

Union #28 Joint Supervisory Committee
Final Interviews of Candidates for Superintendent
Friday, February 16, 2024, Swift River School
Final Minutes

Present: Mandy Blackbird, Kate Woodward, Mark Blatchley, Nancy Slator, Julie Martel, Jeremy Mailloux, Bethany Rose, Jess Rocheleau, Becky Tew, Beth Erviti, Mackensey Bailey, Members; Steven Blinder, Chair; U#28 Principals; Public Members.

Call to Order:

Steven called the meeting to order at 4:36 and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He commented that organizing this meeting proved challenging due to time commitments this week and thanked everyone for attending. Each candidate will be interviewed for 45 minutes, followed by a 30-minute period for interaction with the public. Public comment will be held after all three interviews are completed. He also asked JSC members to introduce themselves when they ask questions. Candidates will have about 3 minutes per question.

CANDIDATE 1: Deanna LeBlanc, M.Ed.

Q1 Asked by Mandy. Answer: There are some strong things you can do in Leadership Teams. A huge proponent of 60-day attainable goals (breaking down longer-term goals into these chunks). Set clear expectations and benchmarks. When evaluating a staff member, be very clear about what's required to be proficient in an area. It's critical to be clear and important to set reasonable goals aligned with what the work we're doing. Finally, supporting the work is crucial.

Q2 Asked by Steven. Answer: One thing I'm involved in right now is a grant redesigning the high school experience for students. We have to manage this work in separate teams; part of it is site visits. I've been involved in the grant from the start, so I'm super excited about it, but I don't need to be involved in every site visit. We've brought more people in and enriched the process by involving them. In my district, we're burdened with many things going on, but one fantastic opportunity we're pursuing with the state involves just the right team, which is also exciting. One challenge for me is communicating but I take feedback on that.

Q3 Asked by Becky. Answer: I'm the Director of Curriculum and responsible for a state grant, critical to my own growth and the growth of the district. I'm engaged in a lot of professional learning. Key to the work is understanding that your specific case isn't universal. We always need to have the space to have those conversations. We need to be willing to interrogate our own perspective. Through that work, we've been looking at our policies and procedures to make sure they're best practices for students, so that all feel reflected and included in our community.

Q4 Asked by Jeremy. Answer: Every child deserves to see themselves in the books and texts they're reading. They need to see themselves as positive characters, doing great work, persevering. That's a key piece for me looking at our literacy curriculum. Are they really representative of our students? If not, they won't be engaged. That's not okay. In the history curriculum, there are so many tools out there to help you review them from the perspective of DEI. There's a textbook in every school that's outdated and says things that it shouldn't say. Bias doesn't show up in one form; there are many, and we need to talk about and address bias in the moment for students as well as staff. Also need to make sure that every curriculum we put before students are of a high standard, keeping that expectation for students.

Q5 Asked by Steven: Answer: When the visiting team came to my district, they saw a display; we're involved in implementing a new program that collects data in the classrooms about the texts students use. After the team departed, we used the data to set our next 60-day goal. We saw a huge growth in implementation but not in student ownership. Looking at data let us see where students weren't owning it. Data showed us where we needed to make effective instructional shifts. The report that to me is the most valuable is the one that connects the data to the standards, giving us the opportunity to reflect on how and when we're teaching different parts of the curriculum.

Q6 Asked by Jeremy. Answer: Advocacy. There aren't enough resources out there for our students. So a district leader needs to advocate for more resources. I'm good at that. There are lots of different trainings out there low-cost or no-cost; we need to get people trained. Then there's making sure staff have what they need to do their work. Need open lines of communication, involving all stakeholders in the conversation, then using that to prioritize the allocation of resources.

Q7 Asked by Mandy. Answer: The first thing a leader does is takes the time to learn the context of where you're entering. Get to know the stakeholders, students, staff, community. That takes a good amount of time. There are certainly short-term things that we'll pursue at the same time, but it's important to get a clear sense of the leadership and culture. Part of that is looking at how goals were set. Empowering leaders to do the work they need to do is important. I need to get to know the Principals, I need to empower the staff. I'm happy to reach out for advice a lot from colleagues. We also need to be flexible because things happen and we need to make a judgment. We have to be responsive and thoughtful at these times. So start with learning, then becoming more flexible over time. The more we can get people to look at and understand their practice and other people's practices, the better.

Q8 Asked by Mark. Answer: I've participated as an educator in collective bargaining, have been involved in bargaining before. As administrator, mostly observing, also there to answer questions about the process. Having a much more open forum and clear discussions with teachers about where things are at for the approaching year, gathering data, is also important. The more the Supt is involved, the better. There are some hard lines we have to keep, but the more we all know, the better. We need to collaborate. At the end of the day, an us-vs-them situation is not satisfying to anyone. I look forward to collaboration on this.

