



HUDSON SCHOOL DISTRICT ♦ Hudson, New Hampshire
Hills Memorial Library, 18 Library Street

6:00 pm Non-public Session
6:30 pm Regular Meeting
Non-public Session

Hudson School Board
Minutes - November 4, 2021

Present:

Gary Gasdia, Chair
Diana LaMothe, Vice-chair
Ethan Beals, Member
Mike Campbell, Member
Gretchen Whiting, Member
Kara Roy, Board of Selectmen Liaison
Larry Russell, Superintendent of Schools
Jennifer Burk, Business Administrator

Call to Order: Mr. Gasdia called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

The purpose of this meeting is to hear multiple proposals for conducting the superintendent search.

1. New Hampshire School Boards Association (NHSBA)

Mr. Gasdia welcomed Barrett Christina and Michelle Munson to the meeting via Zoom. Allen Hardy then joined, also via Zoom. Ms. Munson and Mr. Hardy are both from the Bryan Group, the company used by NHSBA for searches.

Mr. Gasdia asked for a brief overview after which the board will ask questions. Ms. Munson provided a description of their process.

Mr. Beals asked for clarification on the costs in the proposal, \$12k under the Bryan Group, \$15k under NHSBA. Mr. Christina explained that the \$12k was from an outdated brochure and that the current cost is \$15k plus expenses. Expenses include mileage to/from Concord to Hudson, advertising, and typically average \$1500. The advertise on SchoolSpring. Other options are Ed Jobs and AASA but do not yield the same results. The NHSBA also shares postings with the Maine, Massachusetts, and Connecticut school boards associations who will post for free.

Ms. LaMothe asked if they've ever had to redo a search for the additional fee in number 8; Mr. Christina reply that since they've been working with the Bryan Group, they've not. He also stated that if the NHSBA is not able to find a candidate suitable to the Hudson School Board, they would conduct a second search for the cost of expenses only.

Ms. Whiting asked about their method on doing the search for the right fit and inclusion. Ms.

Munson replied and Mr. Hardy shared a screen and elaborated.

Mr. Campbell asked for an estimate of how many candidates they would be able to present to the board. Ms. Munson replied five to twelve initially and then it would be whittled down to two or three finalists to present to the board. Mr. Gasdia asked who would be conducting the initial interviews. Mr. Hardy talked about the guided storytelling interview style. The Bryan Group would conduct the initial interviews with the search committee which are confidential. Once the finalists go to the board, it would be public.

Mr. Beals asked Mr. Hardy for which districts is he currently conducting searches and how the board would know that Hudson's best interests are being served and we're not just getting recycled candidates from other districts' searches. Mr. Christina listed the districts and shared that it may not be Mr. Hardy or Ms. Munson that will be assigned to Hudson. The Bryan Group has multiple people and Mr. Bryan makes sure that consultants are not doing more than two searches at a time. He also explained that many candidates will apply to multiple districts. Leadership profiles will be different between districts. Mr. Beals asked what sets NHSBA apart from groups that surrounding area districts may be using for their searches. Mr. Christina replied that NHSBA is the only group that is dedicated to working exclusively with school boards and their process is significantly different. His connections within New Hampshire and the association's connections throughout New England make it easy to get background information on applicants.

Ms. Whiting asked how they would handle internal interest. The response was that they would be interviewed but would have to meet the required competencies and profile to make it to the final interview stage.

Mr. Christina thanked the board for the opportunity to present, stated that NHSBA would still be there to help even if they are not chosen to conduct the search, and asked that the board reach out to him with any follow-up questions.

The board then took a ten-minute recess.

2. Ray and Associates

Mr. Gasdia welcomed the representatives who are attending via Zoom and asked for a summary of what their search process entails.

Members of their team introduced themselves: Bridget Cheney in Michigan, John Ramos in Connecticut, Michael Collins (company president). Mr. Collins then went through the slideshow of their sample proposal. Oldest and largest search firm in America, largest pool of candidates, recruit and place more women and persons of color than any other search firm in America. Great outreach with associates all over the country.

Ms. Whiting asked what they expect for community engagement. Ms. Cheney and Dr. Ramos replied that they would request input from all stakeholders allowing them to understand the district at a deeper level and create a profile.

Mr. Beals asked how, as such a large national company, they would serve a community wanting

a little more local flavor. Dr. Ramos replied that they take great care to understand and get to know the community. Ms. Cheney shared how accessible they are to the board.

