

**Andover School Committee
Minutes of Thursday, December 10, 2020
Virtual Meeting**

Participants from the School Committee: Shannon Scully, Susan McCready, Tracey Spruce, Paul Murphy, and Lauren Conoscenti.

Also participating: Assistant Superintendents Sandra Trach and Sara Stetson, COO Stephen Nembirkow, Director of Communications Nicole Kieser and Human Resources Director Jessica Porter.

I. Call to Order

Chairperson Shannon Scully called the meeting to order at 7:04 P.M.
The meeting began with a Moment of Silence.

II. New Business

A. Interim Superintendent Candidate Interviews. Jess Porter provided information on the selection process which started with the Screening Committee who reviewed applications of 14 candidates. As a result of the interview, Kathleen Alward Smith and Dr. Claudia Bach came forward as the two interim finalists. The first interview is with Kathleen Smith. The attendees introduced themselves to Kathleen

7:05 PM Kathleen Alward Smith

1. Please tell us a bit about yourself, either personally or professionally, that would help us understand your fit for this role and for our district, and why you are interested in the 6-month interim superintendent opportunity here in Andover.

Kathleen said she has been in education for 43 years, and is most proud of coming into the field of education in 1977 to the Brockton Public Schools. When Chapter 766 came into play in 1972, she was one of the first educators to serve the Special Education population and pleased to get a position in Brockton as a Special Educator. During that time, she served as a special educator, an elementary teacher, and as a math coach. In 1981, with taxes being cut and jobs being lost in the public sector due to Prop 2 ½, she took on many different positions as other staff was cut. The longest time she served was in a junior high as a substantially separate teacher for children with severe learning disabilities, working with a small group of students, keeping them in district and making sure the students were successful. That led her to get a Master's Degree in School Adjustment Counseling and she was fortunate to get a job in the District working at all levels and working with many community organizations.

She graduated from N.E. School of Law and found herself working for children in in the area of Advocacy and Labor Law. There were many administrative opportunities in the Brockton Public Schools and eventually she became the Superintendent. She lived in the community and her children attended the public schools. She found terrific challenges with budgets, she was proud of the advocacy of the work they were able to do, and dealing with all the changes at that time.

Kathleen was prepared to retire in June of 2019, instead she went on to fill-in as an interim superintendent for one year at the Salem Public Schools on July 1, 2019 and became imbedded in the community-at-large. She is interested in coming to Andover for the interim position and willing to come to share any of her expertise.

2. Describe your leadership style, touching upon how you would collaborate with the current leadership team and help rebuild relationships with faculty and staff.

Kathleen said she is very approachable and would be very collaborative relying on the administrative team, and having an open dialogue and developing strong relationships with them. She is an instructional, educational, and a managerial leader. She would work on the priorities and decisions that have to be made and ensure support to the principals and their schools. She is accessible, and sees herself as a visible leader for the entire team to reach every aspect of what is happening in the District. She made sure there was a level of support and opportunities to work with the Directors at Brockton, working with the principals and they knew she was just a phone call away to move the work along in the District.

She spoke about her connections in Brockton and Salem and how she connected with teachers, creating a Superintendent's Teacher Advisor Council in both Districts. The meetings were held once a month and always well attended and invigorating. During a loss of funding in Brockton that severely affected the school budget, they were minus 80 teachers when they opened the doors in September. She talked to the teachers about how she, as a teacher, experienced budget cuts in the 1980's how they inspired students, and worked to get back the 80 teachers lost. Teachers and principals worked together to make sure the students and teachers got what they needed. Kathleen considers herself to be a relationship builder because it makes a difference. It is important to listen to teachers and reward the good work they do every day.

3. Please give us an example of when something you did or someone else did fell short of your expectations and how you responded to that set back.

During some very trying times in Brockton when they had to cut millions of dollars from the budget, Kathleen went to great lengths to plan a retreat with her Executive Team of 11-12 members. There was a lot of frustration at this time. At the end of the retreat, she realized it fell flat. She looked at her team and talked with them about the dysfunction of a team realized there were changes to be made in looking productively at their roles and supporting other team members. They regrouped, reset, and came back together as a strong leadership team. In 2019, when she left Brockton, a number of executive team members she mentored succeeded in moving up.