Q9 Asked by Mackensey. Answer: In my district, there are multiple towns. I'm well aware of that. There's one large SC, however. But Town Selectboards are very much involved; we spend a good amount of time connecting with them. Communicating constantly is important. I've been through challenges where people feel disconnected or not communicated with. My goal during first year is to attend as many Town and SC meetings as possible, and beyond that, regularly reaching out. If I didn't communicate, there'd be a lot more points of tension at SC meetings. Sometimes we can't share everything, but it's important to point out that I'm not able to share something in a given moment. When there's conflict, it's important to sit down and deal with it, work through it. No matter how it goes, communicating about the conflict in a transparent way is critical. It's very similar cultivating relationships with stakeholders. It's critical for everyone to understand how things work. I do have experience working with SCs and Selectboards, it's a challenge I'm excited about.

Q10 Asked by Nancy. Answer: This has changed a lot over the years. The state has adopted a peer-review process lately that's not best for everyone. What I've found a lot of success with is working with the selection team, getting people who're excited about the work. What do we want our instruction to look like in HS math, for example? Getting teachers to really think about what we want instruction to look like, look at our materials, and put them up against what our goals are. How do the materials support our goals, how might they fall short? That approach is how we talk about what's good instructional material.

Q11 Asked by Steven. Answer: One thing I noticed when visiting is I saw Leadership Team members in each building. That's really important and something I feel strongly about. Students should know who upper leadership are; they should be available to talk to, to cultivate relationships with. We need to take the time to do that, which can be hard. It won't happen right away, but it should increase over time. There are absolutely times when meeting quickly via Zoom is necessary, but we all need to meet together, connecting with each other, to support communication and our work. But to make students feel connected, we need to put time in to help them feel included. We need two-way communication,

but we also need a clear process for one-way communication so that everyone is hearing the same thing going out; that's critical as well.

Q12 Asked by Steven. Answer: One clear piece is, what are our priorities? We need to hear from school leaders, student services, etc., to understand our priorities and resources. Our resources need to be aligned clearly to what our mission and vision are. If they're misaligned, we need to come in and ask questions. Where do we go next? It's important for me to learn municipal budgeting process and I'm prepared to do that. I'll be learning in that process. Also important to empower director of finance & operations to get training to do that work. Leaders need the opportunity to speak to each other and advocate for the resources they need. Where are we now and where do we see us headed? That's just how the budget process works. As for oversight, we need to be able to make shifts to do what we need to do. Unfortunately, the budget forecast this year is not great from the state, so having open and transparent conversations is important. We need to show we're out there advocating, talking about Chapter 70, advocating for the Towns and our students.

Steven invited JSC members to ask follow-up questions.

Beth asked: You use the word "communication" a lot in your answers. Give me a great example of how you've used communication to solve a problem. Answer: I'll talk about HS math curriculum. We selected one a couple of years ago; the process went well, the teachers selected. A month ago, the teachers decided they weren't thrilled with the curriculum. A lot of frustration was shown, though it was professional. I took the time to find out why so much frustration. We learned there was a lot of trickiness around user access; that was a technological problem. Also found out this doesn't quite fit the goals we have. That's something we can do something about. Just asking questions, listening and talking. We can discover where we can move forward, and we bring people along. Sometimes we have to be willing to listen, and it's critical we take this time.

Candidate had no questions for JSC, thanked them for the opportunity to interview.

Steven explained the next step: Members of the public can meet with the candidate in the cafeteria. JSC will call all candidates later this evening. If JSC's deliberations extend far enough tonight, candidates will be informed that deliberations will finish at the meeting next week.

CANDIDATE 2: Christine Shea, Ed.D.

Steven reminded the public that each candidate will be interviewed for 45 minutes, followed by a 30-minute period for interaction with the public. Public comment will be held after all three interviews. He also asked JSC members to introduce themselves when they ask questions. Candidates will have about 3 minutes per question.

Q1 Asked by Mandy. Answer: Any relationship with staff is about building relationships. It can be on a professional level, not necessarily personal if one so chooses. The way I assess those I work with is ongoing. You have to deal with things as they come up. I like giving real positive feedback, pointing out their strengths. Job descriptions are important so there's no confusion about what someone is expected to do. I encourage people to come to me if something's not working and address questions as they come up. Exemplary employees ask for help; that leads to success. They take care in the work they're doing. If someone's not invested in the work, the quality of their work will not be what it could. Matching strengths to job requirements is very important. Talking about this and shifting responsibilities around is important. My secretary likes to organize events, and now she does that and really enjoys it. You listen to staff, you build on their strengths, you give them feedback. That leads to stronger relationships and job performance.

