



Special School Board Meeting — Minutes
Public Meeting Notice
901 Walnut — 6A
Monday, May 14, 2012
5:30 p.m.

1. **Open Session** - Discussion of process for selecting an interim superintendent
2. **Closed session** - The Board will meet in closed session pursuant to Iowa Code Section 21.5(c) to discuss strategy with counsel in matters that are presently in litigation or where litigation is imminent where disclosure would be likely to prejudice or disadvantage the position of the governmental body in that litigation.
3. **Exempt session**

Minutes

Present: Boesen, Caldwell-Johnson, Elsbernd, Howard, Jongewaard, Murphy, Sweeney

General Counsel: Lantz

Ms. Caldwell-Johnson called the meeting to order.

Ms. Caldwell-Johnson stated the primary purpose of the meeting was to share the process the Board went through in identifying candidates for the interim superintendent position. The Board will also go into closed session for a report from Ms. Pat Lantz on a property matter and then proceed to an exempt session to discuss the interim superintendent selection and the compensation for that position.

She explained the process she and the vice chair, Mr. Murphy, went through for the transition from Dr. Sebring to an interim superintendent. The first step was to identify potential candidates. Mr. Murphy and Ms. Caldwell-Johnson consulted with an assortment of contacts both within and outside of the district. The consensus of the feedback they received was to appoint someone that could come in and not spend a lot of time revving up; someone that would challenge the status quo and keep the ship moving forward. At that point it became clear that an internal candidate would be best. They met with Dr. Sebring and identified the four internal candidates with a superintendent's license. Of those four they felt the associate superintendent was the best choice at this time.

Ms. Caldwell-Johnson stated if the Board had the benefit of more time, the decision may have been the same but the process may have been a little different.

Mr. Murphy commented on the pool of candidates and who was eliminated. The only way the option of an associate superintendent would be available is if the Board agreed on an internal candidate. The only thing the Board can really look at when it comes to looking for an interim is a former superintendent and that eliminated a lot of choices.

Mr. Howard agreed the Board does not have the luxury of time and feels the options are pretty limited. He would ask many of the same questions in the interim search that have already been asked.

Mr. Murphy stated that many of the potential candidates had experience with low achieving students.

Mr. Jongewaard stated he had three concerns that he would have with any interim, but these concerns are highlighted with an internal interim. He believes part of the challenge the district faces on student achievement is because of actions taken almost a decade ago that eliminated much of the curriculum administration. When there were budget cuts there was an effort to consolidate administration that reduced curriculum directors. For a number of years there was a weakness in that area that led to low levels of continuity, accountability and training in that area across the district. He is concerned about continuing the effort that we have right now in the area of curriculum. The district is on a positive path, relative to curriculum issues. The second area of concern is the issue of organizational climate and culture. He believes whenever there is transition of leadership there is the possibility of an interruption or suspension in the organization's pervasive climate and culture that can be detrimental to the mission. The third concern is continuity in leadership. In his opinion, a new leader will need the help of some of the people that are doing the work now. He believes an internal interim has the greatest potential to result in folks leaving when a permanent replacement is named.

Mr. Murphy asked for clarification of that last concern.

Mr. Jongewaard said if you have an internal interim, that person is not likely to go back to the position they were in once a permanent successor is named. They are likely to interview for a superintendent position in other districts or they are going to go as an associate somewhere else; it would be difficult to go back to the level of their peers. Other administrators are also less inclined to stay because of the likelihood of changes in their routines. That is why he would like the Board to take more time to consider interim candidates.

Ms. Boesen said Mr. Jongewaard's concerns are reasons why it makes sense to appoint the internal individual that's been identified. She feels the district should have people trained to take leadership roles. She expressed her appreciation to the chair and vice-chair for their work and she is not in favor of having someone outside the district serve on an interim basis.

Mr. Sweeney's concern was that elevating someone internally might have a domino effect and create turmoil. His point was leave current administrators in place to function as a team and bring someone in from outside to coordinate under specific guidelines from the Board.

Ms. Caldwell-Johnson pointed out the cabinet position of Tina Jensen needs to be filled now no matter what happens. She said she feels the appointment of an internal candidate as

interim superintendent can be accomplished with minimal impact on other positions if it's handled properly and the district's work can go forward with less interruption than would accompany an appointment from the outside.

Ms. Boesen feels the district is a little light on administration and needs to think about adding an additional position.

Mr. Jongeward stated if the Board appoints an internal interim the district may end up with a lesser overall administrative skill set. He suggested possibly considering the temporary appointment of a retired superintendent and/or taking something off of the superintendent job description so the district doesn't lose its current momentum in the area of curriculum development by effectively promoting that department to take on additional responsibilities.

Mr. Howard asked who the curriculum director is now.