Ms. LaMothe asked what size group of stakeholders typically get involved in this process. Mr. Collins replied that it is up to the board and that size is irrelevant. Mr. Beals asked for details on the process that they would recommend. Dr. Ramos replied that they would screen applicants and get it down to ten to twelve to bring to the board and/or committee. Mr. Collins further explained that the committee would then narrow it down. Mr. Beals shared that the board would like this completed prior to March voting and asked if they'd have a problem with a deadline of the first week in February. Mr. Collins replied that it would be rush but it's the board's choice; they could have a shorter posting period.

Mr. Gasdia asked about the cost. Mr. Collins explained the costs and Ms. Cheney said that it's a fixed fee other than advertising and travel.

Ms. Whiting asked how they would handle an internal candidate. Dr. Ramos said they would be treated in the same way as an external candidate. Mr. Collins stated that if an internal candidate is chosen, it is very important that they go up against other very good candidates to keep everything legitimate.

Mr. Gasdia thanked them for the presentation and Mr. Collins thanked the board.

Recess until 7:30.

3. New England School Development Council (NESDEC)

Mr. Gasdia welcomed Ken DeBenedictis and asked for a summary. Mr. DeBenedictis shared his background and that he has conducted 50+ searches. He then provided a summary of how they would conduct a comprehensive search.

Mr. Beals asked if Mr. DeBenedictis would be the primary contact or if there's a team but NESDEC is very connected beyond what he can do. Mr. Beals then mentioned that Mr. DeBenedictis is doing a search for Milford and asked what level of search they were conducting and how would we know if Hudson was being prioritized instead of getting recycled candidates. Mr. DeBenedictis replied that they don't recycle.

Ms. Whiting asked how doing the Milford search and Hudson's would fit in with him being part-time. He clarified that he is not a full-time employee of NESDEC; he is a consultant. Mr. Beals asked how many searches are too many to conduct at once. Mr. DeBenedictis replied that he does no more than two at a time.

Mr. Gasdia asked about the \$12k to \$20k cost in the proposal, what drives it, and what would our cost be. Mr. DeBenedictis replied that the cost is set by Art Bettencourt, executive director of NESDEC and most that he's done are \$12k - \$14k. Ms. Whiting asked if there are other costs beyond that such as for advertising or travel. He said the price covers a comprehensive search but extras can be added if the board chooses.

Ms. Whiting asked how he conducts his search with diversity while maintaining quality and the

right fit. Mr. DeBenedictis replied that he contacts a lot of people of diverse backgrounds and encourages them to apply.

Mr. Gasdia asked about the timeline and if mid-February was reasonable. Mr. DeBenedictis replied that it's possible and that it usually takes about eight weeks. If we work hard, it could be done by the end of January.

Mr. Gasdia thanked Mr. DeBenedictis and Mr. DeBenedictis thanked the board.

The board then began discussing what was presented to them during this meeting. Ms. LaMothe mentioned some pluses for NESDEC. Mr. Beals asked if the goal was to choose a firm tonight. Mr. Gasdia offered that this decision shouldn't be rushed but if at the end of the meeting the board has a clear preference, that's great. If not, we owe it to ourselves and the public to take time and meet again even though that would mean condensing the timeframe of the search or extending it. Extending it could mean there will be different board members after March voting. Mr. Beals stated that all three groups had impressed him. Ms. Whiting expressed that NESDEC having only one person bringing candidates to the board was a negative. She then said that she's okay with NHSBA not having a guarantee because they've never needed one. Mr. Gasdia shared that each firm has pros and cons but with Ray and Associates being national, we would likely incur costs if someone far away gets recommended.

Kara Roy joined the meeting.