Q2 Asked by Steven. Answer: One decision at a time: In current districts, we have an Early Childhood Center with half-days for 3- and 4-year-olds. An issue we have is opening classrooms for full days. The Center has been doing this successfully for a very long time. We wrote a grant for ECE and are looking to get that. A decision I had to make was how to staff the grant. We want to put all our funds toward the classroom and getting it to the kids. We're working with community partners on collaborative decisions here and it took us about six months to find the right person to coordinate the grant. Some people thought it was holding up the grant funds, but we found someone who's very strong, and she's doing a great job. If we had to make that decision, putting more money into classrooms or hiring someone, I think it turned out well. Not everyone will agree with your decisions. There can be blind spots, and we have to look at how the decision is working. On a smaller scale, I'm a shelter coordinator for the district and a couple of times, there was no shelter for some families, and I provided housing for them out of some funds. We don't want students and their families living out of their cars. Funds are limited, but I think this was the right decision for those monies. Not everyone agreed with that, but I felt I had to make that difficult decision in the moment. Another decision I just had to make was about a student coming from Pittsfield. He wanted to go to Westfield, but when we looked at the time he'd have to get on the bus, and that he was often tardy, I suggested he register locally, and I could tell he agreed with that. I feel like it's the right decision, but we get to see how all decisions turn out.

Q3 Asked by Becky. Answer: In my last position and my current one, I did participate in a good deal of PD around introspection and what are my biases, how I see the world, how that affects how I see other people, etc. This was challenging – you want to respect everybody and you also want to learn. We're working with the Leadership Team first on equity and then the staff are participating. You want to think about what is your privilege and how this affects other people. The other thing is what are the practices. We want to change hearts and minds but we also want to affect the structural aspects of the systems that affect our lives. We've done that this past year, and when I was working with the state as support, we worked with many different populations of students, so I thought it was important to do that work with everyone. Sometimes this involves difficult conversations. In Westfield, there are people with

diverse backgrounds. I think having cultural responsive practices in our schools is really important. We also need to provide opportunities for the students to reflect on who they are, and they need to be made to feel safe. I was able to feel these schools last week, and it felt very warm to me, a place kids enjoyed being. I feel schools are gems in communities.

Q4 Asked by Jeremy. Answer: One thing that's ahead of us is tackling our health curriculum. We've had some PD for staff around working with students and honoring and respecting their identities. We just got a new literacy program we're still learning in relation to DEI. Does it go far enough? Is it really what it says it is? In my office, we oversee Power School and we have to report to the state in certain ways, but we follow the most up-to-date policies about how students identify themselves. We're very respectful of that, very respectful of the students. Knowing about DEI and having our values come out through that way as well is important, supporting all identities. With our health curriculum, the state sent someone out for PD last year working with LGBTQ+ students, just talking about their experiences. It's just very powerful to hear what people say about how they feel they're being included. A list of things that make them feel important, but some staff might not think are important. Hearing directly from students is different from reading in a book or reading some policy. That really shifted hearts and minds and practices.

Q5 Asked by Steven. Answer: I've used a lot of data in some of my positions. Most recently we had an intervention in learning reading skills. We used DIBELS. We're looking at beginning of year and middle of year data and are trying to see if this intervention is effective and something we'd like to continue. We've also done culture and climate surveys that were reported out to the community and to staff. Questions like what makes you want to come to school, do you have friends, etc.? Looking at assessment data gives you some info, but listening to students and families gives you more insight. We're collecting a lot of data for the budgeting process; it's a tough year with ESSER ending. We're collecting data on staffing, class size, class needs, Adjustment Counselors, etc. Using data to try to make hard decisions like cutting positions, and praying more money will be coming in from somewhere.

Q6 Asked by Jeremy. Answer: The impact is real. Educators make an impact every day. Building relationships with students, listening, providing support. Some schools have counselors coming in for students who need that additional support. A nice thing about U#28 is that the schools are small and you can get to know the staff and students. It's important to be a good listener, really listen to others, and think about how to work collaboratively with anything arises from that.

Q7 Asked by Mandy. Answer: My first thought as a leader is to support that: where the district is, what its plan is, why that PD was selected. It's important to come into a district to listen and learn about the plans that are in place so you can help support it.