Ms. Caldwell-Johnson responded that Tom Ahart is the Associate Superintendent of Teaching and Learning. She suggested the Board may want to consider a retired principal with curriculum background to continue some of Mr. Ahart's work in that area if he were to be appointed as the interim superintendent.

Ms. Caldwell-Johnson said the Board needs to focus squarely on the appointment of an interim superintendent and then let that person consider the appropriate next steps at that point.

Mr. Murphy commented on the issue of organizational climate and culture. The district uses the Keys survey, which DMEA recommends, to measure employee attitudes about climate and culture. He and Ms. Caldwell-Johnson have visited with the cabinet twice recently and it seems like a team that is functioning well right now. They like each other, they work well together and he's inclined to trust their collective judgment on curriculum management during the superintendent search. If the interim superintendent is chosen internally, he believes the first thing that person would do is go to his colleagues and have a conversation on what needs to be done to keep move forward and bring a plan back to the Board for approval. He does not feel the Board needs to decide who will be doing what in those positions.

Ms. Lantz, general counsel, brought to the attention of the Board that Holly Crandell is the Director of Curriculum and Mr. Ahart is the Associate Superintendent for Teaching and Learning.

Mr. Murphy commented that Ms. Crandell is new to the position but has been with the district for some time.

Mr. Jongewaard said he appreciated everyone's comments. In general he believes the Board should hire a superintendent and then step out of the way. But an interim situation calls for more Board oversight and involvement. He said he has been approached by many people regarding this circumstance who are very concerned that the Board handles it in a way that won't lose the district's current momentum.

Ms. Boesen voiced her confidence in the cabinet and said she is hearing that folks are happy with the Board choosing an internal candidate to serve as the interim.

Mr. Jongewaard wanted to clarify that the comments he's heard were not directed at any one individual. He is hearing general concerns about the atmosphere, culture, and climate that's been created by the team that's been in charge.

Mr. Murphy commented he hears a lot of what Mr. Jongewaard is talking about — too much testing, etc. However, he is not hearing any negative things about cabinet members. He does not want the Board manipulating a curriculum director.

Mr. Jongewaard clarified that he is not asking the Board to do that. He is asking that the Board not name an interim superintendent and give them a blank check to then create on an interim basis whatever he or she sees fit.

Mr. Murphy clarified his statement earlier that the interim would make some adjustments and recommendations and then bring them to the Board. He does not want the Board making recommendations to the interim appointee.

Mr. Jongewaard said he was not suggesting the Board make recommendations, he was saying he had concerns about outcomes. That is different than saying he wanted the Board to make curriculum decisions.

Mr. Howard commented this decision falls to the Board under policy governance. Let the interim run their team, and then come to the Board with recommendations. He believes the interim should have the same latitude as a regular superintendent and the same accountability to the Board.

Mr. Murphy said the district has turned a corner and believes the program in place now is getting results. He thinks the team in place understands that system. He feels with an internal interim, the district keeps this momentum going.

Mr. Jongewaard said he is against hiring an internal interim but is resigned on that point and is not going to waste more time talking about it. If the Board appoints an internal interim he has concerns and will focus on how to mitigate those.

Mr. Murphy wanted to clarify that Mr. Jongewaard's concerns were at the end of the interim when a permanent appointment is made. He agreed he does worry about the end of the interim but believes the district will lose some people anyway and if the Board brings in an external interim, the Board will lose several top people even sooner.

Mr. Sweeney commented with an interim superintendent, the Board may need to be more involved as an oversight committee than they normally would.

Ms. Caldwell-Johnson said an internal interim appointment is the best option right now to continue the district's progress. She said the Board's full support will be critical and added that the Board needs to be very clear and open about its expectations and course for the future as it goes about the search for a permanent replacement. She emphasized the Board will need to communicate clearly with the interim appointee as to priorities and expectations for the 2012-13 school year.

Mr. Jongewaard commented he felt the Board needs to emphasize curriculum during the interim and have a straight forward discussion about climate and culture. He thinks the Board should consider all of the feedback it gets from all quarters, positive and negative; internal and external, and take all of it into account during the search for the next superintendent.

Ms. Boesen said she thinks the Board has always done so.

Mr. Murphy mentioned the Keys Survey again as a barometer of district climate and culture.

Ms. Caldwell-Johnson noted the Keys Survey was only administered to teachers among the district's employee groups.

Mr. Jongewaard believes there are issues with hiring practices and curriculum adoptions in the district.

Ms. Boesen commented when you have 5,000 employees in an organization there are always going to be issues.

Ms. Caldwell-Johnson asked for a motion to go into closed session.

Ms. Boesen moved to go into closed session; second by Elsbernd

Aye: Boesen, Caldwell-Johnson, Elsebernd, Howard, Jongewaard, Murphy, Sweeney

Nay: None

Motion carried.