4. In the age of rapid communication and in a school community of engaged parents/families, how would you work to guide APS communications (at the district and building levels) to be timely, accurate, proactive, and responsive for all stakeholders, most critically students, parents/families, faculty, and staff? How can we improve the dialogue between school & home? How can our communications reflect what APS says it wants which is the partnership between families and the schools?

The partnership with parents is critical, parents are the most important stake holders, and great importance to building a communications action plan. If Andover already has that, she would have to look at what is successful and where the areas of concern are. In Brockton, she held quarterly meetings throughout the year where parents could ask questions. She also found she needed to communicate with parents in a smaller venue, so she started a 'Tea with the Superintendent' with about 20 parents attending at each school. The information gained in the smaller setting was more valuable in both districts, Brockton and Salem.

It is important, as a District, that we use a connection communication that is inspirational and informative to all parents, teachers, and principals. Communication is something we need to take seriously. Communications during the snowstorm of 2015 when they had 15" of snow were very beneficial in getting students back in school and parents helping out. Communications can be in many forms. They developed a State of the Schools Address and an opportunity for the

Superintendent to go before the City Counselors with information that told the story of what the schools needed and why. You need to market yourself. Andover has done an excellent job with the dedication paid to communicating information. She would put herself out there meeting with students, parents, and members of the community making sure the Superintendent was still the visible leader.

5. Like most MA districts during this pandemic, Andover is employing a hybrid model to de-densify the schools in order to provide some in-person learning for students. Right now, there is a bit of tension between the many who fear that the rising COVID cases indicate that the worst is yet to come, and the Governor and families who would like to see schools to increase the number of in-person days, especially for our younger learners. What data would you use, and with whom will you consult, to determine if Andover's learning model needs to change -- either to move from a hybrid model to a fully remote one or to add days to our elementary schedule?

Kathleen said she gathered information on the learning models Andover is currently using. This is a frustrating time for everyone that we are in a situation where our Governor talks about how important it is that students have in-school learning. We know that and that we are a part of a student's daily lives during their education and this has been very difficult. We can do a much better job, we have the data we need but also have concerns. We need support from our leaders to make sure we have some kind of surveillance testing for all communities. Andover has done everything possible to try to bring students back to school and Rita Casper has been diligent with collecting the data. You have to be a strong advocate state-wide when you see a need that has to be addressed. This is a need that is not being addressed in all communities.

6. The budget process is already underway and, as usual, we expect to have more needs than we can reasonably fund. Additionally, uncertainty in state revenue and education aid make the fiscal realities of this budget season even more difficult than is typical. How do you expect your budget process experience to help us determine the highest priority needs of the district and determine a budget recommendation for Town Meeting?

The most important role of the School Committee is to make sure you are setting educational goals and priorities. What you don't know right now is the support you will be getting from the State. One of the most important things to do would be to talk with each member of the School Committee to find out the priorities and which ones are most important to fund. Looking at Andover's class sizes (18-20 students) it seems you are well funded, so this may be a year for status quo. Are we able to prioritize to run the District in a way that benefits our students and opportunities for students? In Brockton, when the budget season came around she used a budget barometer that was available for everyone to see what could be reduced, and then build back into the budget. She would look at the processes in place in Andover presently and would work with the Committee to build a budget barometer.

Follow-up questions:

Tracey Spruce said one of the big challenges especially right now with the toggling between remote and hybrid-person and remote is the mental health of students. How might you address this in Andover?

Kathleen would meet with personnel in the District involved and most especially the teachers. Teachers hear the struggle of students. In Brockton, she made sure they put together a team to address what a family might need for support, how we were triaging struggling families, and made sure we were addressing whatever need a student has to make sure we have the right person in place. It looks to her like Andover prides itself in hiring the best instructors around who are developing

relationships. She would look to see where the need is and what supports we can put in place to make sure children are receiving what they need from the Andover Public Schools. She would take this task very seriously.