Q8 Asked by Mackensey. Answer: I've been more on management side than teacher side, starting when I was an assistant principal. I was on joint labor-management committee meeting monthly to talk about ongoing problems so we could solve them before they came to bargaining problems. I've had experience negotiating contracts, mostly with paraeducators. Right now I oversee a PD committee with the union president (there are teachers on it), working with him, so when we went into negotiations this fall, we were done in a couple of days. The relationship and collaboration produced a really positive process. The role of the Supt is a good question: Are they at that table? Is it SC at the table and Supt more in the background? Districts do it differently. I'm comfortable finding out how it works here and taking on that role, whether at the table or more in the background.

Q9 Asked by Mackensey. Answer: Entering a job, it's important to meet with every SC member to listen and ask questions about what their concerns are. It's an ongoing relationship with each SC and each Town and each member. It's really important. I always have a listening ear and an open door. Four distinct SCs and five towns, it will really take some time to learn all this. What's really unique to each school, and what are the commonalities and strengths we can bring together to share across the district. If there are any conflicts, I hope they won't get so big that we have to bring somebody in or resort to some process. I hope some conflict could be worked through with conversation, listening to each other and figuring that out in an ongoing way. Building relationships is important regardless of the role. It's a little different role for staff members than parents or caretakers. There are differences, but the commonality is being available and working out those differences. I can also help communicate across those towns and schools because I'd be working across towns and schools.

Q10 Asked by Nancy. Answer: The first thing is to find out who are the people who should be involved in that decision. I wouldn't want to do that myself. There are rubrics out there to help you find curricula that are high quality. You want curricula to be the center of the learning, asking questions and interacting. The teacher shouldn't be at the center, but just set up the environment for learning. And the kids need to read. We also need to ask who we might be leaving out in different curricula. We want curricula to have some research-based effectiveness behind them. I'd like to have a committee of people looking at that curriculum. You can bring in different publishers, literature, trade books to help you figure this out.

Q11 Asked by Steven. Answer: That's a very good question. Going through this process has helped me think about how that's done, thinking about how leadership gets together at different schools or use remote tools when necessary. Virtual meetings aren't the end-all be-all, however; we need to be in person meeting at the different schools to discuss the important issues and topics. I can use various means of communication to be available. Preserving the uniqueness of the schools as well as building on the strengths and commonalities are both important, and I'd rely on the Leadership Team to help learn that. Also, find ways to have fun and get to know each other. These jobs can be hard, so getting together, going into Preschool, going out for lunch, going on retreats.

Q12 Asked by Steven. Answer: It's an important topic. Learning how the budgeting process works here involves meeting with the Principals and staff to see what needs the schools have this year. Before even entering budget process, it's important to understand where we are and what we need. Some of the role is getting started with the staff, then there's working with the SCs. Each town has a SC and there's a U#28 budget as well. The Supt's role is to work with the towns and the SCs. That's something I'd want to learn too: how it works now, how to improve that, but overall, meet with towns early and often, find out what their financial outlook looks like. Find the best collaborative process possible, then oversight is ongoing, working with the finance director to keep on top of that.

Steven invited JSC members to ask follow-up questions.

Beth asked: You've mentioned having an open door policy and being willing to talk with people and resolve issues. Can you give us one example of resolving a sticky situation, using your skills of listening and communication? Answer: Sure, in one case, a parent talks with a staff member, is not happy, goes to the Principal, they're not happy, then they come to me. I oversee the English Learners program, and

I've had some parents meet with me. One time a student took MCAS in English when he should have taken it in Spanish. That's a big mistake. My approach was to invite the family in. I didn't blame them for being angry. And I listened: where are you coming from, why did this happen. I knew from the school side, there was a change in staff and the new staff missed that. You have to think about your responsibilities to the family, the staff member, and the staff. I took responsibility for that since MCAS goes through my office. Let's talk to the state. The school had already spoken with the student sometimes, but not in that case. I listened, and we came up with the best solution possible. The family can always go to the state themselves. In the end they had to wait till the next round to get the test in Spanish. That's one example of working through it as best you can.

Candidate asked about the timeline. Steven answered: It's loose. **JSC established the candidate had some time to interact with the public, but could use some of that time for her questions.**

Candidate: U#28 is unique in its structure, with 5 towns, 4 schools, each with its SC and a Union JSC – how do you see it working? What's a strength and challenges, and would you change anything?

