll call vote;
3. Presiding officer must cite the purpose for the executive session (Ch. 30A, Section 21, Subsection (a)(8)).
4. Presiding officer must state whether the body will reconvene after the ex. session.

CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH EXECUTIVE SESSIONS CAN BE CONDUCTED FOR SEARCH COMMITTEE PURPOSES:

- To discuss the reputation, character, physical condition or mental health, **but not** the professional competence, of an individual; **
- To consider and interview applicants for employment by a preliminary screening committee or a subcommittee appointed by a governmental body if an open meeting will have a detrimental effect in obtaining qualified applicants; **PROVIDED**, that this clause shall not apply to any meeting to consider and interview applicants who have passed a prior preliminary screening.

NOTE: The Attorney general has issued two opinions which are important for search committees to note:

1. The search committee may not report out a single person as the sole individual put forth for the public process. At least two candidates must be moved forward.
2. Questions for the candidates must be developed in public session and, therefore, may not be developed in executive session.

**** If you are discussing the character and reputation, physical condition or mental health of an individual, you must comply with the following:**

- Person being discussed must receive written notice 48 hrs. in advance of proposed executive session;
- Person being discussed may request open meeting;
- Person may be present at executive session during discussions or considerations involving him/her;
- Person may have counsel present; and the person may speak on one's own behalf.
- The individual being discussed may record the executive session,

THE STATE'S CONFLICT OF INTEREST LAW AND SEARCH COMMITTEES

Several parts of the state's ethics statutes apply to search committee members. These include avoiding conflicts of interest should immediate family members become candidates, using the process to advance your own interests, and most importantly, disclosing confidential information such as the names of candidates who do not become finalists.

Confidentiality is not only a legal requirement – violating the confidentiality of executive sessions can damage the reputations and careers of unsuccessful candidates and discredit your search committee and your search. Violating confidentiality can result in action against the person who makes the unauthorized disclosures.

You may not participate in any deliberation that affects:

| | | | |
|-------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| You | Your Children | Your Parents | Your Siblings |
| Your Spouse | Your Spouse's Children | Your Spouse's Parents | Your Spouse's Siblings |

YOU, AS A SEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBER MAY NOT:

- Act in a manner such that a reasonable person might conclude that you might act with bias.
- Secure unwarranted privileges for yourself or others.
- Use inherently coercive authority.
- Use official resources for private or personal use.
- Disclose confidential information*.
- Accept inherently incompatible employment.

Also, search committee members are considered “municipal employees” for the Ethics Commission purposes. As such, if you are already a municipal employee by virtue of paid municipal employment or as an elected official, you must disclose this status using the appropriate documentation.

Guide to Screening and Interviewing Candidates for the Superintendency Avoiding Bias in Decision Making Around the Superintendency

School Committee and Search Committee members need to be made aware of blatant and subtle elements of bias that go into the development of job descriptions, selection of search committee members, orientations of screening committees, reviews of application packages, selection of interviewees, development of questions, and decisions on hiring.

EVOLVING TREATMENT OF WORDS – Being Mindful of Words that Others May Find Offensive

In recent years, the public has become more aware of how certain words may be offensive to others. Words that had been part of the mainstream turn out to have roots in prejudice, bias, and racist practices and are falling out of use as non-inclusive terms even though they may not be intended to offend. For example:

- “Master” has connotations that offend others. Headmasters and Masters of Schools are now more likely to have the title of principals or “heads of school.” The use of “master” as an adjective may also have negative connotations.
- Someone who has wandered afar from the common purpose of a group or whose views are inconsistent with colleagues might have been called “off the reservation,” which offends Native Americans.
- “Grandfathering or Grandmothering” to provide special qualification status has its link in the post-slave era to restrict voting rights, even though modern usage refers to providing automatic credentialing or status.
- More respect is being paid to individual identifying pronouns and the traditional “he,” or “she,” may no longer fit universally as it did a generation ago.
- The well-known “whitepaper” has taken on a bias-implication when used as a research document. The “blacklist” that tracked victims of the McCarthy era is considered inappropriate today. Comparing differing points of view as “black and white” has been criticized.
- Those with mental health issues take offense at the careless use of terms like “crazy” to criticize an idea or person.

We are finding that many educators will make a deliberate effort to exclude terms that are known to be non-inclusive or offensive. In these situations, meaning, context, and tone can define the difference between common vernacular and offensive language. More frequently, individuals are becoming more mindful of these language issues and, out of respect for others, will avoid language that may offend another person.

AVOIDING BIAS IN HIRING

Many positions are filled through an application process. Hiring managers or screening committees will often make inappropriate assumptions based on the names of applicants, language in cover letters and resumes, and experiences listed. Some employers have used a name-blind system where the identities of applicants are edited out. This may work more effectively in the private sector than a public one, and it is a particular challenge when seeking a superintendent since reviewers can easily go to Google to identify candidates based on their experience.

Search Committees should be alerted to the potential bias inherent in making decisions based on candidate names, written materials, accents and speaking styles, experiences, and compensation

histories, disability, and age - all of which can be a source of bias in the wrong hands. Committee members should not, however, be discouraged from scrutinizing every facet of candidate applications in seeking strengths, values, and potential for success in the hiring process potential superintendent. Many School Committees are focused heavily on achieving diversity in their workforce and having teachers and administrators that look like the students they will serve or the communities in which they live. This commitment does not require that the best candidates be excluded in favor of a less qualified but diverse pool. Personnel experts will note that one of the most effective ways of cultivating such a diverse and highly skilled workforce is to adopt an exceptionally effective recruitment strategy that finds potentially outstanding candidates and allows Search Committees to screen a high quality field.

REFERENCES AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

Many of the professionals who train superintendents and other school administrators will point to situations where a candidate of color, or a person for whom English is a second language, or other person subject to bias in the past may be held to a higher standard. The concern is a good candidate might be passed over for advancement, or may be treated differently from another person because of racial, ethnic, religion, age, or sexual identify. Search Committees should review carefully the employment history of candidates to discern whether bias has played a role in slowing the advancement of candidates who may have been victims of discrimination of any form.

CONTRACTS AND COMPENSATION

Bias often appears in contract negotiations. Less experienced employees are often offered lower salaries than others with more years of service or depth of work assignments. A person new to the superintendency might legitimately be offered a lower salary than a more experienced individual with a record of success. However, it is sometimes the case where women, persons of color, and non-native language speakers are offered lower salaries than those offered to similarly situated non-minority candidates. School Committees who negotiate these contracts should be mindful of avoiding these situations.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF BIASED DECISION MAKING

Although well-meaning, members of search committees and school committees will frequently:

- allow their own experiential biases to weigh too heavily on decision making.
- prioritize candidates who mirror themselves and their employment experiences.
- support candidates whose experiences and interests are like their own, including love of the arts, sports, books, etc.
- decisions on appearance and favor for certain kinds of people based on that.
- yield to the biases or will of the majority, including situations where a powerful member of a group overpowers the independent judgment of the individual.
- yield to stereotypes, favorably or unfavorably.
- favor individuals with values that are shared with the hiring authorities such as a political party or religious faith.

WHAT YOU MAY ASK AND WHAT YOU MAY NOT ASK OF CANDIDATES FOR SUPERINTENDENT

AREA OF INQUIRY

LIMITATIONS ON QUESTIONING

EDUCATION

You should not ask about a candidate's education as a means to ascertain age. You may ask about schools attended, confirmation (but not year) of graduation, work experience, references.

RACE or COLOR

Questions about race are not allowed and photographs may not be solicited.

RELIGION

Questions about religion are not allowed. You may ask if a candidate can meet your attendance requirements including weekend or evening meetings as long as they are not designed to ascertain religious information.

AGE

Inquiry about age, including date of birth, is not allowed.

SEX

Generally no questions are allowed.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Questions, including those about relationships or living arrangements, including marital status, are not allowed.

HEALTH STATUS

Questions about height and weight may not be asked.

HANDICAP or DISABILITY Specific questions about whether a candidate has:

- a disability,
- received Workers' Compensation,
- been in a hospital,
- been treated for a mental health condition,
- addicted to or treated for drug abuse or alcoholism,
- been in or completed a rehabilitation for drugs or alcohol,
- been absent from work because of illness.
- **You may ask about a previous attendance record at other jobs without referencing illness.**

NOTE: if a candidate offers information on an illness or disability, you may not inquire as to the kind, severity, ongoing treatment or likelihood of recovery. You may not ask the candidate to take a physical examination prior to making a job offer. You may, after a position has been offered, require a physical exam to ensure that the candidate will be able to fulfill the job requirements.

NATIONAL ORIGIN

Place of birth, original home of parents, ancestry or ethnicity of applicant or parents. **You may ask if the candidate may legally work in the USA.**

MILITARY SERVICE

You may not inquire about service connected disabilities, the nature of military discharge, foreign service, draft status or reserve status.

You may ask if a candidate is a military veteran and about military service history.

RESIDENCE

Questions about living arrangements, ownership or renting are not allowed. You may ask if a candidate would be willing to move into the district.

CRIMINAL RECORDS

You may not ask about arrests, detention, or case disposition where there is no conviction.

You may not ask about *first* convictions for misdemeanors (i.e., drunkenness, speeding, minor traffic violations, disturbing the peace).

You may not inquire of convictions for **any** misdemeanors within the last five years.

You may ask the following questions:

- **Have you ever been convicted of a felony?**
- **(Excluding those listed above), have you been convicted of a misdemeanor within the last five years?**
- **Excluding misdemeanors listed above, have you completed a period of incarceration within the past five years for any misdemeanor?**

All school employees who have unsupervised contact with students, including the superintendent, must submit to a criminal records check every three years.

In Massachusetts it is illegal to administer a polygraph (Lie Detector) to an employee or candidate.

ROLE OF THE CHAIR, OFFICERS, AND MEMBERS OF THE SEARCH COMMITTEE

In general, the chair and other officers (if you have them) of the Search Committee have responsibilities to their colleagues.

The Chair's primary role is to ensure that members are heard and that the will of the majority is pursued, but also that the minority, whatever it is, has a full opportunity to air its views.

- The Chair is the servant of the group, not the master. The chair should expedite the agenda but not impose any additional authority over the board's decision making.
- The Chair has no additional authority other than that specifically given to it by the designating authority (School Committee) or the body itself. In a superintendent search process, the chair has a single vote that he/she may exercise at any time, but no additional authority over other members that might affect the decisions of the group.

It is helpful right from the start that there be clarification about:

- Whether the chair is the chair the spokesperson for the group, or is the media relations in the hands of the School Committee?.
- What the School Committee expects from the group and the chair's role in communicating it.
- Communications with the School Committee, formally and informally.

The Vice Chair, if you have one, covers for the chair in his/her absence.

If there is a secretary, that secretary should keep minutes because the Search Committee is subject to the open meeting law and public records law. MASC can provide technical assistance to the secretary relative to correct form and content. Minutes should include:

- Dates, locations and times of meetings.
- Names of those present.
- Motions made and votes taken.
- General topics discussed (i.e., the group reviewed 21 resumes; the group voted to interview ____ candidates, including ____, ____, ____, etc.)
- It is not necessary to record comments made.
- If the meeting is in executive session, the confidentiality of the minutes should be respected.

Summary of the Conflict of Interest Law for Municipal Employees

This summary of the conflict of interest law, General Laws chapter 268A, is intended to help municipal employees understand how that law applies to them. This summary is not a substitute for legal advice, nor does it mention every aspect of the law that may apply in a particular situation. Municipal employees can obtain free confidential advice about the conflict of interest law from the Commission's Legal Division at our website, phone number, and address above. Municipal counsel may also provide advice.

The conflict of interest law seeks to prevent conflicts between private interests and public duties, foster integrity in public service, and promote the public's trust and confidence in that service by placing restrictions on what municipal employees may do on the job, after hours, and after leaving public service, as described below. The sections referenced below are sections of G.L. c. 268A.

When the Commission determines that the conflict of interest law has been violated, it can impose a civil penalty of up to \$10,000 (\$25,000 for bribery cases) for each violation. In addition, the Commission can order the violator to repay any economic advantage he gained by the violation, and to make restitution to injured third parties. Violations of the conflict of interest law can also be prosecuted criminally.

I. Are you a municipal employee for conflict of interest law purposes?

You do not have to be a full-time, paid municipal employee to be considered a municipal employee for conflict of interest purposes. Anyone performing services for a city or town or holding a municipal position, whether paid or unpaid, including full- and part-time municipal employees, elected officials, volunteers, and consultants, is a municipal employee under the conflict of interest law. An employee of a private firm can also be a municipal employee, if the private firm has a contract with the city or town and the employee is a "key employee" under the contract, meaning the town has specifically contracted for her services. The law also covers private parties who engage in impermissible dealings with municipal employees, such as offering bribes or illegal gifts. Town meeting members and charter commission members are not municipal employees under the conflict of interest law.

II. On-the-job restrictions.

(a) Bribes. Asking for and taking bribes is prohibited. (See Section 2)

A bribe is anything of value corruptly received by a municipal employee in exchange for the employee being influenced in his official actions. Giving, offering, receiving, or asking for a bribe is illegal.

Bribes are more serious than illegal gifts because they involve corrupt intent. In other words, the municipal employee intends to sell his office by agreeing to do or not do some official act, and the giver intends to influence him to do so. Bribes of any value are illegal.

(b) Gifts and gratuities. Asking for or accepting a gift because of your official position, or because of something you can do or have done in your official position, is prohibited. (See Sections 3, 23(b)(2), and 26)

Municipal employees may not accept gifts and gratuities valued at \$50 or more given to influence their official actions or because of their official position. Accepting a gift intended to reward past official action or to bring about future official action is illegal, as is giving such gifts. Accepting a gift given to you because of the municipal position you hold is also illegal. Meals, entertainment event tickets, golf, gift baskets, and payment of travel expenses can all be illegal gifts if given in connection with official action or position, as can anything worth \$50 or more. A number of smaller gifts together worth \$50 or more may also violate these sections.