7. Building Project: Do you have experience working with State on School Building Projects and how to work with the Community to make them feel comfortable making the investment in a school community.

It is amazing to Kathleen how slow the process works. She started a Facility Master Plan in Brockton working with MSBA on a number of projects, and continually submitting projects. One Saturday, she scheduled a bus tour inviting the City Counselors to join them to view the conditions in the 25 schools in Brockton the advocacy started there. In the end, they were well poised to put their application into MSBA. You have to market yourself. Before she left Brockton, they created a brochure on what Brockton offers as a public school and why you want to choose the Brockton Public Schools. She feels very prepared to jump in and become a member of the Andover Community and to advocate for the projects that are happening.

One of the most important jobs of a superintendent is the day-to-day working with the School Committee. She is most proud of the relationships she made with the School Committees in Brockton and in Salem and the retreats they held. Every evening she sent out a Connect-Ed message to the School Committee to let them know what happened in the District each day. She would commit to doing the same work with the Andover School Committee.

Kathleen thanked the School Committee for this opportunity. Andover has done an excellent job supporting education.

8:00 PM Claudia Bach, Ed.D.

Jess Porter welcomed Claudia Bach and each School Committee member introduced themselves.

1. Please tell us about yourself, either personally or professionally, that would help us understand your fit for this role and for our district, and why you are interested in the 6-month interim superintendent opportunity here in Andover.

Dr. Bach said that she was a teacher for most of her career teaching in different countries, both at the elementary and high school level. Eventually, she became more interested in an administrative role. She was recruited into the Urban Superintendent's Program at Harvard and served in three districts, the first interning in Sacramento City, California, then in a small rural district in Oregon, and her last role was as Superintendent in Andover. All three different kinds of environments from city to urban to suburban. After her retirement from Andover, she went onto work for DESE as Director of Education Policy, Preparation, and Leadership for three years. Her role was in educator improvement overseeing the overhaul of the teacher and administrator evaluation programs. She never imagined becoming a Superintendent again, but she has always held up her hand to help in the Andover Community because that has been important to her. She worked on the Committee for the Historic Mill District and held a workshop on the Teacher Evaluation Program with the Committee in 2018. She has been asked to be an interim superintendent by MASC a number of times, but she always turned them down because she was involved in a number of other educationally based activities.

The work that is pertinent to where we are now, is her work done as a member of the Pike School Board of Trustees. Over the last nine months, they have been working on a very detailed COVID plan meeting several times a week developing the Emergency Policy for COVID which she shared with Andover because it was important that they aligned themselves with Andover and that they

made contact with people in the School District and Town Departments, especially the Public Health Department. They put together a very detailed plan that parallels much of what Andover has done.

Claudia said she has kept current in a number of areas. She has always cared about Andover Public Schools and the Andover Community and was encouraged by several people to apply. She does care deeply about Andover, this is her community and is eager, in these times of great challenge, to help in a bigger way.

2. Describe your leadership style, touching upon how you would collaborate with the current leadership team and help rebuild relationships with faculty and staff.

Claudia believes in building teams, but when a new person joins a team the team needs to re-form. She sees three teams, one with the School Committee which is an important association with open and honest conversations, the team needs to work together to move the budget forward. The Superintendent and her team need to be at the School Committee's side to make the case for proposing the budget. The second team is the Central Office Team. Forming a team with them would be a major effort and an important job. She would be spending time talking with the Central Office Team on the challenges, major issues, and what the problems are. She gives a lot of support to make sure people know they can count on her to make their jobs more successful.

The third team would be formed with the school principals. She has always felt that the organization chart should be turned upside down because our core mission and what we are charged to do happens in our classrooms with a teacher and students. That is our prime business. The Principals' main job is to ensure that we produce the best educated students that we possibly can. All of Central Office should be in support and on board with that, and to take time to get to the schools to understand what their responsibility is to be in support of that.

3. Please give us an example of when something you did or someone else did fell short of your expectations and how you responded to that set back.

