

MINUTES – WAYLAND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Special Meeting – April 14, 2023

A Special Meeting of the Wayland School Committee was held remotely on Wednesday, April 14, 2023, at 2:30 P.M. at the Wayland Town Building.

Present:

- Chris Ryan, Chair
- Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair
- Jeanne Downs
- Erin Gibbons
- Jessica Polizzotti (arrived at 2:40 p.m.)

1. Welcome & Call to Order:

Chair Chris Ryan convened the special session at 2:33 p.m. and announced that the meeting was being recorded by WayCAM. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Chris Ryan, Chair	here	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	here	
Jeanne Downs	here	
Erin Gibbons	here	
Jess Polizzotti	absent	

2. Public Comment:

Philip Cohen, 21 Campbell Road, thanked the School Committee for its many hours of dedicated work. He believes that much of the criticism toward the Committee has been unjustified, particularly around personnel decisions and expressed his deep appreciation for their well intentions on behalf of Wayland and the schools.

Jeff Sklar, Brooks Road, asked the School Committee to share the November 10, 2022 investigative report results with Dr. Easy. He also believes that the two School Committee members who were named in the MCAD complaint should have recused themselves. Mr. Sklar referred to the many OML complaints filed against the School Committee and suggested that the School Committee is violating the code of ethics established by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees. Finally, Mr. Sklar believes that the new Superintendent should be hired at will.

Jess Polizzotti arrived at 2:40 p.m.

3. Discussion of Acting Superintendent Candidates and Possible Vote to Appoint Acting Superintendent:

Chris Ryan recapped the interview process for the Acting Superintendent. Five candidates were interviewed, but John Macero withdrew. Also, the initial process was changed because many reached out to the Committee and asked for a more comprehensive process. Chris suggested a format for this evening’s meeting in terms of sharing general thoughts for all of the candidates. A discussion ensued regarding the format.

Erin Gibbons referred to Chris’s comment about the one candidate who withdrew. She was disheartened by a communication received today in which it was stated that some individuals, potential future candidates for the School Committee, were attempting to interfere with the process in an improper manner.

The School Committee thanked all the candidates for their interest in Wayland and coming forward.

Timothy Luff:

The School Committee members described Mr. Luff as warm, an empathetic leader, a collaborator, a listener, confident but humble, and devoted to education and committed in helping students to be at their best and represented in every way. He also believes that every student should feel safe and have a sense of belonging. His calm demeanor would be helpful in Wayland at this time. Although he has a strong Special Education background and some legal expertise, Mr. Luff lacked the experience of some of the candidates, particularly in the role of a superintendent. He views this opportunity as a way to build upon his strong educational foundation. His emphasis on professional development for the teachers to be successful was appreciated, as well as his idea of “stay interviews” indicating that he was a positive leader. Mr. Luff’s approach to the Anti-Racism Resolution is, in his opinion, different for students and adults, and he does have a lot of experience in DEI and addressing racism and micro-aggressions and adapts according to his responses. His recommendation of having a five-year strategic budget plan was impressive.

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Bella Wong:

Ms. Wong was described as calming, is experienced, a communicator, is student-centered, and she has a deep appreciation for what already exists in Wayland and is willing to help the district move forward. In the past, she has worked in some of Wayland’s peer districts. Ms. Wong would hear from and listen to all stakeholders to determine what is needed and to build trust, and her responses to questions regarding Special Education, particularly around dealing with trauma in the long term felt good. Ms. Wong’s response to the anti-racist resolution or to advisory groups were not specific, and although she referred to the Asian and Hispanic students, the METCO students were not mentioned. There was not a sense of her working style, particularly with staff, and there were concerns related to relationship building in the short term, as she spoke in the long-term and not how she would deal with the immediate issues, given that this role is for one year.

Midge Connolly:

Dr. Connolly is an experienced superintendent and has worked in a peer district of a similar size. Her responses were thorough and she had some good ideas, particularly in special education. Dr. Connolly spoke about a listening plan/tour and acknowledged that Wayland needs to heal and move forward. She was described as a good listener, student-centered, good with the budget, a good manager of crises, and she has a strong special education background. Dr. Connolly’s overall organizational approach was to support the principals so they can support the teachers and, in turn, the students would be supported in the classroom. She did acknowledge that Wayland and Weston are similar when minority students and families enter the schools, and addressing white privilege and unconscious bias can be a life-long process. One quality is that Dr. Connolly is not afraid to admit when she is wrong or has made a mistake. Some concerns centered around communication skills, budget planning, and her absence at district events. Dr. Connolly was clear that she would not be a change agent in this one-year role.

David Fleishman:

Dr. Fleishman is an experienced superintendent who worked in a very large district for many years, and has dealt with some very difficult issues. He was described as a manager and delegator who has a thoughtful approach, is personable and enthusiastic, has a great memory, is a wonderful mentor, has a strong focus on relationship building and community engagement, is a straight shooter, and is an exceptional listener who would “listen to fix” and “listen to win.” It was clear during his responses to the questions that Dr. Fleishman is organized and is a structured thinker. Dr. Fleishman would prepare for this one-year role by doing his research and making important connections with all staff in an effort to build a strong team so the district can heal. He believes that everyone has what they need to ultimately support the students. His approach to special education, autonomy with accountability and collaboration are very strong as is his approach to anti-racism and his philosophy that everyone should write a racial biography. Dr. Fleishman is familiar with facilities and issues in that regard, and is very knowledgeable with budgets. The only concern was that Newton is a much larger district with more staff and more resources. However, given where the district is right now, Dr. Fleishman’s experience, demeanor and approach would be very helpful and beneficial.

Each member named one or two candidates as their preference:

Jeanne – David and Midge

Chris – David and Midge

Jess – David

Ellen – David

Erin – David

Final comments were shared by the Committee about all of the candidates, including a former straw poll which resulted in a unanimous show of hands for David Fleishman.

Upon a motion duly made by Jeanne Downs, seconded by Jess Polizzotti, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to enter into negotiations with David Fleishman as Acting Superintendent beginning July 1. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Chris Ryan, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Jeanne Downs	X	
Erin Gibbons	X	
Jess Polizzotti	X	

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Jeanne and Ellen were delegated to enter into contract negotiations with Dr. Fleishman. Chris and Erin will reach out to the other candidates, and Jeanne and Erin will write a communication for the community.

Chris called Dr. Fleishman and he is interested in moving forward.

4. **Adjournment:**

Upon a motion duly made by Jess Polizzotti, seconded by Erin Gibbons, the School Committee voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn at 3:46 p.m. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

<u>Roll Call</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Chris Ryan, Chair	X	
Ellen Grieco, Vice Chair	X	
Jeanne Downs	X	
Erin Gibbons	X	
Jess Polizzotti	X	

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Ryan, Chair
Wayland School Committee

Corresponding Documentation:

1. Agenda