Example of violation: A town administrator accepts reduced rental payments from developers.

Example of violation: A developer offers a ski trip to a school district employee who oversees the developer's work for the school district.

Regulatory exemptions. There are situations in which a municipal employee's receipt of a gift does not present a genuine risk of a conflict of interest, and may in fact advance the public interest. The Commission has created exemptions permitting giving and receiving gifts in these situations. One commonly used exemption permits municipal employees to accept payment of travel-related expenses when doing so advances a public purpose. Another commonly used exemption permits municipal employees to accept payment of costs involved in attendance at educational and training programs. Other exemptions are listed on the Commission's website.

Example where there is no violation: A fire truck manufacturer offers to pay the travel expenses of a fire chief to a trade show where the chief can examine various kinds of fire-fighting equipment that the town may purchase. The chief fills out a disclosure form and obtains prior approval from his appointing authority.

Example where there is no violation: A town treasurer attends a two-day annual school featuring multiple substantive seminars on issues relevant to treasurers. The annual school is

paid for in part by banks that do business with town treasurers. The treasurer is only required to make a disclosure if one of the sponsoring banks has official business before her in the six months before or after the annual school.

(c) Misuse of position. Using your official position to get something you are not entitled to, or to get someone else something they are not entitled to, is prohibited. Causing someone else to do these things is also prohibited. (See Sections 23(b)(2) and 26)

A municipal employee may not use her official position to get something worth \$50 or more that would not be properly available to other similarly situated individuals. Similarly, a municipal employee may not use her official position to get something worth \$50 or more for someone else that would not be properly available to other similarly situated individuals. Causing someone else to do these things is also prohibited.

Example of violation: A full-time town employee writes a novel on work time, using her office computer, and directing her secretary to proofread the draft.

Example of violation: A city councilor directs subordinates to drive the councilor's wife to and from the grocery store.

Example of violation: A mayor avoids a speeding ticket by asking the police officer who stops him, "Do you know who I am?" and showing his municipal I.D.

(d) Self-dealing and nepotism. Participating as a municipal employee in a matter in which you, your immediate family, your business organization, or your future employer has a financial interest is prohibited. (See Section 19)

A municipal employee may not participate in any particular matter in which he or a member of his immediate family (parents, children, siblings, spouse, and spouse's parents, children, and siblings) has a financial interest. He also may not participate in any particular matter in which a prospective employer, or a business organization of which he is a director, officer, trustee, or employee has a financial interest. Participation includes discussing as well as voting on a matter, and delegating a matter to someone else.

A financial interest may create a conflict of interest whether it is large or small, and positive or negative. In other words, it does not matter if a lot of money is involved or only a little. It also does not matter if you are putting money into your pocket or taking it out. If you, your immediate family, your business, or your employer have or has a financial interest in a matter, you may not participate. The financial interest must be direct and immediate or

reasonably foreseeable to create a conflict. Financial interests which are remote, speculative or not sufficiently identifiable do not create conflicts.

Example of violation: A school committee member's wife is a teacher in the town's public schools. The school committee member votes on the budget line item for teachers' salaries.

Example of violation: A member of a town affordable housing committee is also the director of a non-profit housing development corporation. The non-profit makes an application to the committee, and the member/director participates in the discussion.

Example: A planning board member lives next door to property where a developer plans to construct a new building. Because the planning board member owns abutting property, he is presumed to have a financial interest in the matter. He cannot participate unless he provides the State Ethics Commission with an opinion from a qualified independent appraiser that the new construction will not affect his financial interest.

In many cases, where not otherwise required to participate, a municipal employee may comply with the law by simply not participating in the particular matter in which she has a financial interest. She need not give a reason for not participating.

There are several exemptions to this section of the law. An appointed municipal employee may file a written disclosure about the financial interest with his appointing authority, and seek permission to participate notwithstanding the conflict. The appointing authority may grant written permission if she determines that the financial interest in question is not so substantial that it is likely to affect the integrity of his services to the municipality. Participating without disclosing the financial interest is a violation. Elected employees cannot use the disclosure procedure because they have no appointing authority.

Example where there is no violation: An appointed member of the town zoning advisory committee, which will review and recommend changes to the town's by-laws with regard to a commercial district, is a partner at a company that owns commercial property in the district. Prior to participating in any committee discussions, the member files a disclosure with the zoning board of appeals that appointed him to his position, and that board gives him a written determination authorizing his participation, despite his company's financial interest. There is no violation.

There is also an exemption for both appointed and elected employees where the employee's task is to address a matter of general policy and the employee's financial interest is shared with a substantial portion (generally 10% or more) of the town's population, such as, for instance, a financial interest in real estate tax rates or municipal utility rates.

Regulatory exemptions. In addition to the statutory exemptions just mentioned, the Commission has created several regulatory exemptions permitting municipal employees to participate in particular matters notwithstanding the presence of a financial interest in certain very specific situations when permitting them to do so advances a public purpose. There is

an exemption permitting school committee members to participate in setting school fees that will affect their own children if they make a prior written disclosure. There is an exemption permitting town clerks to perform election-related functions even when they, or their immediate family members, are on the ballot, because clerks' election-related functions are extensively regulated by other laws. There is also an exemption permitting a person serving as a member of a municipal board pursuant to a legal requirement that the board have members with a specified affiliation to participate fully in determinations of general policy by the board, even if the entity with which he is affiliated has a financial interest in the matter. Other exemptions are listed in the Commission's regulations, available on the Commission's website.

Example where there is no violation: A municipal Shellfish Advisory Board has been created to provide advice to the Board of Selectmen on policy issues related to shellfishing. The Advisory Board is required to have members who are currently commercial fishermen. A board member who is a commercial fisherman may participate in determinations of general policy in which he has a financial interest common to all commercial fishermen, but may not participate in determinations in which he alone has a financial interest, such as the extension of his own individual permits or leases.

(e) False claims. Presenting a false claim to your employer for a payment or benefit is prohibited, and causing someone else to do so is also prohibited. (See Sections 23(b)(4) and 26)

A municipal employee may not present a false or fraudulent claim to his employer for any payment or benefit worth \$50 or more, or cause another person to do so.

Example of violation: A public works director directs his secretary to fill out time sheets to show him as present at work on days when he was skiing.

(f) Appearance of conflict. Acting in a manner that would make a reasonable person think you can be improperly influenced is prohibited. (See Section 23(b)(3))

A municipal employee may not act in a manner that would cause a reasonable person to think that she would show favor toward someone or that she can be improperly influenced. Section 23(b)(3) requires a municipal employee to consider whether her relationships and affiliations could prevent her from acting fairly and objectively when she performs her duties for a city or town. If she cannot be fair and objective because of a relationship or affiliation, she should not perform her duties. However, a municipal employee, whether elected or appointed, can avoid violating this provision by making a public disclosure of the facts. An appointed employee must make the disclosure in writing to his appointing official.

Example where there is no violation: A developer who is the cousin of the chair of the conservation commission has filed an application with the commission. A reasonable person could conclude that the chair might favor her cousin. The chair files a written disclosure with her appointing authority explaining her relationship with her cousin prior to the meeting at which the application will be considered. There is no violation of Sec. 23(b)(3).

(g) Confidential information. Improperly disclosing or personally using confidential information obtained through your job is prohibited. (See Section 23(c))

Municipal employees may not improperly disclose confidential information, or make personal use of non-public information they acquired in the course of their official duties to further their personal interests.

III. After-hours restrictions.

(a) Taking a second paid job that conflicts with the duties of your municipal job is prohibited. (See Section 23(b)(1))

A municipal employee may not accept other paid employment if the responsibilities of the second job are incompatible with his or her municipal job.

Example: A police officer may not work as a paid private security guard in the town where he serves because the demands of his private employment would conflict with his duties as a police officer.

(b) Divided loyalties. Receiving pay from anyone other than the city or town to work on a matter involving the city or town is prohibited. Acting as agent or attorney for anyone other than the city or town in a matter involving the city or town is also prohibited whether or not you are paid. (See Sec. 17)

Because cities and towns are entitled to the undivided loyalty of their employees, a municipal employee may not be paid by other people and organizations in relation to a matter if the city or town has an interest in the matter. In addition, a municipal employee may not act on behalf of other people and organizations or act as an attorney for other people and organizations in which the town has an interest. Acting as agent includes contacting the municipality in person, by phone, or in writing; acting as a liaison; providing documents to the city or town; and serving as spokesman.

A municipal employee may always represent his own personal interests, even before his own municipal agency or board, on the same terms and conditions that other similarly situated members of the public would be allowed to do so. A municipal employee may also apply for building and related permits on behalf of someone else and be paid for doing so, unless he works for the permitting agency, or an agency which regulates the permitting agency.

Example of violation: A full-time health agent submits a septic system plan that she has prepared for a private client to the town's board of health.

Example of violation: A planning board member represents a private client before the board of selectmen on a request that town meeting consider rezoning the client's property.

While many municipal employees earn their livelihood in municipal jobs, some municipal employees volunteer their time to provide services to the town or receive small stipends. Others, such as a private attorney who provides legal services to a town as needed, may serve in a position in which they may have other personal or private employment during normal working hours. In recognition of the need not to unduly restrict the ability of town volunteers and part-time employees to earn a living, the law is less restrictive for "special" municipal employees than for other municipal employees.

The status of "special" municipal employee has to be assigned to a municipal position by vote of the board of selectmen, city council, or similar body. A position is eligible to be designated as "special" if it is unpaid, or if it is part-time and the employee is allowed to have another job during normal working hours, or if the employee was not paid for working more than 800 hours during the preceding 365 days. It is the position that is designated as "special" and not the person or persons holding the position. Selectmen in towns of 10,000 or fewer are automatically "special"; selectman in larger towns cannot be "specials."

If a municipal position has been designated as "special," an employee holding that position may be paid by others, act on behalf of others, and act as attorney for others with respect to matters before municipal boards other than his own, provided that he has not officially participated in the matter, and the matter is not now, and has not within the past year been, under his official responsibility.

Example: A school committee member who has been designated as a special municipal employee appears before the board of health on behalf of a client of his private law practice, on a matter that he has not participated in or had responsibility for as a school committee member. There is no conflict. However, he may not appear before the school committee, or the school department, on behalf of a client because he has official responsibility for any matter that comes before the school committee. This is still the case even if he has recused himself from participating in the matter in his official capacity.

Example: A member who sits as an alternate on the conservation commission is a special municipal employee. Under town by-laws, he only has official responsibility for matters

assigned to him. He may represent a resident who wants to file an application with the conservation commission as long as the matter is not assigned to him and he will not participate in it.

(c) Inside track. Being paid by your city or town, directly or indirectly, under some second arrangement in addition to your job is prohibited, unless an exemption applies. (See Section 20)

A municipal employee generally may not have a financial interest in a municipal contract, including a second municipal job. A municipal employee is also generally prohibited from having an indirect financial interest in a contract that the city or town has with someone else. This provision is intended to prevent municipal employees from having an “inside track” to further financial opportunities.

Example of violation: Legal counsel to the town housing authority becomes the acting executive director of the authority, and is paid in both positions.

Example of violation: A selectman buys a surplus truck from the town DPW.

Example of violation: A full-time secretary for the board of health wants to have a second paid job working part-time for the town library. She will violate Section 20 unless she can meet the requirements of an exemption.

Example of violation: A city councilor wants to work for a non-profit that receives funding under a contract with her city. Unless she can satisfy the requirements of an exemption under Section 20, she cannot take the job.

There are numerous exemptions. A municipal employee may hold multiple unpaid or elected positions. Some exemptions apply only to special municipal employees. Specific exemptions may cover serving as an unpaid volunteer in a second town position, housing-related benefits, public safety positions, certain elected positions, small towns, and other specific situations. Please call the Ethics Commission’s Legal Division for advice about a specific situation.

IV. After you leave municipal employment. (See Section 18)

(a) Forever ban. After you leave your municipal job, you may never work for anyone other than the municipality on a matter that you worked on as a municipal employee.

If you participated in a matter as a municipal employee, you cannot ever be paid to work on that same matter for anyone other than the municipality, nor may you act for someone else,

whether paid or not. The purpose of this restriction is to bar former employees from selling to private interests their familiarity with the facts of particular matters that are of continuing concern to their former municipal employer. The restriction does not prohibit former municipal employees from using the expertise acquired in government service in their subsequent private activities.

Example of violation: A former school department employee works for a contractor under a contract that she helped to draft and oversee for the school department.

(b) One year cooling-off period. For one year after you leave your municipal job you may not participate in any matter over which you had official responsibility during your last two years of public service.

Former municipal employees are barred for one year after they leave municipal employment from personally appearing before any agency of the municipality in connection with matters that were under their authority in their prior municipal positions during the two years before they left.

Example: An assistant town manager negotiates a three-year contract with a company. The town manager who supervised the assistant, and had official responsibility for the contract but did not participate in negotiating it, leaves her job to work for the company to which the contract was awarded. The former manager may not call or write the town in connection with the company's work on the contract for one year after leaving the town.

A former municipal employee who participated as such in general legislation on expanded gaming and related matters may not become an officer or employee of, or acquire a financial interest in, an applicant for a gaming license, or a gaming licensee, for one year after his public employment ceases.

(c) Partners. Your partners will be subject to restrictions while you serve as a municipal employee and after your municipal service ends.

Partners of municipal employees and former municipal employees are also subject to restrictions under the conflict of interest law. If a municipal employee participated in a matter, or if he has official responsibility for a matter, then his partner may not act on behalf of anyone other than the municipality or provide services as an attorney to anyone but the city or town in relation to the matter.

Example: While serving on a city's historic district commission, an architect reviewed an application to get landmark status for a building. His partners at his architecture firm may not prepare and sign plans for the owner of the building or otherwise act on the owner's behalf in relation to the application for landmark status. In addition, because the architect has official responsibility as a commissioner for every matter that comes before the commission, his partners may not communicate with the commission or otherwise act on behalf of any client on any matter that comes before the commission during the time that the architect serves on the commission.

