

Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District Committee

May 1, 2012

Minutes

CALL TO ORDER

A. McCloughan called the School Committee meeting to order at 5:35 p.m. at the Buker Multipurpose Room.

PRESENT:

Sean Condon, Bill Dery, Kym Donnellan, Roger Kuebel (5:42), Alexa McCloughan, Ann Minois, Jack O'Keefe, Dacia Rubel, and Larry Swartz

ABSENT:

Peter Gray, Acting Superintendent

ALSO PRESENT:

Michael Harvey, candidate for position of Superintendent of Schools

INTERVIEW:

The purpose of this meeting was to interview Michael Harvey, one of 4 finalists for the position of Superintendent of Schools. Committee members asked him questions, many of which had been prepared in advance. These minutes briefly state the topic of each question, and summarize his answer; for the full text of prepared questions see the numbered questions in a document appended to these minutes, which correspond to the number/letter in parentheses after each brief question summary below.

A. McCloughan asked M. Harvey to reflect on his day so far (1a) and what people he met noticed about him (1b). M. Harvey spoke of the high caliber and dedication of the people he met during meetings and interviews prior to this meeting, said people expressed concern about recent administrative turnover, and said he would make it a high priority to rebuild the community's trust in the district. He spoke of his family's background in education and said upon meeting him people would notice his dedication, commitment and passion for education.

A. McCloughan asked why he is interested in working in this district (1c). He said he has aspired to become a superintendent since his first teaching job, and considers this district similar to the Belmont School District in which he now works and so anticipates an easy adjustment to HWRSB.

A McCloughan asked for specifics about how he would spend his first day and week on the job and what kind of support he would need (1e). M. Harvey said he would hold extended interviews with various stakeholders, including critics of the district; set a goal to spend time in every classroom in the district by the end of October; describe in writing what he learned about the character of the district and themes important to the development of a strategic plan; share that document with the Committee and the public; and use it in the strategic planning process. He said the Committee's guidance about whom to interview and develop relationships with would provide important support.

J. O'Keefe asked M. Harvey how he motivates people (1f). He said he empowers them by trusting their abilities and judgment, making clear who has the decision-making authority about particular matters, and assuring them that once decisions

are made he will provide the resources so they can accomplish the tasks set before them. He said expressing confidence and trust in people motivates and empowers them.

J. O'Keefe asked him to describe a situation in which he worked effectively under pressure (1g). M. Harvey spoke of Belmont's \$2 million deficit in 2010-11 and the resulting multiple revisions of high school course offerings and student scheduling during the spring budget cycle.

B. Dery asked how he would communicate with constituent groups (2a). M. Harvey said he would communicate formally and informally, and that he works best in collaborative settings in which people challenge his opinions, which he said forces him to expand his perspective. He described the nature of a monthly letter he circulates to the Belmont community, and gave examples of themes and topics.

D. Rubel asked about his management style, his strengths, and about what needs improvement and steps he is taking to make those improvements (3a). He described himself as a collaborative leader who wants input from lots of sources before making decisions, makes it clear which decisions will be group decisions and which will be his, and does not micromanage. He spoke of strengths in listening; compiling, synthesizing and analyzing information; organization; and building trust. He said time management is a challenge so at the start of each week he reviews the essential tasks before him and "holds them sacred."

D. Rubel asked about his past relationships with boards (3b). He said he has a collegial relationship with the Belmont School Committee and works closely with them. He said challenges have included school advisory council members who think they will "turn the place on its head," and said he addressed this by helping them understand their roles and the district's model for making changes in a process that allows input from all groups.

D. Rubel asked about his experience in negotiations and relationships with teachers' unions (3c). M. Harvey said he has no direct role at the bargaining table in Belmont but is on good terms with the president of the teacher's union and has at times needed to negotiate issues involving teachers who had professional status but were not performing the way anybody wanted them to.

K. Donnellan asked M. Harvey to tell about the strongest team he has built and what made it strong (3d). He spoke of the assistant principals who were in place when he took the job as high school principal and said he encouraged them to find projects that would invigorate and engage them as school leaders. He said he invites conflicting view during weekly meetings with his assistant principals but expects all to emerge from each meeting as a unified group.

