



OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE SUPERINTENDENT CANDIDATE INTERVIEW: BRENDA CASSELLIUS

April 23, 2019

The Boston School Committee held a public interview with Dr. Brenda Cassellius, a candidate for the position of Boston Public Schools (BPS) Superintendent, on April 23, 2019 at 1 p.m. at the Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building, 2300 Washington Street, School Committee Chamber, Roxbury, Massachusetts. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit www.bostonpublicschools.org, email feedback@bostonpublicschools.org or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

ATTENDANCE

School Committee Members Present: Chairperson Michael Loconto; Vice Chairperson Alexandra Oliver-Dávila; Dr. Hardin Coleman; Michael O’Neill; Dr. Lorna Rivera; Jeri Robinson; Quoc Tran; and student representative Evelyn Reyes.

School Committee Members Absent: None.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

None.

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Loconto led the pledge of allegiance and announced that interpretation services were available in Spanish. He welcomed and introduced Dr. Cassellius, who most recently served as Commissioner of Education for the state of Minnesota. He also thanked the Superintendent Search Committee and public interview panelists for their hard work.

Dr. Cassellius made an opening statement, saying she is humbled to be named a finalist and looks forward discussing how her experience as an educational leader can help BPS achieve its goals of helping students succeed.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Ms. Jeri Robinson asked Dr. Cassellius about how she would manage school autonomy with a diverse portfolio of schools. Dr. Cassellius responded that district leaders must have shared core

Boston School Committee Superintendent Candidate Public Interview: Brenda Cassellius

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2300 Washington Street
School Committee Chamber
Roxbury, MA 02119

April 23, 2019

values of equity and inclusion drive decision making and accountability. Ms. Robinson asked Dr. Cassellius about the importance of standardized test scores. She responded that districts can use multiple measures to assess students and should teach the standards.

Dr. Coleman asked Dr. Cassellius her thoughts about comprehensive schools that provide wrap around supports for students and offer services to the community after the school day ends. She discussed how outside factors influence student success and emphasized her experience with cross-sector collaboration. He then asked her what she would like to be known for in five years. Dr. Cassellius said that she would like to make BPS one of the top 10 places to work and make BPS the first choice of families in Boston.

Ms. Reyes asked Dr. Cassellius how she would support student advocacy and how should would balance the Mayor's priorities with the community's priorities should they differ. Dr. Cassellius discussed the importance of student voice and explained that she would work with all parties to find areas of agreement.

Dr. Rivera asked Dr. Cassellius what strategies she would utilize to recruit and retain teachers of color. Dr. Cassellius said that students should have teachers who look like them and discussed the value of alternative paths to licensure and the importance of structures to support teacher retention. Dr. Rivera asked Dr. Cassellius about her knowledge of Question 2 and the LOOK Act. Dr. Cassellius said that language and culture must be valued as assets.

Mr. Tran asked Dr. Cassellius her definition of equity. She responded that equity is giving kids what they need and meeting students where they are. He also asked about the importance of diversity. Dr. Cassellius discussed the importance of recognizing and valuing differences.

Mr. O'Neill asked Dr. Cassellius to discuss one academic achievement, one operational achievement, and one failure. She cited her experience turning around middle schools in Memphis, increasing rigor, and ending corporal punishment. She also discussed challenges she encountered with operationalizing a mixed-delivery system of early childhood education programs. Mr. O'Neill recommended that Dr. Cassellius read the work of Todd Rogers, a behavioral scientist who is Professor of Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School, about easing paperwork. Mr. O'Neill asked Dr. Cassellius why she wants to lead BPS. She responded that she is ready to move forward the district's agenda to support kids who are vulnerable. She praised the district's holistic approach and cited her experience working with executive leadership. She said she would put kids at the center of all decision making.

Ms. Oliver-Dávila asked Dr. Cassellius about the challenges of working with the community. Dr. Cassellius cited as an example her experience in Minneapolis when the decision was made to drop entrance criteria as part of high school redesign. She discussed the importance of being personally engaging in difficult conversations and making adjustments if needed. Ms. Oliver-Dávila asked Dr. Cassellius about her approach to budgeting. Dr. Cassellius said that a budget is

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April 23, 2019

a reflection of your values and pledged to dedicate as much of the budget as possible to supporting students in the classroom.

Mr. Loconto asked Dr. Cassellius about her relationship with teachers unions. Dr. Cassellius praised the value of teachers and said she has always had a respectful relationship with unions. He asked Dr. Cassellius how she would rally people around an issue to generate more funding. She responded that she would work strategically to leverage every dollar, find areas of agreement, and build relationships.

Ms. Reyes asked Dr. Cassellius about her learning process. She responded that she would engage the community and ask questions.

Dr. Rivera asked Dr. Cassellius how she would address declining enrollment due to charter schools. She responded that she would work to provide parents with high quality options in every neighborhood.

Mr. Tran asked Dr. Cassellius about her approach to resolving disputes. She discussed taking preventative measures and abiding by equal opportunity regulations.

Ms. Robinson asked Dr. Cassellius if she would provide leadership stability. Dr. Cassellius responded that, if selected, she would make a commitment to stay in Boston for a meaningful amount of time. She said she would take an accounting of past administrations, be persistent and persevere.

Dr. Coleman asked if racial and economic integration is still a relevant strategy for closing the achievement gap. Dr. Cassellius said that we must create opportunities for kids to meet others who are not like them.

Mr. O'Neill asked Dr. Cassellius about her vision for BuildBPS and her thoughts on the district's shift away from traditional middle school models. She responded that she supports fewer transitions for families. She emphasized that BPS can still have a middle school philosophy and provide supports to meet the unique needs of middle school age students.

Ms. Robinson asked Dr. Cassellius about her approach to a mixed delivery early childhood education system. Dr. Cassellius discussed her experience implementing universal preschool.

Dr. Rivera asked Dr. Cassellius how she would promote the arts. Dr. Cassellius described herself as a proponent of the arts, as well as physical education and libraries. She cited the value of the arts as a vehicle for student expression and connectedness.

Mr. O'Neill asked Dr. Cassellius about her experience being recruited by former BPS Superintendent Dr. Carol Johnson when they worked together in Memphis. He also asked Dr. Cassellius how she would build her senior leadership team. Dr. Cassellius described building a

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team as both an art and a science, and said she would put together a team that is highly qualified, diverse, committed, and ethical.

Ms. Oliver-Dávila asked Dr. Cassellius her thoughts on the LOOK Act. Dr. Cassellius said that she values language as an asset and would surround herself with ELL experts.

Dr. Cassellius presented her closing statement, describing herself as a lifetime educator and a cross-collaborator.

Mr. Loconto invited BPS stakeholders to learn more about the candidates and view the public interview schedule at bostonpublicschools.org/superintendentsearch. He encouraged people to complete the online surveys, which will remain open until midnight on Sunday, April 28. Feedback can also be provided via email at superintendentsearch@bostonpublicschools.org. The School Committee is tentatively scheduled to vote on the selection of a superintendent on May 1st.

ADJOURN

At approximately 3 p.m., the Committee voted by unanimous consent to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Elizabeth Sullivan
Executive Secretary