Becky: Our towns have a lot of things in common. I'd like to see more of a narrative about those similarities so we can build on them together. More communication from leadership about the differences and similarities, and what can we capitalize on to share and build together. When that communication isn't supported, there are more possibilities for conflicts around budget or decisions made on the leadership level. Being able to facilitate that would be an important strength for the new Supt. Maintaining our investment in the community hubs we have in our schools is important. I'd want a leader listening to each individual town to find out what they need to maintain an investment in the school within the community. Bringing people in to support the school even if they don't have children going there, for example.

Mark: Seconded idea that the schools are central hubs to our communities. There are differences, three different communities represented. It's hard to respond to problems on JSC that are only happening in one community. It's important for Supt to bring awareness about these problems to JSC so everyone knows about them.

Candidate: Yes, schools are central to communities, and it's kind of a responsibility to invite people in, but there's also joy; people care about what happens here. My other question: About the budget process, what do you see as the challenges this year and strengths?

Steven: Not sure about strengths. Challenges are that there could be more outreach to local Fin Coms. That's an important piece to be proactive about.

Beth: Our new finance officer, Caitlin, is a strength. She presents the budget in a realistic, clear, understandable, beautiful way so that we can all understand it.

Jeremy: All schools are dealing with loss of ESSER, less Chapter 70. Caitlin presents a very conservative, careful picture, which is a strength. Very careful planning to account for loss of funding like this.

Mackensy: A challenge is being transparent about the budget, how the decisions are made, etc. SC members need to have a clear understanding of this so they can present it to the Town for a vote. Supt needs to help SCs by being transparent.

Mark: Ongoing relationships with town govts are important to maintain.

Steven explained the next step: Members of the public can meet with the candidate in the cafeteria. JSC will call all candidates later this evening. If JSC's deliberations extend far enough tonight, candidates will be informed that deliberations will finish at the meeting next week.

CANDIDATE 3: Shannon White-Cleveland, M.Ed.

Steven reminded the public that each candidate will be interviewed for 45 minutes, followed by a 30-minute period for interaction with the public. Public comment will be held after all three interviews. He also asked JSC members to introduce themselves when they ask questions. Candidates will have about 3 minutes per question.

Q1 Asked by Mandy. Answer: I think that whenever you assess performance, it depends on the expectations of the role. It'd be different for administrators, instructional staff, etc., and would be unique to their job descriptions. To any of them, it would start with some honest conversations, build relationships with them so that they trust you and can be vulnerable, seeing you as someone who is trying to build their capacity. When not getting results, having frank conversations about barriers and why things aren't happening the way they should. That's the cornerstone for anybody.

Q2 Asked by Steven. Answer: I've made so many decisions, it's hard to pick. When you're in an educational leadership role, it's important who you bring onto the Leadership Team. One time, bringing in a particular person for a role did not have a lot of experience, but trusting the team I brought on to help me make the decision made it turn out well. I don't make decisions all on my own but take into consideration the thoughts of the committee or team involved. It wasn't an easy decision to hire this person since we had an in-house candidate, and it's risky not to go with that candidate. As for blind spots, I underestimated that particular candidate, thinking I had the answer before I fully understood him.

Q3 Asked by Becky. Answer: There's a real focus on diversity in Athol, which is changing quickly as a community. I had some excellent training recently as part of the Leadership Team, which built our interpersonal connections but also revealed things about the personal perspectives everyone is bringing to the table. I learned so much about my coworkers; it was so impactful. What are students bringing in with their identities that we don't know about? I was selected for a fellowship for the Influence 100 program for training leaders to make the changes that are coming quickly in education. It's really opened my eyes. DESE has partnered with educational think tanks to make progress here. Our students and staff coming in are changing, so we need to look at how we help seat them at the table to make sure they succeed.

Q4 Asked by Jeremy. Answer: Outside my comfort zone: I grew up in North Quabbin, and most people around here look like me. Going through the Influence 100 program has really opened my eyes since the people involved don't look like me. It's humbling and has been very impactful. Going through the DEI process is very impactful too. We need to identify mirrors and windows we have, and make sure that students have access to representations of themselves in our materials. We also need to support staff in this process. Something really impactful for some students makes others uncomfortable, which can be a challenging situation. We worked with staff to help prepare them for those challenges, helping all students feel like they belong. It was great seeing those changes in practice in the classrooms. It's something of a forte of mine now.

Q5 Asked by Steven. Answer: I use data a lot, certainly student performance data. Athol is an under-performing school, so we use data to try to correct that. We're a big school and we can use data to take the personal feelings out of allocation of resources and support those decisions. There's so much data, but you have to look at the area you're trying to address and the data that best aligns with that.