Example: A former town counsel joins a law firm as a partner. Because she litigated a lawsuit for the town, her new partners cannot represent any private clients in the lawsuit for one year after her job with the town ended.

* * * * *

This summary is not intended to be legal advice and, because it is a summary, it does not mention every provision of the conflict law that may apply in a particular situation. Our website, www.mass.gov/orgs/state-ethics-commission, contains further information about how the law applies in many situations. You can also contact the Commission's Legal Division via our website, by telephone, or by letter. Our contact information is at the top of this document.

Version 7: Revised November 14, 2016.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF
RECEIPT**

I, _____, an employee at

(first and last name)(name of municipal dept.)

hereby acknowledge that I received a copy of the summary of the conflict of interest law for municipal employees, revised November 14, 2016, on

_____.
(date)

Municipal employees should complete the acknowledgment of receipt and return it to the individual who provided them with a copy of the summary. Alternatively, municipal employees may send an email acknowledging receipt of the summary to the individual who provided them with a copy of it.

Do's and Don'ts of Running a Hiring Committee

In this Chronicle of Higher Education article, Chicago executive-searcher Dennis Barden has ten suggestions for search committees as they interview candidates:

- Understand the job. It's vital to know the day-to-day responsibilities of the position in question before conducting interviews.
- Prepare. Read candidates' materials and decide on the structure and guiding principles. "Group interviews work better when the panel agrees on a line of questioning that is intended to elicit substantive, useful responses and that can be replicated for every candidate..." says Barden.
- Keep the purpose of preliminary interviews in mind. That is, to take an expansive view of possibilities and expand options, not decide on the best candidate.
- Don't represent just a narrow constituency. Every committee member should keep the good of the whole organization in mind.
- Loosen up. "It is deadly when a panel is so focused on process that it feels that it must ask the same questions, using the same words, in the same order, with every candidate," says Barden. "Interview conversations go better, and institutions get a far better sense of the personality of the candidate, when they flow naturally, like a conversation."
- Talk about the elephant in the room. People are sometimes too polite. "For goodness sake, just ask!" says Barden. It's important to address difficult or contentious issues while the candidate is there.
- Recruit as well as interview. "In an optimal search, the institution and the candidate find themselves at the same stage of mutual consideration at the same time," he says. "So, not only should the candidates be telling the institution that they want the job, but the institution should be telling them how interested it is in them."
- Don't treat candidates like supplicants. "Talent is hard to find," says Barden. "It needs to be invited in and to be given a reason to stay."
- Understand that leaders don't make everyone happy. "A search for candidates who have a track record of keeping everyone happy is a search for an appeaser," he says.
- Don't let the process become more important than the outcome. "Process is intended to serve result, not be a result itself," he concludes. "When institutions become so immersed in the process that they come to believe that it's more valuable than the outcome (the hire itself), things tend to go awry – and they do so very, very slowly."

"Treating Candidates Like Supplicants, and 9 Other Recruiting Mistakes" by Dennis Barden in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 24, 2013 (Vol. LIX, #37, p. A36-37),

<http://chronicle.com/article/Top-10-Mistakes-in-Recruiting/139351/>

ATTACHMENT C

DEVELOPING QUESTIONS FOR SUPERINTENDENT CANDIDATES

Sample Questions for Initial Screening, Semi-Final, Final Interviews And Site Visits

Including:

Frequently Asked Questions

Questions with Annotation

Higher Order Questions

Model Questions Based on Emerging Issues and Trends

Site Visit Questions

Anti-Bias, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Reference Questions

Response Guide

**MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL COMMITTEES**
Revised and Expanded, January 2024

INTRODUCTION

Interviewing a potential superintendent of schools is a very challenging task. You may have only one or two opportunities to meet the candidate before moving forward on an appointment. Many outstanding administrators and leaders may not present well while others are master of the relatively short interview that may fail to uncover weaknesses. Here are some questions developed by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees to help you probe and challenge the candidate before you to demonstrate skills and abilities that can help identify a potentially outstanding educational leader.

QUESTION CATEGORIES – General Areas

Below are some of the general categories of questions that superintendent search committees pose to candidates. It is by no means complete, but many search committees find this a helpful checklist for identifying areas for probing with candidates:

1. **Leadership**
2. **Vision** for Education in Our District
3. **Values** that drive the candidate's work
4. **Communications** (Community, Parents, Staff, etc.)
5. Superintendent as **Advocate**
6. **Achieving Equity** in all its forms.
7. **Diversity** in all its forms.
8. **Inclusion and Opportunities**
9. **Hiring** Principals and/or Central Office Administrators
10. Strategies to Promote **Student Achievement**
11. General **Management Style**
12. Oversight and **Management** of Administrators
13. Relationship with **Municipal Side(s)** of Government
14. **Human Resources/Personnel**
15. **Recruitment/Development/Evaluation/Retention**
16. **Collective Bargaining**
17. **Curriculum** (Including Common Core)
18. **Accountability**
19. **Special Education/Special Populations**
20. **Why Our District? Why Now?**
21. **Standardized Assessment** – Philosophy, Specific Tools (PARCC vs. MCAS)
22. Dealing with **Difficult People**
23. Unique Issues for **Urban or Rural** Districts
24. **Safe** Learning Environment
25. Putting **Children at Center** of Decision Making Process

26. **Political Acumen**
27. **Cultural Proficiency**
28. **Consensus Building**
29. **Conflict Resolution**
30. **Budget and Finance**
31. Educator **Evaluation** (at various levels, under new system)
32. Program **Evaluation**
33. How to Work with **Leadership Team**
34. **Teaching and Learning**
35. Protecting Elements of the **Student Experience**
36. Dealing with **Outlier Personalities**
37. Social and Emotional **Wellbeing of Students**
38. **Balancing Goals**, i.e., Achievement vs. Student Wellbeing (i.e., homework, workload, pressures)
39. Using **Technology** to Advance Student Learning
40. **Ethical Dilemmas** and How You've Handled Them (Examples)
41. **Transition Plan**
42. How Do You **Prioritize?**
43. **Dealing with Change**
44. Accessibility/**Visibility**
45. **Crises Management**
46. Ownership-**Responsiveness**
47. **Reference Questions About Candidate (Colleague Assessments of Candidate, Pro/Con)**
48. Relations with **School Committee**
49. Understanding of **State and Federal Regulatory Systems**
50. Response to **Crisis**
51. Role in an Override/**Political Leadership**
52. **Personal:**
 - a. How did you prepare for the superintendency?
 - b. Basis for your standards of ethics.
 - c. How do you relax?
 - d. What's on your reading list?
 - e. Do you read and/or speak another language?
 - f. Do you read music or play an instrument?
 - g. Special talents?

SAMPLE INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONS

SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS INITIAL SCREENING AND SEMI-FINALIST STAGE QUESTIONS

Here are some of the more frequently asked questions. You might want to adapt them to your community or modify them so you can probe even further:

1. How would you describe your leadership style and what particular strengths do you believe you will bring to our school system?
2. What has been your practice for interacting and involving yourself with students, parents and the community?
3. Can you give examples of quality programs and/or educational policies to improve the quality of instruction that you have implemented in another school district? Can you give us examples of programs that were not successful and describe the course of action you took as a result?
4. How would you build rapport with your administrators? Or, with the teaching staff or the support staff?
5. What is your experience with curriculum development? How do you implement and maintain the curriculum at each level and across all levels?
6. What is the role and value of assessment instruments in a school system today?
7. Given the financial limitations at hand what types of creative ideas might you suggest to meet the educational needs of students not being met within the regular budget and program?
8. What role do you believe the staff should play in decision making? How have you involved your staff in the decision making process?
9. You are proposing a highly controversial program. The school committee is seemingly divided on the issue and a group has formed to oppose the new program. You strongly believe that this new program will be highly beneficial to the students. What steps would you take to promote your program?
10. How would you work with local municipal officials to generate support and trust for the schools?
11. How would you ascertain the public's perception of the school system and what steps would you take to improve or sustain that perception?
12. What steps would you take to build a school district budget?
13. What do you perceive as the superintendent's role in the community?
14. How would approach the district's desire to improve and maintain high academic achievement?
15. How do you feel technology should be applied in or to education? Has it begun to happen in your most recent school district?
16. Could you describe for us what the teaching and learning environment might look like in our district five or ten years from now?

Questions (Annotated) for Superintendent Candidates that Allow You to Probe for Depth and More Information

In responding to these questions, please reference your own experiences or be specific to distinguish your own experience vs. examples you draw from the work of others.

1. What examples would you offer for effective evaluation processes for teachers and administrators that actually work to improve performance and motivate teachers and administrators? How would a process like this be consistent with the current requirements of the professional standards, curriculum frameworks, and proper roles and responsibilities? In particular, describe a process that would work best, in your opinion, over a reasonable period of time.

What to look for in the response:

- What does the candidate know about evaluations?
 - Has the candidate researched or used innovative models and what made them different or effective?
 - Does the candidate have a thorough view of the evaluation process over a period of time or years for individuals?
 - Does the candidate demonstrate knowledge of the constructive, remedial, and long term benefit of a good process as well as how evaluations can be effective tools for coaching people to more effective positions or leaving the district?
2. What are your strategies for fostering a positive relationship with the School Committee regarding a) making educational policy for the district; b) setting budget priorities and formal spending plans; c) engaging in collective bargaining, and d) creating a solid administrative and policy making team that supports the district's goals and objectives?

What to look for:

Some candidates foolishly explain that their top priority is to build a solid working relationship with the School Committee. This does serious damage to credibility because even board members know the highest priority is academic achievement and good schools. However, a good response will answer these questions:

- Does the candidate understand the relationship under Massachusetts Education Reform that clarifies policy making (School Committee) with administration (Superintendent, Principals, etc.)?
- Does the candidate understand all the various elements of policy making (e.g., formal policy documents, student handbooks, collective bargaining, budgeting, grant writing, etc.)?

[A knowledgeable candidate will explain to the School Committee that policy is a broad area, and there are situations where policy making and administrative lines may blur. A good response will explain how a superintendent would respect policy making responsibilities, facilitate them, and guide the board away from where it shouldn't be. A candidate who does not appreciate that budgeting, for example, is a critical policy task, or that collective bargaining is essentially your personnel policy, or that grant applications may include commitments to the district that aren't always obvious, may run into trouble later. Some superintendent search consultants have taken the position that School Committees should not engage in collective bargaining but, instead should defer to the superintendent. Probe this carefully. It's one thing to use your expert professionals to deploy their skills in bargaining with well represented unions. It's another to think that School Committees don't have a role.]

- Does the superintendent understand that, on occasion, School Committee members may overstep their roles vis-à-vis administration? In dealing with this, does the candidate use a good strategy for dealing with individual members or groups of members to address these transgressions?
 - Does the candidate have a good strategy for speaking with individual members who may engage in inappropriate tactics or activities?
3. There are several areas where clear delineation of authority becomes more blurred than clear. For example, several areas touch both policy and administrative operations, and it may not be fully clear about where the school committee’s responsibilities end and where the administration’s begins. Give me some examples of how you have worked (in any capacity) with your school committees to resolve these potential conflicts?

[Potential areas of conflict include:

- Parents who complain to an elected school committee member who has the right and obligation to hear the constituent but not the ability to resolve the problem.
- Collective Bargaining (including impact bargaining) situations where certain items being negotiated or grieved may impair the administrator’s legal obligation to manage the district or school.
- Budget and Fiscal Administration where the level of board control varies depending upon the level.
- Working the District Legal Counsel who is employed by the school committee but who may serve the superintendent or principals in confidential personnel matters not under the jurisdiction of the committee.
- Confidential Information and informing the school committee of pending issues over which they may not have jurisdiction but about which they are likely to read in the newspaper before hearing about it from the superintendent.
- Staff and School Restructuring if there are collective bargaining and budget and policy implications.
- Problem Principals and Administrators over whom the superintendent has full authority but who may generate complaints to the school committee.
- School Committee Rules of Order that may not please the superintendent.

What to look for:

- Does the superintendent acknowledge that the lines of authority are not cut and dry?
 - Does the superintendent recognize the importance of keeping the school committee informed?
 - Does the candidate appreciate the fine line that separates responsibilities and is the candidate sympathetic or understanding of the importance of working with the board on these situations?
 - How does the candidate see the allocation of power and responsibility and is this candidacy a quest for authority as opposed to a desire to advance the district’s agenda?
 - How will this candidate view a collaborative relationship with the school committee?
4. There are times when simple intelligence is not enough to resolve a problem. Can you describe a complex problem, situation, or crisis that you confronted where you had to rely on more than intelligence, but when you had to call upon your other skills and abilities for, say, communicating, thinking quickly, working with people, political savvy, instincts, academic training, and intellect?

What to look for:

This is a great question because it allows candidates to show how skillful they are and to demonstrate such virtues as tact, discretion, communication skills, fast thinking, interpersonal savvy, etc. Ask for several examples, and let candidates put the question off to the end if they need time. You can even alert them to this question, or allow them to expand at a subsequent interview.

- Does the candidate know how to use resources, colleagues, team members, and other individuals and appreciate their roles?
- Is the candidate resourceful?
- Is the candidate honest and honorable in dealing with problems?

5. How comfortable and knowledgeable are you with the Massachusetts education reform structure, the relationships it provides for superintendent/School Committee operations, and its various levels of accountability? How would you guide this community as it continues to maneuver through a changing period in educational public policy?

What to look for:

- Does the candidate have a solid understanding of the law's specifics and goals for the long term?
- Does the candidate have a good understanding of a communications strategy around achievement levels and accountability for when the local press publishes scores (out of context)?

6. How comfortable and knowledgeable are you with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, the Massachusetts Achievement Gap Legislation (2010), Race to the Top and what would you see as critical steps this district needs to take to implement these laws and grant opportunities? Can you give us a sense of how the requirements of the federal law and the MCAS mandates present special issues for a school district like ours and how you would address them.