Mr. Gasdia explained that the agenda item that was added this morning was the result of a motion that was made and approved at last night meeting of the Budget Committee and asked Ms. LaMothe to relay what happened since she was there. Ms. LaMothe stated that in the closing comments, a motion was made to request both the Hudson School Board and Hudson Board of Selectmen request that the liaisons on the budget committee who are ex officio members of the budget committee abstain from any FY23 budget related votes. Liaisons have been voting as long as anyone can remember. The law pertaining to the budget committee does not state that the ex officio members have a right to vote or that they do not. Ms. LaMothe shared her opinion that this is not something that should happen a week before the budget is presented to the board but should be something handled by revising the bylaws and that if two members did abstain, the abstentions would not appear on the ballot. Mr. Beals asked Ms. Roy for her opinion. She shared the response from town counsel which stated that all members of the budget committee are voting members whether elected or appointed. Mr. Beals expressed his agreement with Ms. LaMothe and Ms. Roy and that he would recommend going in the same direction as the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Gasdia agreed with Mr. Beals and stated that this is an important decision and warrants public input and more than 24 hours to consider. This is something we could look at next year if necessary. Ms. LaMothe had a conversation with an NHSBA attorney who echoed what town counsel had to say on this subject and confirmed that there is no conflict of interest. Ms. Whiting opined, based on the RSA that states that liaisons are voting members, that the board should not make a motion and bylaws should not be changed. Mr. Gasdia will relay to Mr. Weissgarber that our member will vote and should the Board of Selectmen take a different path, we will revisit it in the future.

Ms. Roy left the meeting.

The board continued their discussion on the search firms. Mr. Beals stated that the guarantee discussion should continue and Ms. Whiting would like the board to ask NHSBA about that and ask the other two if they've ever had to use their guarantee. Mr. Gasdia asked if they could whittle it down to two. Ms. LaMothe reviewed costs.

Mr. Gasdia asked Mr. Russell and Ms. Burk for input since they have been involved in superintendent search(es) in the past. Mr. Burk shared her positive experience working with NESDEC as a search committee member (in a different district), including support provided after the new superintendent was hired. Ms. Whiting asked if she saw any red flags during this evening's presentation. She replied that it wasn't a red flag but that Ray and Associates may not have the knowledge of New Hampshire that NESDEC and the NHSBA have and they're very expensive.

Mr. Campbell voiced a concern with Mr. DeBenedictis mentioning a brochure that was not sent. Ray and Associates is very expensive and what they presented didn't seem personalized to Hudson.

Mr. Russell shared that there are advantages and disadvantages to doing a national search versus a local one. National searches result in a deeper pool. When he was a candidate in a national search and moved from Nevada to New Jersey it was difficult to get acclimated as each state runs differently. An important element is to go to candidate's district, see them in their current role, and talk to people. Mr. Beals stated that is a part of the NHSBA's timeline.

Ms. LaMothe explained how she came up with \$30k for Ray and Associates.

Mr. Beals liked the concept of Ray and Associates doing a national search but has concerns that a candidate from far away is more likely to back out than someone local. Ms. LaMothe expressed concerns with their response that the beginning of February would be a rush where the NHSBA timeline has February 7th as when their search would complete and NESDEC said end of January/beginning of February was feasible. Mr. Gasdia pointed out that the February 7th completion date was based on if they started their search in October so they'd be mid to late February. Mr. Russell mentioned that NHSBA already has a leg up since they already know all the conditions in the state.

Mr. Gasdia asked if they were still at three. Mr. Campbell replied that he would be ready to make a decision tonight. Ms. LaMothe suggested eliminating one. She would eliminate Ray and Associates. Mr. Campbell and Ms. Whiting would eliminate NESDEC. Mr. Beals would eliminate Ray and Associates. Mr. Campbell's first preference of firms is NHSBA with Ray and Associates his second. Ms. LaMothe's first preference is NESDEC with NHSBA as second, noting NESDEC's help with the onboarding. Ms. Whiting would like it if the NHSBA was asked about their transition coaching as it is #20 on their timeline but not colored in. Mr. Gasdia shared that he doesn't believe they're ready to make a decision tonight and asked if the board could meet on Monday the 8th.

Mr. Beals would like to solicit interest for the search committee right away and would like to write up a proposal on the makeup of the committee.

Ms. Whiting would still like to narrow it down to two firms tonight.

Ms. Whiting moved to removed Ray and Associates as an option, second by Ms. LaMothe.
After some discussion, ***motion passes 4-1 with Mr. Campbell voting nay.***

Mr. Gasdia will ask NHSBA and NESDEC questions the board has and ask NESDEC for an in-depth proposal and he will contact Ray and Associates. The board will meet again on Monday night at 8:00 to decide between NHSBA and NESDEC. The board then discussed committee makeup and the survey to find interest.

Mr. Beals moved to adjourn, second by Ms. LaMothe. Motion passes 5-0.

Motion adjourned at 9:08 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Gail Porter