Q6 Asked by Jeremy. Answer: Recognizing that students come with obstacles that become barriers to accessing the curriculum. How you can remove some of those barriers. Students don't come in with equal ways to access the curriculum. It can be difficult for them if we're not intentionally removing those barriers. It can be risky; if a student isn't accessing the curriculum, a teacher or principal could be defensive ("I taught it"), so we need to be open to looking at those barriers. Are we trauma informed? In meeting the needs of that student, we need to make sure we're giving them access to that curriculum and making the school welcoming for them.

Q7 Asked by Mandy. Answer: The Supt serves as the liaison: you set the direction. If there's a PD plan or strategic plan for a school, you have to start with that goal and align to that. You need to start by being a listener or an observer to learn what's working and what isn't. I wouldn't make a major change coming in; you need to honor what's in place and understand it. You won't get buy-in if you come in and change things immediately. You make it your own but it doesn't happen overnight; it comes through a lot of listening. You need to understand the direction that's already been set, and you can add to it and make changes to that.

Q8 Asked by Mackensey. Answer: It's very fortunate (felt like a lot of work at the time) that we went through a pretty lengthy contract negotiation with our district, first the COVID agreement then a 3-year contract. Union leaders had allowed principals to be observers, involved in the process to see how it played out. Before I went to the dark side of administration, I was a teacher for a long time and on the union executive board, so I understand all of that. The role of Supt is to be an advisor to the committee. Through an educational lens, this is what our teachers need, or this is what our students need. The negotiations are between the teachers' unions and the SCs, so bringing the focus to how to bring those together.

Q9 Asked by Mackensey. Answer: You recognize that you have 4 distinct SCs and 5 towns. It's not a regionalization, it's a union, so recognizing what the priorities are from each town. It starts with a lot of listening; you build relationships and trust by being transparent and being honest. You have to be present; that's essential. With people I've worked for and with, I've always appreciated the leaders who are good listeners, who've asked probing questions and got me thinking, but also put the time in to learn what I brought to the table. I try to do that with all my relationships, students, staff, SC members. Being articulate and transparent, but not just surface present: listening to really hear. I'd do the same thing with any conflict between me and a staff member. Start with a conversation, recognize your role in it. Sometimes it can get defensive, but when you run a building with 100 people, sometimes you have conflict, so engaging in acknowledging that there's a conflict and being willing to find a compromise are important. You have to expect some conflict, but also recognizing at the end of the day being transparent about what the decision is and trying to come to an agreement to move forward. My staff will say my being transparent is one of my greatest strengths (sometimes they just ask me to listen). I'll listen and really hear what they say. You have to be present for your stakeholders in your school and in your communities. If you're never in those communities, you don't get to know them, you're not informed, and you won't know how a decision might impact those stakeholders. Engaging the stakeholders lets you understand that.

Q10 Asked by Nancy. Answer: There are a lot of curricula out there. They can be different and very good. There are some generalizations about curricula. What will the students be doing? What are the tasks that are aligned to what we're asking the students to do? Does it provide opportunities for critical

thinking skills? Can they see themselves in that curriculum? Does it meet the needs of teachers? When you're evaluating a curriculum, why do you choose it? Aligned with strategic plan, aligned to what we're looking for from it? What are your measurables? Student performance might be part of it, seeing how teachers feel about it. Survey students, can get a lot of info even from elementary students. Their answers will tell a lot about how they engage with that curriculum. You can see that from being in the classrooms. You have to be in the classroom to see the practice and see it across different grade levels. You can't get the whole picture from a score. When you're looking whether it's a good fit for the student body, you look at what you chose it for. Scores, classroom visits and observations. A new curriculum can be clunky as teachers learn it; you need to check in with guidance groups and probe practice in the classrooms.

Q11 Asked by Steven. Answer: I think you have four distinct elementary schools. I've learned so much from colleagues, so creating intentional opportunities for colleagues to learn together and be in each others' schools. To build that opportunity, when I look at really effective leadership teams, it's typically been the case that a leader above has set the table for us to be able to interact and work together. Meeting in person is important for the personal connection; technology is great but not the whole story. Being able to see each other's best practices just widens your talent pool. Being intentional about providing those opportunities.

Q12 Asked by Steven. Answer: At the end of the day, you're the Supt. You need to get all your stakeholders on board, but you're the one who's accountable to this committee. Your SCs have to be involved in it, principals and staff need to be involved in it. The budget process starts in the fall. When you talk about 5 distinct towns, you need to think about relationships with all of them and let them get to know you before you show up at town meeting to ask for a budget vote. Getting to know people so that there are no surprises when the budget is presented. Looking at how it will be different for each town, finding out how each town has their own process for working out a budget with Fin Com.

Steven invited JSC members to ask follow-up questions: None.