K. Donnellan asked him to tell about a planning process he was involved in. M. Harvey spoke of preparing for implementation of the state's new staff evaluation system, which Belmont, like Hamilton, must implement in 2012-13 as a Race for the Top district.

K. Donnellan requested specifics about M. Harvey's experience in leadership searches (3f). He said he participated in hiring curriculum directors, a high school principal and two assistant principals, secondary administrators, and was part of the site visit team during Belmont's search for a new superintendent.

Noting that this district has experienced upheaval and time is of the essence, D. Rubel asked M. Harvey about skills that would enable him to kit the ground running, and what new skills/knowledge he would need (3g). He gave examples of juggling multiple issues and said his skill set is transferable to being a superintendent. He said information-gathering upon arriving in the district would make clear to him what he does not know, at which point he would find answers.

S. Condon asked why faculty and staff should support M. Harvey's candidacy (4a). M. Harvey said they should do so because he has been a teacher and building administrator, lets people know he appreciates the importance and difficulty of what they do, and would work to keep what is going on in the classroom the primary focus of the district.

S. Condon asked what M. Harvey believes this district's staff is looking for in a leader. He said they want programmatic consistency and a long-term superintendent who will attend to a range of responsibilities but is a teacher first.

S. Condon asked how he would assess curriculum (4b). M. Harvey said MCAS scores should be just one of many data points used to validate what a district is doing. He spoke about backwards design models, looking at skills students need to be effective adults (including communication, problem solving, critical thinking and effective researching), and the declining importance of memorization.

S. Condon asked how he would evaluate the effectiveness of teachers and administrators (4c). M. Harvey contrasted the long-used Saphier method with Massachusetts' new evaluation system and said teachers' and administrators' active engagement in assembling and presenting evidence of their performance will help them grow and mark a shift in school culture.

S. Condon asked his opinion about the difference between a good and an excellent teacher (4d). M. Harvey said this is hard to discern and that the strength of the new rubric-based system is that it will allow staff to document their specific strengths. He said excellent teachers and administrators are reflective; they ask themselves why they do things a certain way and how they could do them better, and then try new strategies.

A. Minois asked about employee accountability (4e); he said he makes expectations clear, formally invites feedback and discussion, and has staff demonstrate that they are proficient or exemplary at what they do.

A. Minois asked M. Harvey about new concepts in education (4f). He said his doctoral work was about checking the research base behind innovations. He described the evaluation of Belmont High School's three levels of math instruction, his role, and the outcome.

A. Minois asked what makes school districts successful and effective (4g). M. Harvey such districts hire teachers who graduated from the best universities and have strong subject area and pedagogical backgrounds. He advocated vetting new hires over three years, and releasing some if they are not the best teachers the district could find. He said effective districts consider how each practitioner could improve and what professional development would allow that person to do so.

R. Kuebel asked M. Harvey how as superintendent he would view the most important aspects of a budget, and galvanize support for it (5a and 5c). He said support stems from community buy-in to a strategic plan and reiteration of its main points as budget planning begins. He said past acrimonious exchange between school, finance, and select boards in Belmont led to creation this year of subcommittees that started work in September and engaged selectmen and FinCom members in discussion of what kind of things would go into the budget.

L. Swartz inquired about investment in technology and integrating it into teaching and learning (5d). M. Harvey advised against trying to keep up with the newest technology, which he said is a losing proposition because it quickly becomes obsolete. He suggested designing infrastructure to employ students' own devices that they bring to school, and purchasing resources for use by students who cannot afford such devices.

L. Swartz asked him about regional districts (5f). He noted some specifics he learned during his tenure as an assistant principal in Triton Regional School District but said he would need to learn more about excess and deficiency accounts and other matters; he said he would consult colleagues who work in regional districts.

ADJOURNMENT:

A. McCloughan recessed the meeting at 6:55 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 7:05 p.m. at the Wenham Tea House; the Committee and candidate continued informal conversation over dinner. The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

DOCUMENTS AND EXHIBITS

USED AT THIS MEETING: Interview Questions — School Committee Interview (7 pages)
Supplemental interview form for superintendent search 2012 (3 pages)

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Sierks Smith, School Committee recording secretary