What to look for:

- Does the candidate understand the law and its implications around such items as Title I, overall staffing, district policy requirements, funding, mandates, etc.?
- Does the candidate understand how NCLB and MCAS relate to each other?
- Does the candidate understand the implications of the state's varying levels of sanctions that are different from the federal law?
- Can the candidate respond substantively with more than just clichés and academic or political rhetoric?

7. Can you give us some examples of how you have worked with parents (and students) to build support for the public schools in your previous positions?

What to look for:

- Does the candidate really respect parents or view them as a necessary nuisance?
- Is the candidate a good collaborator with community resources?
- How does the superintendent view the importance of attending to the needs and concerns of parents?

8. Can you give us examples of how you have worked with community leaders to build support for public schools?

What to look for:

- Is the candidate a good external communicator?
- Does the candidate know how to find the key people to meet and find as partners. Is the candidate astute at identifying key community partners?
- Does the candidate think differently about how to deploy community allies?
- Did the candidate promote the schools or himself/herself with community leaders?

9. Give us some examples of how you have worked with principals to improve their performance in the following cases: a) being instructional leaders; b) improvement of administrative performance; c) knowing how to interview and hire good teachers; d) working with parents; e) working with faculty and colleagues in the school district.

What to look for: Specifics.

- What does the candidate know about instructional leadership? Can the candidate offer good strategies? Does the candidate know what works in professional development strategies? Does the candidate know how to deploy tactics to improve student achievement?
- How has the candidate interviewed professional educators, aides, or support people before? What are some of the questions he/she would ask? What does he/she look for in a prospective school district employee?
- Does the candidate respect parents? (School Committee members are very astute at deducing a candidate's strength or weakness here.)
- What does the candidate do to earn respect from district team members?

10. What is your view of the role of the superintendent vis-à-vis the district's chief financial officer? In other words, how do you build a budget, monitor the district's finances, and develop a good reporting system?

What to look for:

- Does the candidate understand the budget process, or is the candidate uncomfortable with it and with financial accountability.
- Can the candidate be comfortable explaining the district's budget to the school community, the public at large, the city or town's governing authorities (e.g., Finance Committee, Town Administrator, Town Meeting, Mayor, City Manager, or City Council)

11. Tell us about your experiences with collective bargaining. Then describe how you view the role of the school committee in the various stages of the collective bargaining process. (NOTE: Some consultants believe that the school committee should take a minimal role in collective bargaining, deferring instead to the superintendent and management team. Some School Committees agree while others support an active role for their members. This question is also an appropriate one for you to ask your search consultant before inquiring of the candidate as it may have influenced the selection of candidates presented to you.)

What to look for:

- Does the candidate know about collective bargaining?
- Does the candidate believe the school committee should have a greater or lesser role?
- What process would the candidate use to involve the board in preparing for bargaining vs. face to face negotiations, mediation, or the final steps toward a contract?

12. What is your recommendation to a school committee member who receives a complaint from a parent regarding a school related matter?

What to look for:

- Does the candidate respect parents who generate complaints?
- How will the candidate mediate the parental complaints with the need to support the administrative team?
- Does the candidate respect the delicate position in which the school committee member sits?
- Does the candidate have a good sense of the right of a parent to exercise the right to petition elected officials even though they may not have the ability to resolve the problems or concerns?

13. In three years, how would you define success for your superintendency?

What to look for:

This is your candidates' opportunity to recommend some standards to which they will be held and to demonstrate that they have vision. If the answer is substantive, it will be an important guide. If the answer is vague or standard generalities, you must probe for specifics.

- Are the definitions of success realistic?
- Are these definitions consistent with what you want from your district?

14. We've heard people talk about using "state of the art" curriculum and teaching technologies. That means different things to different people. For example, to a medical person it means proven research that advances on what we know or that produces better outcomes. Given that teaching and learning has gone on for thousands of years, can we really have 'state of the art' curriculum or learning tools in our education system.

What to look for:

- Does the candidate go beyond a technical response?
- Can the candidate offer perspective on evolving technologies, theories, and trends?
- Can the candidate defend traditionalism or progressive trends effectively?

15. We have had people tell us that while "all kids can learn," not all kids do learn. If that is a function of a) curriculum, or b) teaching competence, or c) the teaching environment, or d) something else, please tell us what we can do to help use curriculum/teaching competence/teaching environment/something else, to ensure that more kids will learn?

What to look for:

- Real knowledge about teaching and learning.
- Understanding of diverse learning styles.
- Basics of effective teaching and learning that shows technical knowledge and the ability to inspire and motivate students.

16. Please tell us about an important project that was assigned to you, how you handled it, challenges you encountered, and the outcome? What did you learn from this experience that will make you a better leader?

What to look for:

- How does one begin to organize around a project?
- How does one manage other people in planning and executing?
- Are the lessons valuable ones and are they the right ones?

17. Tell us about your experiences working with educators who resist your recommendations, including veteran educators who were skeptical about your plans.

What to look for:

- How does one win over colleagues?
- Can the candidate make reasonable adaptations, if appropriate?
- Does one respect the concerns of veterans even if they cannot be accommodated?

18. Please explain to us how a skillful supervisor looks for in a teacher observation and how you can guide your subordinates to do this more effectively?

What to look for:

- Does the candidate truly understand the elements of teacher evaluation?
- Does the candidate understand coaching?

19. How have you supervised an administrator or teacher who was having trouble managing a school, a program, or a classroom and what have you done about it?

20. What professional development would you be seeking for your own professional development goals or plans?

What to look for:

- What can the candidate tell you about him/herself? (This would be a great opportunity to learn appropriately about the candidate as a person.)

21. A lot of students tell us that technology is useful to someone, but not to them. That might be because the technology is out of date, or not used effectively. What kinds of technology are most effective in your opinion, and why do they work?

What to look for:

- Can the candidate make the link between the emerging technologies and student achievement in a way that is more than simple admiration for the technological innovations?
- Is the candidate capable of adopting new technologies as they emerge?

22. How would you explain the Common Core to a room full of parents who might range from sophisticated to the curriculum to those who have never heard of it?

What to look for:

- Ability to explain a complex system in a way that the general audience can understand.
- Does the candidate actually understand the common Core and PARCC?

23. Can you give us some of your experiences in dealing with disgruntled or dissatisfied parents who are concerned about their own children, rather than the entire student body?

24. What are the key characteristics you seek when you are assessing an outstanding teacher or administrator? What are some of the characteristics that you have found consistent among the most effective educators?

What to look for: How well does the candidate understand good teaching and good management?

**The Following Set of Questions Has Been Used By Districts that Set Up a
More Lengthy Screening and Interview Process**

Leadership

1. Do you have staff with performance problems? Please give us some examples and explain what you have done to improve performance or correct the problems.
2. How do you determine the success of your district? How would you define success over a short term or over the long run?
3. How did you go about setting objectives for your district last year? Explain how you involved your School Committee and others in doing this.

Management Effectiveness

1. Are you satisfied with your current district's performance? Why or why not? Looking back is there something you should replicate or might have done differently? Please explain.
2. How do you judge the performance of the staff members who report to you? What characteristics do you see as distinguishing a better employee from one whose performance is simply average? What can you do to try to make superior staff out of average performers?
3. How do you keep your Board informed? In particular, what is your strategy around issues that are your responsibility but where the School Committee may have an interest? What has been their response and feedback?
4. What do you consider the most important contribution(s) your administration has made to the education of its students? Or, to the community?

Planning and Organization

1. Tell us about a time you had to prepare for an interview or meeting that was important to you, and what you did to get ready?
2. What organizational changes have you made in the past? Why did you make an organizational change, how did you plan it, and what was the outcome?
3. How do you use data? For example, can you provide us with an example of how you've used data to make decisions, plan, budget, or work with others.

Financial Analytical Ability

1. What is your role in budget planning and development? How much involvement do you have in financial decisions during the year, once the budget is approved?
2. Please describe a tough financial problem you have faced in your job? What did you do about it?

Judgment

1. Can you give us two examples of decisions you had to make in the last six months that have proved to be good ones? What influenced your decision? Why were they good decisions? What were the alternatives?

2. What is the most important decision you have made in the last year or two? How did you go about developing your decision or course of action? What alternatives did you consider?

Persuasiveness

1. Describe your most satisfying and disappointing experience in presenting securing or failing to secure your board's/staff's support for an idea or proposal. In the case of a disappointment, explain how you feel about it now, and describe what you might have done differently.
2. What was the best idea you ever presented to your Board – the one you feel exemplifies the best in planning, policy, administrative action, or whatever? Did the board accept it? What persuaded them to move as they did, or what might you do to continue to work with them to accept your recommendation?

Administrative and Operational Skill

1. Tell us how you organize your day.

Stress Tolerance

1. Under what kind of conditions do you work best?
2. Give us an example of a time when you made a proposal that was strongly opposed in a discussion/board meeting/public forum. What did you do at the forum, and afterward?
3. We have all had feelings of frustration and impatience when dealing with Boards/the public. Tell us your most recent experience with frustration with your board or the public and what you did about it.

Sensitivity

1. If your current Board/staff were asked to identify your greatest weakness, what would they say? How do you know they would respond that way?
2. How do you go about discerning your Board's likes or dislikes? How does that influence you?

Tenacity

1. Tell us of an experience in which you felt you gained something important because you persisted for a length of time.
2. Describe an experience you had in which you were too persistent? What happened? How could you have improved the outcome?

Independence

1. When have you had to go against general feeling of a group with whom you were working or recommend a change of current policies to accomplish a goal? Tell us about it.
2. Describe a situation where you had to provide unpleasant news or unpopular recommendations to a group of people. How did you plan for the recommendation and what did you do to convince individuals that this action was necessary?
3. Describe those occasions when you feel it is necessary to consult your Board before taking action.

4. Describe an incident where you disagreed with your Board. How was it settled?

Integrity

1. We have all had occasions when we have had to act in a way that is contrary to the policy in effect to accomplish something important or critical. Tell us about a time when you did so.

Ethics in Practice and Administration

Sometimes less than honest behavior in organizations is not simply an individual response to a situation, but an outcome of organizational dynamics. Less than honest behavior can, with the best of intentions, be a result of organizational dynamics. In addition, a case can be made that less-than-honest behavior is sometimes the most humane, compassionate, and ethical way one can act:

1. Can you give examples of this in your school district? Are there situations that unduly pressure people in your district? Has the pressure ever been so great that unethical practices result? As a superintendent, how could you address this kind of situation?
2. Describe a situation in which you have benefited from or been hurt by what you believe was a less-than-honest practice of another. How did you handle the situation? Would you do the same thing to or for another person? Has this situation changed the way you work?
3. At times, we all have to deal with situations in our work which we find ethically compromising. Tell me about a specific situation in which you have felt ethically compromised, or a situation that has left you carrying a very big burden for a long time. What kinds of situations in your work do you find to be ethically compromising, or which are “no-win” situations or “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” situations?
4. Often while moving into a new job or a new position, a mentor guides a protégé in adapting to the new position. Have you ever been guided, mentored, or advised regarding “the way we do things where” in a manner that made you feel ethically uncomfortable or ethically compromised? How did you learn to survive in your new culture? Have you ever felt obligated to follow a mentor’s advice about which you felt uncomfortable?

Follow Up: How have your experiences guided you in mentoring others or how might you use them to establish a mentoring or internship program?

Follow Up: What kinds of advice would you give to beginning administrators, including principals, about how to deal with ethically compromising situations?

**QUESTIONS FROM DISTRICTS (Actual Questions Used in Interviews)
DISTRICT WITH HIGHLY DIVERSE POPULATION**

1. Why this District, and Why Now.

Why are you seeking this superintendency? How do you see your particular skill sets working effectively for us, and why do your skills match our needs.

2. Entry Plan

How would you spend your first three months and your first six months as a superintendent in our district and what would your initial priorities be?

3. Success and Failure.

Can you describe for us some of your successes of which you are particularly proud. How did you achieve these successes and what was your role?

With regard to failures, tell us about some occasions when you did not succeed – or in something where you actually failed - and what it was and what you learned from it.

4. School-Based School Leadership

What does strong school based leadership mean to you as an administrative issue and learning strategy.

What is the proper balance between school based management, central office supervision, and school committee policymaking and oversight?

5. Superintendent as a Communicator

Whom do you see as the most critical stakeholders for the public schools in Brockton?

Tell us how you have reached out to build up a community constituency and strengthen relationships with the local stakeholders.

FOLLOW UP (If needed): In particular, could you talk about how you would build a line of communications to the municipal leadership including the Council and the media.

6. School Committee and the Superintendent

The roles and responsibilities of school committees and superintendents are sometimes clear and sometimes ambiguous. For example, budget approval vs. budget implementation; or personnel policy and finance vs. personnel administration; or even dealing with parents and teachers with concerns or complaints.

Can you describe some situations where these roles and responsibilities have challenged you and how you would work to address them were you our superintendent?

7. Problem Solving

There are times when you are challenged by a situation where you need to call upon every personal skill you have to work it out. Can you tell us about a situation where you had to use your best skills and judgment to resolve a problem? How can that experience help us appreciate your potential as our superintendent?

8. Team Building and Hiring

Tell us about a team that you have built; why you chose the people in your team; and how you worked together. If you can, please tell us about a specific project or goal that you set out to achieve or compete successfully.

9. Special Education

Special Education is a particular challenge because of the complexity of rules, service needs, and student and parent concerns. When you assess the effectiveness of your special education programs, what are some of the criteria you use?

Tell us about a problem or challenge you have addressed involving special education and how you worked this out.

10. Decision Making

Tell us about a challenging situation where you, or someone else with whom you worked, had to make very difficult decisions.

Have you had to terminate subordinates because they were ineffective (as opposed to insubordinate or violated the law or policy)? How did you do it, what processes did you use and what have you learned from these experiences?