Candidate: What are the greatest strengths of the union? What's the greatest challenge if I were offered the position?

Steven: The greatest challenge is recognizing how the towns are different, and getting to know all five of them. Taking the time to be out and about to get to know them. It's a big part of the job.

Becky: One strength of our union is having small elementary schools usually with one class per grade, getting to collaborate with teachers and staff knowing they get to communicate with folks at other schools, and how valuable that can be. And just feeling that talking to other SC members, just getting each other and understanding our areas of expertise. Being rural towns adjacent to larger communities is a very New England experience, so there's a strength there in sharing that.

Candidate commented on her school visits: every school was very warm and great, and represented their town cultures well. Another question: What's the most important characteristic of Supt you're looking for?

Mandy: For me, it's transparency and visibility. Being transparent with SCs, parents, Fin Coms, towns. And families seeing you and knowing who you are.

Mackensey: Communication.

Beth: Trust.

Jeremy: Thinking creatively out of the box about ways to support our students.

Nancy: Someone the staff wants to work for, feels respected by.

Julie: Bottom-line student focus.

Becky: Someone who really understands what teachers and staff are doing and sees the value in it. Also a learning environment where students get to know themselves, experiencing themselves in the world in a positive way. My hope is a leader who really values those types of interventions and can focus on that in our schools.

Steven explained the next step: Members of the public can meet with the candidate in the cafeteria. If JSC's deliberations extend far enough tonight, candidates will be informed that deliberations will finish at the meeting next week.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Steven invited members of the public to comment, as they will not have the opportunity during JSC deliberations.

Member of the public: One observation on the last candidate: she brought up students for three separate questions. I was struck because it seemed like the greatest number of times a candidate brought up students.

Member of the public: I thought it interesting the third candidate had interviewed by committee; she wasn't the only one who made the hiring decision. She was the only one who brought up herself during the budget question that there needed to be communication between her and the Fin Coms. A general observation: Orange has been used as a stepping stone for Superintendents. This Union is so special, we don't want to be a stepping stone. We want someone we feel will stay around and grow with us. The third candidate grew up in Athol and has the most knowledge of our area as well.

Member of the public: I agree with the things said by the last candidate. I was also struck by the differences between the three candidates' responses to questions on DEI. It's a goal we've been working on in U#28 for years now and is so difficult because we're all white ladies. She had the most striking demonstration of taking that journey through her own perspective to understand what that meant, and then taking it and applying it to the experience of students in the classroom who don't feel included. I was also surprised by the second candidate's question about how U#28 functions given that she has already been a principal in this very school. The third candidate was exciting talking about building a community school while she is actively building a community school.

Member of the public: I've been in this educational system for a long time. One of the most important things to me is having someone who is present and bringing people together. Someone who is part of the team. No judgment about which candidates are best for this; just an idea that's very important to me. The last candidate felt the most warm.

Member of the public: I know the third candidate started at a school in Athol that was as close to a community school as you can get there, which is closest to what we have here. That's a big deal, having a teacher working in a community school; that's where your heart is. I've worked in Orange, huge numbers of staff, just lots of red tape, and coming to or from a community school, that's always there for you. Making those bonds and bringing people together was obvious in her responses and clearly in her plans moving forward.

Member of the public: The last candidate's response to keeping the individuality of each school, and talking about how to manage conflict, was much more genuine. A true working-together, coming-together kind of energy.

JSC DELIBERATIONS

Becky thanked the public for their incredibly helpful comments.

Steven invited JSC members to share general impressions or thoughts first, then move to concrete items. He began: All three candidates are capable of doing a good job here. I have a clear favorite, but my opinion of Dr. Shea was higher after meeting her in person, so it's a tougher decision for me. I recognize the student focus and staff loyalty for Shannon was impressive. These are my initial impressions.

Jeremy: The public comments are really helpful to hear and helped solidify my thinking. I really like the fact that the third candidate is local; that investment is important, and the sense that someone will stay with us for a while. When I was calling references, she has loyalty from staff, and everyone spoke to the turnaround she created in Athol. The kid-centered focus comes through in her references as well. Great at managing student committees. The personality and personability she brought here were impressive, and her emphasis on belongingness for all students. She articulated that better than the others. We have three great candidates and we can't go wrong with any of them, but what she was talking about I see as the vision for our students. All the candidates came out strong in their references, and sometimes a reference knew several candidates. One of the drawbacks for one candidate was that being clear and direct was taken the wrong way by staff. But everything else across the board was really glowing, especially for Dr. Shea.

