



Read at 6/13/17 SC meeting.

Beth Petr <bpetr@abschools.org>

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Open Letter to the Acton-Boxborough School Committee

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Mon, Jun 12, 2017 at 7:10 PM

To: abrsc@abschools.org, Amy Krishnamurthy <akrishnamurthy@abschools.org>, Allen Nitschelm <Allen@thehomesteader.com>, Sunanda Pepalla <sunanda0412@yahoo.com>, Steven Ballard <sb Ballard@stevenballard.com>, Stow Laboratories Inc <stomail@stolab.com>, Sanjib Biswas <sanjibbi@gmail.com>, bpetr@abschools.org

June 12, 2017:

Dear School Committee,

We represent a group of Acton-Boxborough residents who share the goal of hiring the best possible Superintendent for our school system. Some of us remain in a sort of grieving process, as we are still trying to come to terms with the reality that we as a district will be separating from our current Superintendent, for reasons we still do not understand, even though many of us appreciated his service and supported his initiatives as we understood them. Therefore, given the unfortunate circumstances in which we find ourselves, there is an issue of trust that needs to be restored between our hardworking School Committee and the members of the community that Committee serves.

We certainly do not purport to speak for everyone, but to the extent we do not, we hope that our own voice will also continue to enable others to be heard as well. In fact, our actions to date have largely been directed precisely to that important end: to request that the School Committee change its meeting agendas to give greater voice to the community, and not just to the dominant voices in our group, but to all of those concerned about these recent events, whether they agree with us or not.

At this point, we have developed some very specific requests related to the next steps in the process of seeking new Superintendent leadership for our school district. We hope the School Committee, and others in our community, will understand that our primary goal in making these specific requests to the School Committee, and in making these requests public, is to help to stimulate further, constructive debate on these important issues, so that the entire community may work with the School Committee to repair the broken trust both internally and externally and to make it clear to prospective candidates that the prior divisive issues are behind us, and that we are moving forward as one community.

We believe that the strong consideration, and hopefully acceptance and implementation, of the following recommendations, by the School Committee will be critical in attracting top candidates:

(1) We want the School Committee to appoint an Interim Superintendent as soon as possible. The Interim should serve until a permanent Superintendent is hired and takes over, which we assume will be starting July 1, 2018. A person serving either as Acting or Interim Superintendent for an extended period would not be eligible for the permanent position.

(2) The last search resulted in the selection of a Superintendent who only served for three years, and is leaving rather abruptly as the result of reported "philosophical differences" between him and the current School Committee. Given this fact alone, we believe that changes to the search process are necessary to make it more likely to be successful in both attracting and retaining our new Superintendent.

We respectfully request that the School Committee implement the following guidelines or rules:

A. If possible, the 2017-2018 Search Committee shall be comprised of individuals who have not yet served on any AB Superintendent Search Committee.

B. Half or more of the Search Committee shall be volunteers from the AB community (including parents of children currently in the AB schools, as well as other community members) who do not have any current or prior affiliation to the School District, as employees (either paid or unpaid "special employees" such as School Committee members).

C. The Chair or Vice-Chair of the Search Committee shall represent the community, as one of the "volunteers from the AB community" as described in B. above.

(3) The School Committee shall develop a "conflict of interest" policy which shall include the prohibition of participating in the discussion or voting to recommend a candidate when candidates are still under consideration who are personal friends of the member. This policy shall apply to discussion and voting on such issues both by and within the Search Committee and the School Committee.

(4) For a robust national search for the new Superintendent, we prefer that a new consulting search firm be selected.

(5) The criteria for the permanent Superintendent, including the stated qualifications - both of credentials and experience - that shall be advertised for the position once posted, shall first be discussed in open public meetings of the School Committee or Search Committee. Such "criteria" shall include a consideration and discussion of expectations for the candidate's educational philosophy, both substantive and operational, as it relates to the philosophy of the School Committee and the School District.

(6) Following the open public meetings of the School Committee or Search Committee, as described in paragraph (5) above, there shall be at least one public forum devoted to the issues as stated in paragraph (5), which shall be attended by members of the Search and School committees, along with a representative of any search firm that is to be hired. This public forum should give the communities of Acton and Boxborough a chance to engage and give direct and public feedback on the precise criteria and qualifications and philosophical expectations of any candidates for the new position.

(7) Given the importance of getting and retaining the best candidates, the School Committee should be willing to offer a more attractive compensation package to the new Superintendent.

We look forward to your careful attention and response to this letter.

Members of the AB School Community

Susri Anuradha (Acton)
Allen Nitschelm (Acton)
Steve Ballard (Boxborough)
Sanjib Biswas (Acton)
Sunanda Pepalla (Acton)
Charlie Kadlec (Acton)