Claudia said she is always self-critical of her own expectations. In terms of other people, she had the need to not renew the contract of a senior administrator, who was nice and skilled in many ways, but not effective in that particular job. The person was not right for the job and it was time to part ways. She helped that person in every possible way to find another position, that was higher and in a district, that was a better fit, and where they were much more successful.

4. In the age of rapid communication and in a school community of engaged parents/families, how would you work to guide APS communications (at the district and building levels) to be timely, accurate, proactive, and responsive for all stakeholders, most critically students, parents/families, faculty, and staff? How can we improve the dialogue between school & home? How can our communications reflect what APS says it wants: partnership between families and the schools?

There is an opportunity for the interim superintendent to come in and refresh, renew, or increase communications. There must be a communication plan. When a new person comes on board there is an opportunity to reintroduce herself to the community. She did the superintendent evaluation workshop for the Committee. There are four standards; the first two are curriculum management and management of the operation; the third is one we never talk about; Family and Community Engagement. These all need to be addressed, and we need to be attentive, an active listener, and learn what are our parents' concerns are. Parents are exhausted trying to do so many things these days. This is a community that is quite diverse, hurting, and trying to balance all these things.

Today's Townsman included a parent letter stating that the hybrid learning model wasn't working and students are falling behind. The letter was polite and respectful and worth listening to; the parent concerns are real. Andover has a red designation, we are hitting the surge within the surge, and this is the worst time to talk about easing up on the COVID mitigation planning; yet parents have a good point. We have to figure out every way we can increase the two-way conversation through various communication venues. Parents are looking for help and resources, and are deeply concerned about the mental health of their students. Children and their families have been traumatized in many ways and this is going to be a big issue in planning for the future. It is important to have a conversation with parents as much we can about why decisions have been made. We need to communicate, communicate, communicate. You can't communicate too much.

5. Like most MA districts during this pandemic, Andover is employing a hybrid model to de-densify the schools in order to provide some in-person learning for students. Right now, there is a bit of tension between the many who fear that the rising COVID cases indicate that the worst is yet to come, and the governor and families who would like to see schools to increase the number of in-person days, especially for our younger learners. What data would you use, and with whom will you consult, to determine if our learning model needs to change - either to move from a hybrid model to a fully remote one or to add days to our elementary schedule?

A number of other Districts have worked hard and have not been able to have a hybrid model, and sometimes it comes down to having the space to do this. It is very difficult to conform with all of the DESE protocols for social distancing and at the same time to have everybody in school at the same time. Some districts have tried to phase in in school learning, having elementary students coming back full time in-person, it would be interesting to find out how they did that and tweak our plan to some degree and see if we can bring back some portion of our students. Can we do better than that? It is always good to take a look at what other districts are doing and there may be a way to meet some of the parents' concerns.

6. The budget process is already underway and, as usual, we expect to have more needs than we can reasonably fund. Additionally, uncertainty in state revenue and education aid make the fiscal realities of this budget season even more difficult than is typical. How do you expect your budget process experience to help us determine the highest priority needs of the district and determine a budget recommendation for Town Meeting?

Preparing the District in the best way to so that we can bring in the very best Superintendent in July is important. The budget and building process are continuing as are contract negotiations. Claudia feels that Shannon is almost the expert in understanding the budget, all the details that make up the budget, what the costs and categories are. She understands the budget process, and taken a consensus budget in working with the three Boards together.

Claudia said she has been successful at asking people to look at the budget in a slightly different way. You might have the greatest mission, strategic plan, but it is the budget that is telling you what you value. The difficult exercise is funding the most core pieces of our business, determining if the money is going there is first and foremost, and are there areas that can wait to be funded in the future. The principals need to look at their budgets and their particular situation. It is important to ask them to think about what is essential.

When HPE and WHMS came on board we were going through an enormous economic down time, redistricting and the budgets were very tight. We were in the midst of a real struggle. The Principals worked together and in teams to understand the budget and the costs and began to understand the needs of not only their schools but of the other schools and departments. There are ways of doing some economizing in tough times. Thousands of dollars have been spent due to COVID. She hopes

that the PPP Program, which brought funding to the District in the fall will continue , and that there will be other Federal or State funding for the school district. A goal would be to bring another consensus budget if possible.