11. Budget and Finance

What have been your experiences helping to develop a budget?

Also, how do you envision the relationship between policy making and the budget process?

If you needed to make significant changes in a budget in the middle of an academic year, how would you go about doing that?

12. Impact of the Superintendent

We sometimes hear that all kids can learn, but that not all kids DO learn. If that's the case, and we know it is, to what extent is their ability to learn and our ability to serve them a function of curriculum and good classroom instruction (or a function of good finances; or a function of good facilities) and what can you as superintendent do about this to improve the outcomes students have?

Given the stress in the lives of young people today and the social, academic, and even financial pressures they face, how can educators in general and a superintendent, in particular, have an impact on the emotional wellbeing of students?

13. Core Values

If someone asked you, what are the core values that drive you as an educator and what core values would you want to see in the staff you hire, what would they be?

14. Dealing with Collective Bargaining

Please tell us about the experiences you have had with collective bargaining on both management and the teacher side of the table. What is the best role for the superintendent?

What kind of advice and guidance would you give to the school committee to bargain for strategies to improve student learning?

How would bargaining be different in the current economic crisis?

15. Multi-Cultural Experiences

Multi-cultural experiences are much more than just race, language or place of origin. What experiences do you have that relate to multi-cultural experiences, especially when some cultures have different values from your own? How do these experiences affect the way you work?

16. Familiarity with Latest Technology

What would be your curriculum plan for technology intervention in students' lives?

And how would you budget for technology upgrades.

FINAL QUESTION:

Do you have any questions for us, or are there any concerns about the position that we can address?

QUESTIONS FROM HIGH RISK DISTRICT WITH UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS

Preface Question:

Specifically, related to our district turnaround plan:

- How would you develop a centralized student assessment program that will be used to monitor the progress of all students in meeting state and local learning standards
- How would you align district preK-12 curriculum in ELA and math and ensure that the aligned curriculum is taught in all preK-12 classrooms
- How would you hold educators at all levels preK-12 accountable for delivering effective instruction
- How would you develop district wide capacity to assess, analyze and monitor student performance
- How would you develop and sustain a preK-12 comprehensive professional development program
- How would you develop a program to ensure that highly mobile students have access to quality instruction designed to meet their needs

Other Questions

1. As the new superintendent, what would you do in your first 90 days on the job?
2. As a new leader in an underperforming district, you will need to develop an effective system for monitoring and reporting continuous improvement in the HPS. How will you ensure that the DIP is monitored and adjusted, and results in positive trends in meeting student performance standards?
3. Describe your leadership philosophy and how you will build leadership capacity at the district and school levels in this district.
4. As you lead the district, how will you use student performance results to prioritize use of resources, including money, technology, facilities and human capital?
5. Across the different levels of the district, describe how you will know whether professional development programs and initiatives have affected the knowledge, skills and practices of educators in the district.
6. How should the district use student assessment results?
7. How would you ensure that the district is providing support and enrichment to LEP students who fail to meet or exceed the learning standards?
8. How would you build a plan to address the effects of high mobility rates in the district?
9. As the new superintendent in Holyoke, what would be your most critical long-range objective?

SUPERINTENDENT SEARCHING: HIGHER ORDER QUESTIONS

The following questions were drawn from several district interviews and in collaboration with our colleagues at the National Association of Superintendent Searchers of which MASC is a charter member.

What are your primary and strongest **personal attributes** that you would hope to apply to our superintendency?

People who have moved from direct supervision to management often cite the subtle differences in having to **persuade rather than to direct** staff and colleagues to make and accept change, address problems, or deal with subordinates. How have you adjusted (or, how would you adapt) to having to use persuasion vs. direction at a management position.

What are the **core values** that define your work and how do they affect the way you do your job as an administrator and as a leader?

We all have **weaknesses**. What have you done to recognize and try to overcome of those weaknesses that might otherwise make it hard for you to succeed?

Tell us about a time when you had to use your **judgment** to deal with or avert a crisis of some kind. How can that experience help us appreciate your potential as our superintendent?

Tell us about a **team that you have built**; why you chose the people in your team; and how you worked together. If you can, please tell us about a specific project or goal that you set out to achieve or compete successfully.

What are some of the ways that you have raised the **confidence** of the people with whom you have worked or the students in your school(s)? How did you do it?

What experiences do you have that relate to **multi-cultural experiences**, especially when some cultures have different values from your own? How do these experiences affect the way you work?

Have you ever had the experience of **building a coalition** to support an initiative or to change the status quo?

Who are your **mentors or role models**, and what did you learn from them that you apply to your work?

Have you ever dealt with a **problem in which opinions were polarized**? (Something akin to a question of capital punishment, choice, fundamentalist beliefs, longstanding political biases, etc.) What did you do, how did you plan, and what did you learn?

Decision making is a two-edged sword. Some situations call for decisiveness right at the start, while others involve consensus building. Tell us about a situation where you were decisive and how it worked out for you. Tell us about a time when you were not decisive enough and what you learned from it.

We all know about **courageous leaders**, but have you ever had to be a **courageous follower** in controversial times? Tell us about it.

What do you think are some of the core competencies that our students need to master before they get to high school, and also before they graduate?

What kinds of things do you want our kindergarteners to know 12 years from now when they graduate?

What can you do as a superintendent to help recruit the best and most appropriate teachers to want to work here in our district?

How can we prepare to come to the negotiations table with tactics and strategies to use our union contracts in ways that are student centered and focused on helping them grow academically?

We often hear that student achievement and success is a function of any one of a number of factors. How can you, as the superintendent help promote the interests of students if learning and success are, in fact, functions of:

- Curriculum
- Physical Environment
- Teacher Competence
- School Building Leadership
- Work of the School Committee
- Technology/State-of-the-Art Materials and Resources
- Mobilizing the resources of the community to support children and families.

What kinds of data do you think are really important for us to help people do their jobs as educators, and how should we use these data?

What kinds of **questions would you ask candidates for principalships** that you would have to fill? And, also, **what kinds of questions would you ask your principals about the teachers** they bring forward for you to approve hiring on their recommendation?

RECENT SAMPLES 2024

Relationships with the School Committee

Our School Committee is comprised of six members who represent the broader community. What would your approach be to forging a relationship with each individual Committee member in your role as Superintendent?

Parent and Community Relationships

We fortunate at LS to have a parent community that is very involved and invested in the success of the district. Can you please discuss what your approach would be to connecting with the community in a way that maximizes that partnership and conveys to the community that their perspective is valued?

Getting Ready for Our Distict

- What did you do to get an initial understanding of our community upon your entry?
- What would be your plan to begin your superintendency and your first year?
- What kind of support would you need to immerse yourself into this position?
- Whom would you seek out? Whom would rely upon over your first 1-2 years?

Visionary Leadership

Do you believe the vision of the superintendent should shape the direction and policies of the district, or should the vision of the community drive the decision of the superintendent's vision?" (or something like that).

Faculty Engagement and Empowerment

The faculty here is an active one where staff seek input into the decision-making process in general. What have you done in your work to engage the staff in the important decisions related to the school?

Bargaining with Staff

Collective bargaining can be viewed as confrontational or as an opportunity to be collaborative. How do you see the role of collective bargaining in public education and what would be your objective when you begin to engage in the bargaining process?

Equity/Diversity

The term “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion” (DEI) gets a lot of use in public schools. What does the DEI work mean to you, and, very specifically, what have you done to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in your work? Specifics, please.

School Budgeting

What is your experience with school budget and finance? What is your history participating in the various steps in the budget process including:

- goal setting,
- building budget around goals,
- preparing and presenting a recommendation to the school committee, and
- implementing and overseeing the budget during the year?

Looking Backward from 2025

Here is a scenario question: It is two years from now and we are working on you evaluation. You are asked to tell us about the previous two years and to highlight the accomplishments of the district under your leadership. What do you tell us?

Superintendent/Principal as a Function of Excellence in Education

If student success is a function of a good budget for schools, or solid curriculum, or excellent teaching from the faculty, effective supports for students, or a beautiful facility, what can you as the superintendent to establish:

- A good budget that aligns with our goals.
- Relevant and powerful curricula.
- Excellent teachers and counsellors who are good at what they do.
- Strong social and emotional support and health support for students.
- Good facilities.

Preparing the Next Generation

If we have learned nothing else from COVID, the economy, politics, and the weather, it is impossible to predict the future. Our students and their children will inherit a world that few among us can predict or envision accurately. How would you think about preparing our students for success in a world that we cannot predict with certainty?

Extracurricular Activities

What have you done in your work to date to preserve and encourage the work of the arts including music, drama, dance, and fine arts in their many forms?

Personal

The job you are seeking is challenging. How do you manage your time, and how do you like to take time to take a break and relax?

Superintendent Interview Questions

Tell us about yourself and tell us what attracts you to the position. Please highlight one accomplishment in your background that convinces you this could be a good match.

What do you think are the essential components of a high quality, comprehensive educational experience?

Give us an example of how you dealt with a difficult situation involving a disagreement in which both parties have valid views? What worked and what didn't work?

Describe a challenging situation that you would handle differently now that you have had time to think about it. What might you have done that would have altered the outcome?

How do you balance the relationship between central office leadership, school committee, individual schools and educators?

What is your process for making decisions regarding the allocation of resources?

In the negotiation process, what is the role of the principals, superintendent, and School Committee?

What is your process for identifying and dismantling systems of structural inequity?

Who do you think some of the key stakeholders are in the Town and how do you envision working with them?

If we were to "google" you, is there anything about what we would find that you would want to talk about with this group?

Are there things we should know about you that we haven't asked or something you didn't have the time to address?

Tell us something about yourself, either personally or professionally, that you are proud of, or what would interest or surprise us.

What questions do you have for us?

SCENARIOS FOR CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

Constituent Complaint

- Parent Terry Smith, the parent of an eighth grader objects to the teaching technique of math teacher Pat Jones. Pat assigns a weekend “problem of the week,” a series of progressively difficult brainteasers that require that students to deploy various strategies to solve a problem by Monday. Unfortunately, the teacher refuses to give the answer and method for finding it, frustrating some students who cannot find the answer. Parents who have been trying to help their children solve the problems note that some kids spend hours of weekend time wrestling with the challenge – often failing. Requests by parents to share the answers after the fact fall on deaf ears. Things come to a head at the PTA meeting when a parent with an advanced degree in math points out that some problems pose a challenge for college math majors. Jones, however, is adamant. He responds that “It’s my classroom, and I do what I want. I want the kids to think about the problem more than I want them to solve it. It helps me understand their thinking process.” The principal who hired Pat defends the math teacher and explains that it’s important for kids to have questions unanswered in their lives. Parents confront a school committee member at the supermarket and explains that their children are feeling bad about math and demand that this practice stop. Some of their kids are being turned off to math and feel humiliated by the teacher. The board member calls the superintendent and demands that something be done.

Censorship

- The student “Current Events Club” tries to present a balanced view on the issues its takes up. Next week they will discuss the topic “Liberal or Conservative – Which is More Effective.” Club Members post a meeting with several web sites that students may access for different perspectives on issues. However, one web site links students directly to graphic video of live scenes of human torture and the actual beheadings of hostages. The principal demands the students remove the offending web link. Students demand their “Freedom of Speech” rights to post the full notice. At tonight’s School Committee meeting, the subject will be raised at public comment period and action is demanded by various factions in the community.

Police in the Schools

- Following a shouting match with fellow senior Sally Smith, Jane Jones asks her friend, senior Cynthia Brown, to beat up Sally for \$25. Cynthia accepts the assignment and “sucker punches” Sally outside the cafeteria. Sally, blindsided, doesn’t have time to respond before teachers separate them and secure the area. Sally emerges with a sore jaw but otherwise without serious harm, but she is very upset. Her parents are called and they take her home for the day. Cynthia’s parents are also called to school where they and their daughter learn of a five day suspension for fighting. Mr. and Mrs. Smith, however, are outraged that this was allowed to happen, especially because they do not know why the assault took place. The principal has a very poor relationship with the Chief of Police and, fearing the bad publicity, explains to the Smiths that he will investigate himself before going to the local authorities. When they hear nothing for three days, the Smiths file a criminal complaint with the local police. The local reporter is “tipped off” and finds the complaint on the police blotter. It is a lead story in the local weekly’s next edition several days later. That’s where the School Committee learns about it. Assess this situation.

Public Relations Crisis

- Using the school district as an out-of-context example for political purposes, and after recklessly misinterpreting MCAS test data, a candidate for the legislature calls for higher standards, less every district end up “like another (your community).” Those with a solid foundation for No Child Left Behind and MCAS testing understand that this claim is false, if not slanderous, but the public’s complexity tolerance is very low. What can you do in this situation?

School Budget on Municipal Election

- You’ve just settled the union contracts and they’re set for the next three years with raises of 1% in each year; but you’ll need a Proposition 2 ½ override to fund what you need in order to avoid severe program cuts. A critic of the schools claims that you’ve “given the teachers a 12% raise.”) It’s time to respond, but what would you do?

(What the critic doesn’t explain is that he has compared the salary of an entry level teacher in 2014 with that same hypothetical teacher in 2016, after three years of step increases, attainment of a new Masters degree plus additional graduate training, plus taking on a new stipended-curricular coaching position.)

Charter School Decides to Recruit Your Students

- A group of parents who are dissatisfied with the schools organizes an effort to establish a charter school in (your community). They recruit an experienced charter school consultant, do their homework, speak with community members and prepare their application to the Board of Education which will is expected to approve it. Every student the charter enrolls will mean the loss of thousands of dollars in state aid to (your community) public schools. What would you do?

A Death in the School Family

- A student dies from an adverse reaction to drugs purchased from a school-based dealer. Some demand a crackdown and heightened security, plus police presence in the building. They demand that students be questioned, lockers be searched, and students be subjected to drug sniffing dogs. Others argue for a more cautious, sensitive approach and want to focus on the needs of students sharing the trauma of the loss.
- A popular teacher is killed in an unfortunate accident and the school family must come together to help everyone.