Mandy: For me, I'm struggling with the fact that the first candidate comes with a high school mindset; I'm not sure she's relatable to elementary school. A lot of her experience is at the secondary level.

Mackensy: I missed the first part, so I'll only comment on the part I was here for. I was concerned that the first candidate talked in terms that didn't recognize we're a union, not a regionalized district. That was my impression of her.

Mark: On that point, Shannon knew we're a union.

Bethany: So did Christine. What put me over the edge for one person was that I saw Shannon had everybody around in a circle, which I didn't see with the other candidates.

Jeremy: She came to us and thanked us before leaving as well.

Nancy: Dr. Shea was more businesslike and it made me wonder about stepping stones. My other question was about curriculum; Shannon was the only one who talked about it by starting with what we want the kids to know, then working backwards.

Beth: I appreciate the public comments. Shannon was definitely more warm and fuzzy. Personally, I was impressed better by Christine; she felt very grounded and personable and competent. Her story about helping the unhoused families represented taking a risk, showing she had what it takes to step up and do what's necessary. A Supt needs to be strong and be realistic. I liked Shannon too.

Mark: That community has a lot of problems, and that Christine would step up and do that was just a small piece of someone in authority seeing a problem and doing something about it.

Becky: All three candidates were incredible, and what I think is tricky is that if I read Shannon's answers on a piece of paper, I would have preferred Christine's answers. But Christine didn't give off a pulling-

people-together energy that Shannon did. That's a critical leadership quality. In the Leverett community, people would just resonate more with Shannon. Shannon was quite impressive in how she laid her process of involving people in curriculum selection out.

Jeremy: Christine and Shannon were both acceptable in their references, but Shannon had a bit of an edge. Listening to Shannon, I made up my mind.

Mackensey: I like the idea of bringing people together, but at the end of the day, can Shannon say I'm your boss and you need to follow me on hard decisions? I like that she brings people together, but we need someone in that position to be able to be the strong person in a hard situation. Can she do that with people who aren't already willing to do that?

Mandy: I understand that, but if Shannon took a school that was falling apart and turned that around, she obviously has leadership skills to bring people together.

Mark: Going back to the site visits, Shannon puts extra effort out and expects that of her staff. New hires who come on who find out if they don't want to work have to learn that from senior staff. The rest of the staff holds people to account. That's both the leader themselves holding the school to account but also creating a staff that holds themselves to account. If you're going to teach, you need to teach.

Jess: I think it's very important for leaders to solicit input, which Shannon seemed very interested in doing. That's a strength we need. The other thing I was impressed with about her was just what sounded like a very authentic desire to get to know the communities. And even her collective bargaining answer was excellent. She had the most articulated answer about that. This is how I can be of service to the SCs in bargaining.

Jeremy: From the references, Shannon came through as someone who's not afraid of pushback. She's not someone who just tells you what you want to hear. She builds capacity, safety and rigor in her school that wasn't there before. She motivated her teachers and staff there. I'm sure there was some discontent there as well.

Jess: In the interest of efficiency, can we talk about if someone has concerns about Shannon? Or can we just vote?

Nancy: I love Shannon, but she's moving from a hanging around kids position to an office position.

Steven: She loves contact with the kids and that staff loyalty, but she applied for this job, so she must want it.

Jeremy: She runs a budget for a 600-student school. She's on subcommittees she doesn't even have to be on. She's already doing a lot of the things we need at a relatively large school.

Steven explained the wording of the motion.

Jeremy moved to appoint Shannon White-Cleveland as Superintendent pending contract negotiations. Julie seconded. Unanimous.

Mackensey asked whether the candidates know how many meetings are involved in this position. At least four SCs per month.

Steven: I believe that was made clear.

Becky: In Jennifer's contract, there's time off specified to offset SC meetings.

(The Principals made it very clear to every candidate that there are four SC meetings plus JSC every month.)

JSC clarified next steps: sending out a contract when the candidate is notified of the offer, then setting up a meeting to negotiate.

Jess: Can we inform the candidate now so that if she doesn't accept, we can discuss offering it to another candidate? Then we don't need next week's meeting?

Steven clarified that JSC might have to meet again if the candidate can't accept for some reason prior to signing the contract. He's comfortable entertaining the notion of notifying the candidate tonight.

Beth moved that Dr. Christine Shea be considered the second choice if the first choice does not accept. Jess seconded. Unanimous.

Steven thanked all the SC members who did so much work on the search. Jeremy thanked Steven for setting up the timeline.

Steven cautioned that the ratings sheets might be public documents, so don't throw them out.

Beth moved to adjourn at 8:48. Julie seconded. Unanimous.