

Andover School Committee
Minutes –Interim Superintendent Interview

Date: June 9, 2015
Location: School Committee Room
SC Members Present: J. Blumstein, P. Colby-Clements, T. Teichert, S. McCready, A. Gilbert
Others Present: Dr. Nancy Duclos, Assistant Superintendent, and Candace Hall, Human Resources Director

- I. Chairman A. Gilbert called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M. followed by a Moment of Silence and a Salute to the Flag.

Mrs. Gilbert welcomed Dr. Sheldon Berman noting that he is the 2nd finalist to interview for the Interim Superintendent position. The members of the School Committee introduced themselves to Dr. Berman.

- Explain why you consider yourself a good candidate for this position and what have you learned about Andover

Dr. Berman has worked as a Superintendent over the past twenty-two years in three very different school systems (Hudson, Mass,-Louisville, Kentucky, and Eugene, Oregon) and learned a tremendous amount from each of these state systems and would like to pass on his knowledge, provide support with the transitions and help with many other roles and aspects, not just keeping the system running but providing a sense of direction and continued progress. He would use the same assessment and sense of direction from his past experiences to determine what can get done in Andover so the system doesn't stall.

Dr. Berman has always admired Andover, and many years ago and almost had a position here but instead became Assistant Superintendent in Reading where he still owns a home. His knowledge of Andover is based on what he has learned from people who live and work here and what he has read online. Prior to coming to the interview tonight, he drove around Andover to view all the schools. This is an exciting position at this point in his career. He loves working as a facilitator, supporting groups, and being invested in seeing education make for a better world.

- What do you see as Andover's primary challenges

Andover is a high-performing school system; the challenge is to insure a smooth transition, create and maintain a sense of team. There are several key positions to be filled: Spec Ed, AHS Principal, Bancroft Principal, and Superintendent), and the new hires have to be 'District Hires' not his. Having a sense of team is a critical aspect in developing an investment in the new people coming onboard. It is important to gather people with the capability to start the conversation and keep the direction and vision moving forward. The Andover Public School Five Year Plan is a good plan and he feels that this would be the time to reflect on that plan and affirm that Andover has hit the right targets and determine next steps and the direction Andover wants to move in.

There has to be a balance between daily operations and higher-lever thinking. Andover is an Innovation School District and as such has to consider how to develop resources and to focus in on the direction of nurturing and building excitement for the future. There are many minor challenges that all Superintendents encounter that you want to be handled well but you can't let the minor challenges preoccupy the direction of the district.

- How do you strike a balance

You have to have a team, a team you know, with the right people who can take on the 'debris' in the context of the larger vision.

- With budget cuts and financial challenges how do you balance funding with public requests

Through an extensive strategic investment process that is an open process of collecting data from schools, meeting with key district leaders, preparing analysis to be brought forward to the budget committee, holding forums on key goals and prioritizing results and bringing that information to Leadership for discussion.

- What is your general management approach

Dr. Berman said his management approach has evolved over time and he has learned a lot in the 22 years of his education career. Process is important, engaging as many people as possible on various teams and small groups. He realizes he does not need to be 'everywhere' and can guide the process without having to be at each meeting which empowers teams and facilitators. You have to trust the team to make decisions while observing and guiding the process and assuring that all voices are heard.

- Explain your Communication style

Dr. Berman writes a lot – he emails the entire staff with an update about every two weeks. He has written a lot of OpEds and had a Communications Director when he was Superintendent in Eugene.

Communication is vital be it through the parent portal, a communications director, webpage, Facebook, etc. Parents have to be involved and the more communication that is provided the more people feel engaged. Dr. Berman said he visits every single school multiple times and sets aside a four hour block to spend at each school. He asks three questions: What is the 'good' going on that he should communicate to the community, what are the concerns, and what are the concerns about the system and the direction.

Dr. Berman stays visible within the community as a member of the Rotary Club, Service Clubs, by attending award presentations and he enjoys being out a lot. He does a lot of communication and 'wandering' around and recommends making an investment in someone who takes charge of communications for the School System. In addition he also encourages informal engagements with business leaders which can be very beneficial, communication with outside groups and personal conversations that make a difference and working collaborative with the Town Management. Dr. Berman is impressed with Andover's Global Engagement Curriculum which builds leaders, provides a sense of service and engagement.

- You had a difficult time in your last District, was any progress made?

Dr. Berman said he inherited huge budget cuts and used furlough days for everyone to avoid layoffs and to stay within budget, economics was key. The budget was restored via a bond for \$10M in Technology. It provided the opportunity for new curriculum programs, use of iPads that engaged students, a redesign of high school work, and a major shift to focus on quality instruction and how to bring it into the classroom. Teachers and principals participated in year-long programs and the focus was on strategies for teachers to work with students; eventually increasing the graduation rate. He continued to make gains through difficult times.

- There are competing demands to meet Special Education needs; how would you handle this

Dr. Berman chaired the State-wide Special Education Task Force in Massachusetts and created policy change. He was the Chair of the Center for Adaptive Technology for Special Education students where the curriculum was designed to be accessible for all Special Education students. He has spent a lot of time ensuring programs have the necessary accommodations for students to access the curriculum. Most Special Education parents want their child to be part of the classroom which can be accomplished

through the use of technology and staff addressing the needs of as many students as possible. The right investment 'early' pays off.

- How do you foster confidence and convey your own to your team

If you have confidence you can handle most situations well. Communication is the key; you have to hear people, it is important to listen and not argue, and to be as transparent as you can be without getting totally distracted.

- How do you continue to manage moving the school system forward and manage the district as well

Dr. Berman supports the Project Based Learning Model that provides a balance while still using district curriculum. You have to provide a sense of consistency.

- Do you have any questions for the School Committee

Dr. Berman asked the School Committee what they would like to see. The responses included: restored confidence in parents, educators, and the leadership team, finding the right people for the interim positions, making the right key hires especially at Andover High School, stability, and a feel good proud again of our schools atmosphere.

II. Motion to Adjourn

At 8:40 P.M. on a motion by Paula Colby-Clements and seconded by Susan McGready, the Andover voted 5-0-0 adjourn the Interview Meeting of June 9, 2015. Roll call: J. Blumstein-Y, P. Colby-Clements-Y, T. Teichert-Y, S. McCready-Y, A. Gilbert-Y.

Respectfully submitted,

Dee DeLorenzo
Recording Secretary