Union Pickets the Home of Board Members

- Teacher union negotiations have broken down. The issues are over economics and the inability of the district to provide the desired package. To pressure the School Committee, union members vote to picket the homes of board members. Some of the members with young children are concerned that their children will be traumatized, their neighbors annoyed, and their families harassed. The strike vote is scheduled for Thursday, and today is Tuesday. Picketing will begin after school.

The Strike Deadline has Passed.

- The strike has begun and teachers have voted on Thursday afternoon to stay home until agreement is reached on a new contract. Some parents offer to cover classrooms. Others demand the striking teachers be fired. The board members whose homes were picketed are most adamant that the board not cave in to the union.

Obnoxious, Persistent Reporter

- A student has complained to police that he/she was harassed in a locker room by members of his/her lacrosse team. The abuse included pushing, hazing, verbal taunting, and, possibly actions with sexual overtones. The parents of the alleged victim want a criminal complaint issued and investigated. The alleged victim is a juvenile and the perpetrators may also be juveniles. A local reporter gets wind of the story from student sources inside the school and has some names of involved persons. You've had a mixed relationship with this paper. The reporter contacts the superintendent with some of the following questions:
 - Can you confirm that it was the lacrosse team?
 - Where was the adult supervision?
 - Has the school department issued the appropriate mandated reports on the victims?
 - We're told this has happened before so what can you tell us?
 - If you stonewall us, we'll report that as well because we think some of the students are not eligible for protection as juvenile sources?

What are some of the things you think about as superintendent, and how do you respond?

Parents Intervene for Sanctioned Students

- Your high school has a National Honor Society chapter that admits students who meet specified high academic achievement of 3.5 GPA on a 4.0 scale. Before being admitted to NHS, students must be evaluated by a faculty review panel that will also consider community and school service, integrity, and character criteria. Of the thirty students who met the academic requirements for admission in the junior year, five were not recommended by the faculty screening committee for membership, meaning they will not be able to include NHS in their college applications.

Parents of these five students appeal to the School Committee to have the decision overturned.

- How do you advise the school committee prior to the meeting?
 - What do you do to prepare for the meeting?

MODEL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR 2019
QUESTIONS WILL BE REORDERED PRIOR TO INTERVIEWS

1. OUR DISTRICT

Why are you seeking the superintendency in our district and what is it about the combination of your skills and our district needs that makes you well suited to be our superintendent?

Give us some experiences that you have had as an administrator and outcomes that came from them and explain how they would help us see your potential as a successful superintendent.

2. BUDGET AND FINANCE

When you prepare your budget for the School Committee, how do you go about this and what happens before the proposal reaches the board?

In the current fiscal crisis, how do you advise your staff and school committee about setting budgetary priorities in perilous economic times?

Have you ever had to convince a board to do more with less?

3. ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Do you think Technology has really changed education beyond the bells and whistles that we all see? How do you see our district assessing our technology needs and how would you go about looking at a technology plan for our future? Who would you involve in that discussion?

4. A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

Tell us about your experience working with children and families who don't look like you, or speak the language you do, or who do not have the economic advantages you do. How have these experiences shaped your view of public education and its mission?

5. MISTAKES

Tell us about a time when you made a significant mistake or proposed something that did not work. What was it and what came of that mistake?

Please describe a decision you made that in retrospect you wish you had made differently.

Follow Up:

- How did you come to understand that the decision was problematic?
- What would you do differently and why?
- What *did* you do about it and why?
- What did you learn from the process/experience?

6. LEADING A TEAM

How do you build your leadership team and what do you think about when you put people together to run the district or fulfill short term or long range plans?

What are the characteristics of good team leaders and good team members that you would seek to carry out the work of the district.

7. ENTRY PLAN TO THE SUPERINTENDENCY

How would you develop your plan to prepare for and begin your superintendency? How would you develop your “entry plan” and prepare for your first few weeks, months, or for your first year?

Whom would you consider to be essential sources of information, critical friends, and strategic allies?

8. CHILDREN IN DISTRESS

Have you had to deal with children and families in distressful situations? Without identifying anyone, can you tell us of situations where the social and emotional needs of children and their families moved you to action?

9. MASSACHUSETTS REGULATORY CLIMATE

What is your knowledge of the Massachusetts accountability systems and how will our measures of proficiency and our state’s standards help or challenge you as you undertake our superintendency?

What is your experience working with your state education department?

Are you familiar with the MA accountability system as it under waivers from the No Child Left Behind requirements?

Are you familiar with the conditions and expectations under the Race to the Top program?

10. SPECIAL EDUCATION

What have you done in your experience to try to make your Special Education department work better? How have you looked at ways to contain costs and how have you balanced the needs of students with the fiscal responsibility to the school department?

How have you responded to individuals who complain that funding the needs of special education students are unfair to the other students whose programs have been reduced?

11. ISSUES AT THE STATE LEVEL

Have you been involved in state-level activity related to public education? How would you see yourself representing our district lobbying, or participating on task forces and work groups? What issues are of most concern to you?

Have you ever lobbied for legislation, funding, or for an issue? How do you see your role in public policy?

12. RELATIONSHIPS WITH UNIONS

What has been your experience in the collective bargaining process, and what to you see as the most appropriate role for the superintendent?

How do you see the role of the superintendent in collaboration with the school committee using the collective bargaining process to promote student achievement for a sustainable period of time?

As a prerequisite to the Race to the Top grant, the state is rolling out new educator evaluations that

include some groundbreaking requirements, including that School Committees negotiate with unions over the use of student achievement data as criteria, among many others, for assessment of performance.

Are you familiar with these requirements?

How do you envision establishing various criteria for educator evaluation given that they will apply not only to unionized educators but also to administrators including the superintendent?

13. DEALING WITH A CRISIS

Tell us about a time when you had to address a crisis that posed serious consequences to your district. What was the crisis and how did you or you and your colleagues deal with this situation?

14. MANAGING A LARGE ORGANIZATION

Our district is a multi-million dollar operation and some people want us to run the district like a business. How do you respond to those people?

What are the principles that guide your own management style?

15. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

What are some of your personal characteristics that you believe would make you an effective superintendent?

Conversely, what weaknesses have you worked to overcome in your professional life? How did you work to overcome them?

16. MAKING HIRING DECISIONS

When you consider how to fill vacancies, what are some of the things you consider in making a hire or in working with principals to make the hires at their schools? How much autonomy should a principal have in hiring the people they want?

What would you want principals to think about when they hire their candidates?

How do you view the role of advisory committees in the selection of staff at the school and district level?

17. COMMON CORE AND PARCC

Can you explain to us your understanding of the Common Core Curriculum and the relationship to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career and tell us how we need to prepare for these changes?

18. WORKING WITH THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

What has been your experience working with a school committee/school board and how do you see the role of the superintendent as the chief executive officer reporting to a board that is, in fact, a municipal legislature for schools in leading the district?

In your experience how have you (or how would you) deal with the School Committee on matters where law or policy provide little guidance on authority or roles and responsibilities? For example, how do you see the line of demarcation between the policy making role of the board and the administrative responsibilities of the School Committee, and what do you do when the lines blur?

What do you envision are the key challenges in communicating with the School Committee?

19. WORKING WITH CIVIC LEADERS

Have you been actively engaged in working with your colleagues on the municipal side of government? Have you worked with a mayor or chair of a Board of Selectmen or finance committee in the communities you've worked in? Have you had to address the city council, the finance committee or the town meeting? How do you prepare to work with civic leaders on public administrative issues?

20. COMMUNICATING WITH THE DISTRICT STAKEHOLDERS

What is your experience dealing with various media who cover your district?

How have you built lines of communication with the various district stakeholders such as your leadership team, the faculty, community leaders, business interests, and families?

21. TEACHING AND LEARNING - CURRICULUM

Tell us about your experience working in the curriculum area that might include identifying a need to revise curriculum, implementing a new curriculum, or assessing the curricula that is already in place. What did you learn from these experiences and how would you use what you have learned?

We have heard a lot about the "Common Core" curriculum. If you had to explain what this is to a group of parents and put it in perspective, what would you say?

22. EDUCATOR EVALUATION

Districts across Massachusetts are implementing a new educator evaluation system. We understand that it is complex but also that it applies to all of our teachers and administrators.

- Have you had experience with this system as of this time?
- What do you see as the important challenges we face as a district to implement the system?
- How can we make this a force for good outcomes?
- What are your views about using student achievement data to evaluate educators?
- Do you think that "peer evaluation" has potential as a way to assess the performance of educators?

23. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

What have you done to build contacts and relationships with key local stakeholders and citizens? Who are the most important contacts to reach out to?

24. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

What is the best role of the superintendent in collective bargaining, in your opinion? What are your experiences at the bargaining table? How would you propose that we use the bargaining process to promote student achievement as well as control our expenses?

25. ACCOUNTABILITY

Like many school districts in Massachusetts, some of our students, especially those in identified subgroups are struggling to reach proficiency on standardized testing. Many students are not "college ready" and require

remediation their freshman year of college. Tell us how you have or would address these issues.

26. SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION AND DISTRICT PERFORMANCE

How would you expect to be evaluated as the superintendent? On what measurements would you expect to be “graded “after one year, or at two years or at three years?

When would be a fair point to evaluate your performance as superintendent?

In three years, how would you define success for your superintendency?

27. INNOVATIVE THINKING

(Introduction) Barriers to innovation in education still exist in K-12 education. Motivating students continues to be a challenge in these times and some argue that conventional schooling may not be motivating enough to attract student interest in 21st century jobs. Some researchers also suggest that different kinds of school and methods of teaching should be allowed to emerge while also allowing effective traditional approaches to continue.

What ideas do you have for redirecting K-12 school policy towards innovation that could help to break those barriers?

28. BUILDING CONSTRUCTION AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Can you tell us about any experience you may have planning and renovating or rebuilding or how you would approach the critical issues this brings?

29. INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

How have you or would you go about developing an effective system for monitoring and reporting continuous improvement in our district’s Public Schools?

MODEL SCENARIO: Redistricting

You realize that the student enrollment is shifting. You know that you will greatly alleviate budget pressures and balance the student population more equitably among the schools if you redistrict the elementary children.

How would you begin to address this theoretical question, and redistrict the schools, knowing the following?

Parents, generally do not like to change schools and disrupt the children’s’ routines and relationships associated with a move.

One of the schools is very new and one is very old. Yet students will be leaving and going into each under any new plan.

ALTERNATE SCENARIO: – Ethical Situation

A student, using a small camera, recorded a teacher and then played the recording on YouTube complete with inappropriate commentary. The film is clean and the teacher is acting appropriately, but the comments are derogatory - but not obscene. What action would you take as superintendent?

ALTERNATE SCENARIO: Curriculum, Teaching and School Management¹

This question could be provided ahead of time.

Parent Terry Smith, the parent of an eighth grader objects to the teaching technique of math teacher Pat Jones. Pat assigns a weekend “problem of the week,” over the year - a series of progressively difficult brainteasers that require that students to deploy various strategies to solve a math problem by Monday. However, if no student can solve the problem and explain the method to the class, the teacher refuses to give the answer or a method for finding it.

Parents who have been trying to help their children solve the problems note that some kids spend hours of weekend time wrestling with the challenge – often failing. Requests by parents to give the answers and method to the students later on fall on deaf ears.

Things come to a head at the PTA meeting when a parent with an advanced degree in math points out that some problems pose a challenge for college math majors and failing to give answers builds esteem problems for students, especially girls who are stereotyped unfairly as not ready for math.

Teacher Jones, however, is adamant. He responds that “It’s my classroom, and I do what I want.” The principal who hired Pat defends the math teacher and explains that it’s important for kids to recognize the role of unanswered questions in their lives.

Parents confront a school committee member at the supermarket and demand that this practice stop. Some of their kids are being turned off to math and feel humiliated by the teacher. The board member calls the superintendent and demands that something be done.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS SUPERINTENDENT CANDIDATES SHOULD ANSWER

EXPERIENCE WITH DISTRICTS LIKE OURS

What has been your experience approaching a challenge similar to undertaking the superintendency of our district in your professional life? How did you prepare? Whom did you call upon for advice and guidance? And, what have you learned from this/these experiences that you can apply to our district?

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Our “achievement gap” and our ability to bring some of our students to proficiency have not yielded to the recession, the demographic trending, and the social and economic challenges we face. As you prepared for the search process, have you thought about the difference you, as a superintendent, can bring to our effort to close this gap more quickly?

LEADERSHIP TEAM BUILDING

What criteria do you use in selecting the members of your administrative team? Are there key elements of character or experience that you look for? (Why?)

Can you give us some insight into how your teams have been effective or ineffective at meeting challenges you

¹ This is a real situation from an actual Massachusetts school. It poses several layers of questions around things like appropriate teaching styles, management of teachers, supervision of principals, intervention by the superintendent, and how one deals with a runaway teacher who rejects supervision. Or, it could be about a thoughtful teacher who challenges students.

have confronted as a leadership team?

Tell us about a time you failed or had a disappointing outcome in a major task you undertook. What did you learn from this and how does it guide your work today?

How do you deal with mistakes or errors in judgment that you or your team members have made?

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

How do you view the role of the school principal, especially in light of the new evaluation process? What do you see as necessary for principals and their schools to succeed?

How much independence would you provide to your department heads and principals in selecting their staffs and what would be the role of the superintendent in assessing the effectiveness of administrators?

PERSONAL LEADERSHIP OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

What have you done to prepare yourself for the superintendency? What are the strengths that you bring to the position? What would be your personal professional development plan were you to become the superintendent?

ROLE OF PARENTS, GUARDIANS, AND CAREGIVERS FOR CHILDREN

How do you envision the schools and school district communicating with the people who care for children at home and in the community? How can the district reach out to families in social and economic distress to support their children?