Specific Questions or any Follow Ups

1. Mental Health Impacts of the Pandemic. We are starting to see this bubble up with students especially as we toggle back and forth between hybrid a remote. How would you address this?

We need to form a plan. We can't think COVID has gone away and we are back to normal. We have to look at the aftermath and the plan has to start right now as does the engagement with parents. It could be a budget item in terms of added supports, or swapped with another budget item. We will be facing a lot of mental health issues and it doesn't matter if we are an affluent distract, we are going to see it. We should put together a task force in the next six months to plan for what we can do right now and what the plan might look like when all of the students are back and have more in-person access to some of the specialists in our area.

2. We are in the midst of building project in partnership with MSBA and intend to ask voters at Town Meeting to approve a funding article this spring. How would you apply your experience to this project?

Claudia was the Superintendent when the HPE/WHMS project was brought forward and also when Bancroft was started working with MSBA on funding and architects. She has been impressed with some of the outreach already done and watched the very professionally developed Zoom meeting with everyone participating. She believes Andover has been funded for this project because you are solving two problems; replacing West Elementary and Shawsheen Pre-school on one campus, similar to what was done with HPE and WHMS.

She is happy that Mark Johnson is still involved with the school building projects because he was head of the High Plain and WHMS Building Committee. It is not only the school family, it is the community that has to be involved. The vast majority of the community probably doesn't have much information about the project. She and Mark Johnson went to over a hundred meetings everywhere throughout the community to garner support for an HPE/WHMS Town Meeting vote. Partnerships and getting the word out is most important. They went to the Senior Center more than once, it is essential to recruit those senior people who support the schools. It takes a monumental effort to get the message out to the whole community.

Claudia asked what the School Committee would consider success in the next six months.

Shannon replied that right now it feels like it is survival mode, are we going remote/hybrid, dealing with groups having difficult time, uncertainty, keeping the ship afloat and providing the most possible services to students that can be provided. Everyone is overburdened and staff is working incredibly hard. Success would be serving all of it. She is confident that the Andover Team is doing their very best. We do have strategic initiatives to move forward. We need to get the buildings built and addressing the long-term obligations. Success is finding a new superintendent to lead the District.

Susan agreed that it has been difficult for parents, teachers, students. We are fortunate in Andover to have a strong administrative team, principals, and teachers. Need a person who can balance being a supporting force, and helping by having a fresh set of eyes to offer some prospective that when

you are in the weeds so much you may lose sight of something. It is a difficult time to be moving forward but we are moving very strongly forward with the building projects.

Claudia knows what a difficult time this is, these are incredibly trying times for everyone working in the schools. For her, success would look like having a really is a good plan to return for full-in person learning full time. Having a consensus budget passing at Town Meeting is an important goal even though it is a tough time to do that. She looks forward to helping with moving the building project forward. Having a successful teacher contract would be an important goal. Having a plan in place that includes action and aids that affect our students, staff and parents. Having enough stability so that we can begin to be much more supportive of a professional culture where people are proud and respectful of each other professionally throughout the District and move to a culture where we celebrate the successes we do have in place, and that we have joy.

The Committee thanked Claudia for talking with them tonight.

Shannon reminded the Community is that they would like to hear feedback from the entire school community. Tomorrow a short survey will be sent out and the Committee would appreciate any feedback on each of the candidates. The survey will close on Wednesday evening and we will also be reconvening in a regular business meeting on December 17th to deliberate and talk about a selection and vote on a selection to pursue a contract with.

III. Adjournment

At 9:09 P.M. Tracey Spruce moved to adjourn the meeting of Thursday, December 10, 2020. The motion was seconded by Susan McCready. Roll call: P. Murphy-Y, L. Conoscenti-Y, T. Spruce-Y, S. McCready-Y, S. Scully-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Dee DeLorenzo
Recording Secretary