BUDGET AND FINANCE

The citizens in our community demand value for their tax dollars and transparency in fiscal accountability. In this light, tell us about how you have ensured that the budget you propose and the financial plan that you oversee as approved by the school committee is as compact and efficient as possible?

How do you develop the district budget proposal?

Whose input do you solicit in developing the budget?

What has been your history working with municipal officials like a town manager, finance committee, city council or mayor in supporting your budget?

What inter-municipal collaborations would you pursue or avoid?

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF STUDENTS

As you plan to close the achievement gap and help all students reach the highest possible goals, how do you think about the social and emotional wellbeing of students?

How do you view the social and emotional wellbeing of children in the context of establishing a high perform school population in the decade ahead?

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Please tell us about a time when you mobilized, or attempted to mobilize the agencies and personnel in other parts of the municipal and state social services network to support children and families. How would you go about getting those who do not report to you in making the schools successful?

**MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL COMMITTEES
MODEL SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW (2022-2023)**

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Many districts value strategic planning. What are some of the things you consider when planning and executing a strategic plan? Tell us about strategic planning that you have overseen or in which you have participated?

[See how astutely the candidate understands some of the following: How do you know it's time for a plan? How would the planning be organized? What resources might you use? How much of this is data? Who should be involved and where? How do you convince stakeholders to support the process?]

ADVOCACY

The superintendent must be a key advocate for the schools and the students in the district. How have you conceived a plan of advocacy at various levels including:

- Convincing the district leaders and community leaders to prepare a good budget, sound practices, and astute planning?
- Winning the support of the school committee?
- Selling your budget to the municipal officials who must approve it?
- Securing other supports from the municipal side of town (building projects; shared resources)?

[Attempt to discern the candidate's power of persuasion; ability to lead; understanding of the nature of advocacy; and capacity to work with the school committee.]

STATE/FEDERAL LEVEL LOBBYING

What does your district need from state government that requires your advocacy and mobilization skills? How have you approached advocacy at the state level?

[Does the candidate understand how government works? Does the candidate have the patience to plan for the future over a period of time; and how to communicate effectively with state and federal policymakers and bureaucrats?]

PREPARING FOR LEADERSHIP

How have you prepared yourself for the superintendency? What have you learned from mentors or supervisors about how good school leaders rise successfully through the ranks?

COLLEGIALITY

What are the best practices for collegiality that you have used in order to build rapport or morale among your colleagues? What have you done in the past to address issues of morale among faculty or parents or students?

TESTING AND ASSESSMENT

In an era when testing and assessment may be evolving and changing quickly, how would you work with your faculty and school community to plan, secure the resources needed, build support among constituencies, and create a sense of confidence that the ultimate system will work and be effective for the district?

[Can the candidate discuss the value of testing and how the current requirements have benefits or liabilities? This is a good opportunity to see how effectively a candidate can mobilize large groups or teams to meet a challenge they may find objectionable, formidable, or successful.]

PERSONNEL – COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

What are some of the ways you would (or have) prepared for collective bargaining? How have you tried to make the process a vehicle for making school a better place for students and teachers? What would you change if you could modify the current system?

[Candidates might answer technically with a list of tasks completed and deadlines met; or they could show real depth and opine on the value of bargaining in general, understanding of how it can be adapted; or how they would strategize on one hand, and lobby for change on the other.]

EVALUATION SYSTEMS

The educator evaluation system is a combination of procedures, standards, and professional development that may work well to improve the performance of teachers and administrators; or it might not. How have you worked (or would you work) with the new evaluation system in a way that would be successful? And, how would you define that success?

[Does the candidate understand the theory behind the new educator evaluation system and accept it, or are there modifications that need to be made to make it work in appropriate situations? Can the candidate give you experiences that demonstrate both the concept and implementation in ways that will be successful?]

Follow Up: Currently, there is a debate over the best way to assess the impact that an educator has on the performance of students in addition to the proficiency of the educator as an individual. What are your thoughts on evaluating the impact or developing an “impact rating”? Do you think it is possible to do this within the time constraints of a principal or superintendent’s limited time? And, what do you think about the debate on this issue? [This question is recommended for 2017 and 2017 as well.]

SAFETY IN SCHOOL

Many parents are concerned about safety in school, but safety has many implications such as the safety of the physical plant, protection of students from physical harm, security of your facilities, and social and emotional safety and wellbeing of students. How have you worked to operate a safe environment for your students?

[Challenge the candidate to demonstrate breadth in understanding the meaning of “safety.” Social and emotional well-being of students may well be a question of its own or a follow up that goes in another direction.]

FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Superintendents and School Committees have both educational and fiduciary responsibilities that can require attention to the long range financial planning and line item details. What does a fiduciary responsibility mean to you and how do you ensure that the finances and operations of the district are managed appropriately and that the School Committee and superintendent partner effectively in this process.

[This is a potential third rail issue because the rules around school finance did not change with the Education Reform Act of 1993. How does the candidate plan on working with stakeholders, municipal officials, and the school committee on budgeting carefully, spending prudently, explaining finances clearly, and linking strategic or financial planning and the annual budget cycle?]

PERSONAL COURAGE

Tell us about a time when you have put a matter of ethical practice, principle or urgency ahead of your personal or professional interest? Have you ever put your position or security on the line to pursue what you believed to be fair or just? What was it (or if more than one, which were there) that required you to demonstrate personal courage in your work or in your life?

[Was the example real courage or the kind of courage that only risks you getting moved to a worse cubicle? Why did the candidate demonstrate courage or risk? Can you link that to challenges you have had in your district or elsewhere in your experience?]

RECRUITING THE BEST PEOPLE

What are the key traits that you look for in teachers and administrators that you have hired and would hire in the future? How might these characteristics vary for different positions?

Tell us about a time you rejected a candidate who was recommended by a principal or department head; tell us why and how you dealt with the hiring authority to resolve situation?

WORKING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

Difficult people are everywhere, and one person's difficult person might be another person's courageous hero.

How have you dealt with some of the most difficult people you have had to confront and how would you mentor a principal or subordinate leader to deal with difficult people?

Sometimes those difficult people are on your school committee. How have you dealt with them?

[Does the candidate understand that "difficult" is a challenging definition and extraordinary interpersonal skills can be needed, or that there are many variations on the nature of the difficulty? How does the candidate assess and deal with these people?]

PERSONAL QUESTIONS THAT ARE APPROPRIATE

What's on your reading table right now?

What do you do to address the stress of your work?

TECHNOLOGY – BUDGET and PLANING

How would you develop a sustainable technology budget and what do you see as part of that budget?

What is the appropriate Professional Development? What coaching might be involved?

TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

What technology should be available to students and teachers in the classroom at the elementary, middle and high school levels?

What does teaching and learning look like in the "digital age of learning" or in the modern classroom?

How can schools best prepare students in a technological society?

New Questions for 2024

Hiring Decisions

As a superintendent, what would you use and what expect from your principals to use in assessing a potential a) administrator and b) teacher or counsellor or therapist for employment? Other than expertise around their fields, what would you ask of candidates prior to making a hiring decision?

Core Values on the Job

Please give us some examples of how you have been guided by your core values as you have confronted special challenges of your job.

Educator Evaluation

Tell us your views on the Massachusetts educator evaluation system and how you have used it or adapted it in your work or in your district. Are the standards, procedures and protocols workable and, if not, what can be done to improve them?

Follow Up: Currently, there is a debate over the best way to assess the impact that an educator has on the performance of students in addition to the proficiency of the educator as an individual. What are your thoughts on evaluating the impact or developing an “impact rating”? Do you think it is possible to do this within the time constraints of a principal or superintendent’s limited time? And, what do you think about the debate on this issue?

Building Relationships/Communications

What communications strategies have you used to build your relationship and that of your school or district to the other constituencies?

Collective Bargaining

How do you view collective bargaining in this era of public education? How have you engaged in this process and what have you done to make bargaining a tool for improved educator practice, student achievement, and fiscal responsibility?

Role of the School Committee

Your school committee has legal, ethical, and fiduciary responsibilities. What do you know of the role of the school committee and how have you (or how would you) develop a relationship with the board to fulfill its responsibilities?

Influence of Reflection

Tell us about situations where you were able to change the way you handled a problem or a challenge that was informed by reflection about other situations or experiences? What did you learn from the process?

Well-Being of Students

Unfortunately, “Social and Emotional Learning” and “Social and Emotional Wellbeing” are becoming clichés that are too often paid lip service, but not always used as tools or guiding principles of the work of school leaders. How do you assess the emotional vulnerability or strength of children as they grow in the context of school and community, and how can schools promote health development and emotional strength of children as they learn?

Coaching

How do you coach your subordinates about listening, providing feedback and responding to observations of the people with whom you work, including faculty and students?

Professional Practice Goals

What have been your previous personal goals and how successful have you been in achieving them.

How do you relax, and what's on your reading table? What would be doing if you weren't an educator?

If you ruled the world, how would you close the achievement gap given the ability to remove barriers and implement change?

SAMPLE OF SOME SITE VISIT QUESTIONS ASKED BY SCHOOL COMMITTEES
(Questions should be identified for appropriate persons.
Not all questions should be asked to all interviewees.)

1. In what capacity and for how long did you work with the candidate?
2. Please summarize what you believe are the candidate's major strengths and weaknesses?
3. As in every school district, there must have been issues (i.e. staff, parent grievances, or performance problems) that developed in one school or another over the years. Was the candidate quick to identify these issues? Was the candidate quick to resolve these issues? Or did she/he tend to avoid confrontation, therefore allowing issues to fester and grow? Describe how she/he would bring these issues to resolution. Give a couple of examples?
4. Describe the candidate's leadership style. Describe his management and supervision styles? (This is a particularly important question to ask of superiors and direct-report subordinates.)

People aren't usually objective about their kids, their neighborhoods, their schools or their jobs. Sometimes a leader has to tell people things they don't want to hear, or say "no" to requests from people who believe they deserve what they seek, or take an action that makes some parents or teachers unhappy or feeling the decision is unfair. How has the candidate handled situations like this?

5. How did the candidate handle parent complaints, including those complaints that parents make to school committee members before they use the official "chain of command"? Does she/he have an open door policy? How often did complaints make it all the way to the School Committee? How many grievances were filed during the candidate's superintendency and what does this volume tell us?
6. How did the candidate go about building the school budget? Who did she/he involve in the process? How did she/he prioritize? How well did she/he present his budget and sell it to the community, including the municipal officials? (This question is particularly important for principals, staff, town manager or mayor, and Finance Committee members in towns.)
7. When a problem would arise, how does the candidate go about dealing with it? How does the candidate think about the situation and plan to resolve it?

How did the candidate perform under fire? Describe situations when he had to do so? How did he do during the town's override battles?

8. How would the candidate handle an underperforming or troublesome employee? Would she/he let the situation continue or resolve it early? Is she/he tough when he has to be?
9. If the candidate gets the job, he may have an experienced staff member who also sought the superintendency as an internal candidate. How do you think the candidate would handle that situation? Do you think he will succeed in keeping this subordinate and work effectively with this person?
10. How was the candidate perceived by the community, by employees, or by the School Committee, the town manager, or Finance Committee?
11. Did the candidate tend to give greater priority or emphasis to special needs students, average students, or advanced learners? Or did she/he balance his priorities, efforts, and initiatives across all three groups? Give specific examples of things he initiated for each group?
12. How did the candidate go about improving academic performance?

13. How savvy is the candidate in dealing with the media?

14. How has the candidate handled relationships with the police and managed the police/school liaison function?

15. "Control" is a very important element of managing school districts. How does the candidate manage to be in control with or without being overly "controlling"? Or is control a problem with the candidate's administrative style?

15. If we hire the candidate, what will we be saying about that decision 5 years from now?

Not every question was asked of every person. You'll find that the sessions go quickly. Certain questions were more applicable to certain people. However, this covers just about the entire range of questions. I hope it helps.

QUESTIONS TO POSE DURING REFERENCE CHECKING

What is the nature of ____'s work with you or your district?

Tell me about this person's communication skills generally, or with internal constituents, or with external partners and community?

How culturally proficient is this person?

What is (s)he like as a person?

How did this person do with subordinates? Or with Parents?

Is this person a good collaborator?

Has this person managed finances for the district or organization and how proficient was this candidate?

Have you seen this person grow as a manager and how so? Similarly, has this person grown as a leader, and how?

What problems has this person confronted and how did (s)he fare?

Does this person have a social conscience that guides her/his work?

Does this person get the "big picture"?

Has this person worked successfully to implement strategies for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and how well did it go.

Mary Newman's Three Questions:

1. *Who is this person? What formed the person's background, values, and standards? What in this person's background will tell me that he/she is a good person whom I can trust and whom others can depend upon to act in the public interest and not one's own?*
2. *How does this person think? How does this person tackle a problem? Is there a clear thought process that uses many criteria and avoids biases that get in the way of sound judgment? Does this person use others to plan and implement?*
3. *Finally, if I had a problem, would this person care about me?*

Guide to Screening and Interviewing Candidates for the Superintendency Avoiding Bias in Decision Making Around the Superintendency

School Committee and Search Committee members need to be made aware of blatant and subtle elements of bias that go into the development of job descriptions, selection of search committee members, orientations of screening committees, reviews of application packages, selection of interviewees, development of questions, and decisions on hiring.

EVOLVING TREATMENT OF WORDS – Being Mindful of Words that Others May Find Offensive

In recent years, the public has become more aware of how certain words may be offensive to others. Words that had been part of the mainstream turn out to have roots in prejudice, bias, and racist practices and are falling out of use as non-inclusive terms even though they may not be intended to offend. For example:

- “Master” has connotations that offend others. Headmasters and Masters of Schools are now more likely to have the title of principals or “heads of school.” The use of “master” as an adjective may also have negative connotations.
- Someone who has wandered afar from the common purpose of a group or whose views are inconsistent with colleagues might have been called “off the reservation,” which offends Native Americans.
- “Grandfathering or Grandmothering” to provide special qualification status has its link in the post-slave era to restrict voting rights, even though modern usage refers to providing automatic credentialing or status.
- More respect is being paid to individual identifying pronouns and the traditional “he,” or “she,” may no longer fit universally as it did a generation ago.
- The well-known “whitepaper” has taken on a bias-implication when used as a research document. The “blacklist” that tracked victims of the McCarthy era is considered inappropriate today. Comparing differing points of view as “black and white” has been criticized.
- Those with mental health issues take offense at the careless use of terms like “crazy” to criticize an idea or person.

We are finding that many educators will make a deliberate effort to exclude terms that are known to be non-inclusive or offensive. In these situations, meaning, context, and tone can define the difference between common vernacular and offensive language.

More frequently, individuals are becoming more mindful of these language issues and, out of respect for others, will avoid language that may offend another person.

AVOIDING BIAS IN HIRING

Many positions are filled through an application process. Hiring managers or screening committees will often make inappropriate assumptions based on the names of applicants, language in cover letters and resumes, and experiences listed. Some employers have used a name-blind system where the identities of applicants are edited out. This may work more effectively in the private sector than a public one, and it is a particular challenge when seeking a superintendent since reviewers can easily go to Google to identify candidates based on their experience.

Search Committees should be alerted to the potential bias inherent in making decisions based on candidate names, written materials, accents and speaking styles, experiences, and compensation

histories, disability, and age - all of which can be a source of bias in the wrong hands. Committee members should not, however, be discouraged from scrutinizing every facet of candidate applications in seeking strengths, values, and potential for success in the hiring process potential superintendent. Many School Committees are focused heavily on achieving diversity in their workforce and having teachers and administrators that look like the students they will serve or the communities in which they live. This commitment does not require that the best candidates be excluded in favor of a less qualified but diverse pool. Personnel experts will note that one of the most effective ways of cultivating such a diverse and highly skilled workforce is to adopt an exceptionally effective recruitment strategy that finds potentially outstanding candidates and allows Search Committees to screen a high quality field.

REFERENCES AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

Many of the professionals who train superintendents and other school administrators will point to situations where a candidate of color, or a person for whom English is a second language, or other person subject to bias in the past may be held to a higher standard. The concern is a good candidate might be passed over for advancement, or may be treated differently from another person because of racial, ethnic, religion, age, or sexual identify. Search Committees should review carefully the employment history of candidates to discern whether bias has played a role in slowing the advancement of candidates who may have been victims of discrimination of any form.

CONTRACTS AND COMPENSATION

Bias often appears in contract negotiations. Less experienced employees are often offered lower salaries than others with more years of service or depth of work assignments. A person new to the superintendency might legitimately be offered a lower salary than a more experienced individual with a record of success. However, it is sometimes the case where women, persons of color, and non-native language speakers are offered lower salaries than those offered to similarly situated non-minority candidates. School Committees who negotiate these contracts should be mindful of avoiding these situations.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF BIASED DECISION MAKING

Although well-meaning, members of search committees and school committees will frequently:

- allow their own experiential biases to weigh too heavily on decision making.
- prioritize candidates who mirror themselves and their employment experiences.
- support candidates whose experiences and interests are like their own, including love of the arts, sports, books, etc.
- decisions on appearance and favor for certain kinds of people based on that.
- yield to the biases or will of the majority, including situations where a powerful member of a group overpowers the independent judgment of the individual.
- yield to stereotypes, favorably or unfavorably.
- favor individuals with values that are shared with the hiring authorities such as a political party or religious faith.

Candidate Questions Related to Anti-Bias, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

- There are many dimensions to bias and to diversity, equity and inclusion. Have you thought about all of these and what thoughts might you have had that are not always raised?

(Examples: diversity of opinion, allowing those who disagree with you to have their say, culturally appropriate food in our cafeteria, fast evolving language/dialect that might not have demonstrated bias in the past.)
- What have you done as a school leader to address bias among your colleagues and students.
- Where do you see a role for anti-bias and DEI strategies where others might not envision one?
- Have you engaged in anti-bias and DEI professional development with your colleagues, and what did you find most effective? What were you able to take from this and implement in your district?
- What have you done to consider questions of equity when you work on a budget or in curricula, or personnel management?
- To whom do you turn when you have an issue or concern that could benefit from the DEI and anti-bias lens?

HOW CANDIDATES ARE BRIEFED TO INTERVIEW

What Mentors Advise Candidates Prior to Their Interviews

The following points were developed by individuals who guide superintendent candidates through the search process.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT OF PUBLIC MEETINGS AND INTERVIEWS:

“Brief is Good”

1. Above all, demonstrate that you have a commitment to the children of the public schools. Many candidates bring superior skills to the interview process: administrative talents, legal acumen, budget knowledge, analytic capabilities, and even vision. But do you care about kids and do you have a passion for making their education a fulfilling experience? Many good candidates are brilliant and talented, but, if they do not communicate their love of children and a commitment to the mission of educating them, the interviewers may see you as more ambitious than caring, and more concerned with authority, power, and a higher average salary for pension purposes: and they might be right.
2. Do not underestimate the intelligence of the school committee members. They are elected officials who are almost always very skilled at relating to other people, sensing nuance, seeing through rhetoric, and appreciating their own district’s best interests. If you are meeting with a search committee, the same caveats apply. Moreover, some search committee members hope to serve on the School Committee, so consider them as your potential future employers.
3. It is always helpful to know who’s in the room. Some school committee and search committee members are expert at educational issues. Many are teachers, principals, college faculty and might know more than on some topics than the superintendent they seek. Others often have strong background in several professional areas. Moreover, most are parents who have experience with the public schools.
4. Remember that School Board members sense “bull” right away when candidates get careless with the truth, exaggerate, pander, or revert to clichés and other stereotypical comments. Be sensitive to that. They are more likely to tune out if they feel they are wasting intellectual energy during an interview.

For example, when citing what you might have as your priorities, the most foolish thing you can do is to tell them that your relationship with the board is your highest priority. You will lose credibility at once if you do that. The next most foolish thing you can do is to start with the buzzwords and “insider” lingo of education that will alienate your interviewers.

5. As a style point, be controlled, but don’t hide your enthusiasm for students or public education. School Board members sense that public education is under assault and a superintendent who wants to help them fight for public schools will earn respect.
6. Be attentive to the board at all times during an interview and subsequent discussion. Show confidence without arrogance (which shows through in candidates better than they can hide it). Demonstrate that you are a serious person who can also laugh and be light when it’s appropriate, but not someone who looks more for fun than work. (Often candidates turn into comedians. It’s fun, but they don’t go to the second round.)
7. A special skill that is invaluable is to be brilliant, yet modest, understandable and personable, rather than having to let the board know you’re smarter than they are. Most board members don’t have Ed.Ds (and even more aren’t necessarily as impressed with the academic credentialing as the academics are themselves). Board members who didn’t go to college can turn off very quickly if you must be known as Dr. _____. After all, whose appendix did you take out?

8. Identify some talking points that clearly distinguish you from others because they show you really know what you're talking about and that you've studied more than one approach to a problem. Quality candidates are in very short supply, and even some of the good ones don't have a personality, demonstrate intellect, or give a good reason. Here are some of those critical areas:
- **Teacher Recruitment.** Successful candidates can tell stories of how they push principals and department heads to keep trying until they get an educator they really want, rather than the best of a mediocre crop of candidates. Others describe outstanding hiring decisions that were both academically and strategically effective – like the mathematician who had outstanding communication skills for reaching to the youngest as well as the oldest students.
 - **Teacher Evaluation.** Most answers here are full of clichés and sound the same. Try to identify some angles that are both unique and reflect that you've studied this question. Among the more creative answers that have worked well are:
 - those who talk about “the work being done to evaluate teachers both as individuals and as part of a team evaluation process so that teachers are accountable both for themselves and as a group.”
 - responses demonstrating that the evaluation process can be one way to tell teachers that they're doing a great job as well as a vehicle for constructive improvement (or intense remediation for failure).
 - responses that show how to use testing data appropriately to identify teachers who need extra support.
 - ones that appreciate how much teachers need support and encouragement. It's a tough job.
 - **Special Education.** This is a very sensitive issue, and if you don't know it, don't try to fake it. Many board members ran for office because of a special education concern.
 - **Education Reform and Critical Public Policy Questions.** Demonstrate that you have a thorough understanding of Education Reform and the financing side as it has evolved to include various federal initiatives and issues (i.e., Adequate Yearly Progress; Race to the Top; Massachusetts's 2010 Education Reform II statute). Show that you know that the system includes standards, accountability measures for teachers, students, schools, and school districts. That it is very complex and defies a simple explanation.

In particular, make sure you can explain state governance laws, appreciate good theory on board roles and responsibilities, and show respect for the School Board at the same time. There are many gray areas in law or in practice where the law or good practice would exclude school board involvement. Some superintendents finesse this, or guide boards through it, while others ignore the need to collaborate with the board until they get caught. It's important to identify those areas where there is less black and white than gray: collective bargaining, grievance remediation, addressing budgetary line items, dealing with parents, etc. Yes, you may have the power, but it's the board that has to face the people in the coffee shop, PTA meetings, town meetings, and in the media.

Also on the financing side, make sure they know that you know that the “Foundation Budget” concept employed in many states is simply the way the state tries to establish a base for funding districts. Explain that, totally separate from the Foundation Budget is the state's reimbursement formula for disbursing the aid and that the real solution to the reimbursement shortage is: a) greater state allocation; b) an equitable state formula that incorporates special education student needs; c) holds harmless districts with declining enrollment and gives every district a per pupil base set to inflation; and d) better state funding for school building assistance and SPED.

- **Curriculum.** Everyone seems to have to answer an obligatory question(s) on curriculum. Good responses have referenced the state frameworks as a very helpful outline where districts can fill in the specifics. Note that the state accountability system (Regents, MCAS, etc.) can play a valuable,

appropriate role in measuring how well your district may be aligned with the Frameworks, but also that districts must work carefully to secure a thorough curriculum into which teachers and principals buy in. The superintendent has to work closely with principals to make sure they understand just how important a solid, aligned, and defensible curriculum is. Also, demonstrate good strategies that develop and revise curriculum, including using the evaluation tool to make sure that people contribute to the curriculum development process and meet the goals they set.

- **School Committee Roles.** The board members are your partners. Don't threaten them with best practice theory or state reform legislation, or discourage them from coming to the superintendent with legitimate concerns from their parent/neighbors. A very good response to this question was that "the School Board's role as the principal policy maker is incredibly powerful. The Board can set the standards and hold us to them; they can establish our operating policies and hold the superintendent accountable; they can use the budget making process not only to set financial parameters, but to set the appropriate policy to go with it. Their role is usually underappreciated, but significant."
Also, make sure that they know that you know that the board's job is the toughest role in American elective politics. You respond to the citizens at their very grassroots, the ones that lead up to their doors.
 - **Budget Development.** Give some concrete experiences about how you've conceived, developed, and implemented a budget in collaboration with various boards and superintendents. Many superintendents get into trouble by handling the politics of budget issues poorly.
9. Be able to explain your leadership style and your ability to collaborate without being controlling. School Committee members are particularly sensitive to the "controlling" personality and want to be sure that their superintendent will facilitate full discussion by sharing information, allow the board plenty of time to consider and make informed decisions, and make people feel empowered.
10. Demonstrate a genuine respect for parents in terms of being accessible to them, a recognition that while they're single issue constituents (i.e., their children), they are also invaluable advocates to the community at large. If you can't give examples, offer ideas.
11. Demonstrate that you know how to build a constituency for the public schools by:
- Understanding how to incorporate School Board members into the communications strategy.
 - Demonstrating that you would not turn the school system into your personal show, but use everyone as part of the school/community communications team.
 - Cultivating the people who cover your community with accurate information.
 - Being an ambassador and "cheer leader" for the public schools.
 - BEING UBIQUITOUS: attending community events, meeting with parents, contacting community business people (Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.), getting to know religious leaders, etc.
 - Linking with local and legislative leaders. (Know the local legislators' names and something about them. Meet them if you can.)
12. Be credible about why you want to make a job change, if you're coming from a current superintendency. Be truthful and explain anything that might appear to be a bad situation. (Don't blame the school board, because if you blamed your past employers, you'll be just as predisposed to blaming the next one – and the prospective next one knows it.)

Legitimate and credible reasons for change include:

- A professional advancement.
- The outstanding opportunity posed by the hiring district.

- A change in your previous board’s philosophy.
- You had to “fall on your sword” because the financial situation was bad or someone you hired messed up.
- A desire to get closer to home or to relocate to a specific location.
- A desire to deploy your education and training more effectively.
- Your district no longer needs the special skills you brought (new buildings are complete, curricula are implemented, restructuring is in place, new financial system is now working, etc.)

13. Practice responding to difficult questions and go over them again and again, and again until you’re comfortable with the tone, text, and content. (That’s why we have long walks and drives.) You don’t want to be perceived as reciting a memorized response – it never works and the interviewers will know it immediately. By working on your responses, you will have command of the talking points and intellectual arguments and will be able to explain them clearly.

A closing thought:

Mary B. Newman, a distinguished Massachusetts legislator who was respected on both sides of the aisle, always evaluated her colleagues in government by posing three sets of questions:

1. *Who is this person? What formed the person’s background, values, and standards? What in this person’s background will tell me that he/she is a good person whom I can trust and whom others can depend upon to act in the public interest and not one’s own?*
2. *How does this person think? How does this person tackle a problem? Is there a clear thought process that uses many criteria and avoids biases that get in the way of sound judgment? Does this person use others to plan and implement?*
3. *Finally, if I had a problem, would this person care about me?*

In your interview, try to draw out clear responses from the candidate.

If you are being interviewed, demonstrate what a quality candidate you are; how you value good judgment, teamwork, and collaboration; and not only how you want to make things better for the community, but also that have you cared about individuals and their needs.