



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
SUPERINTENDENT FINALIST INTERVIEW: MARY SKIPPER**

June 23, 2022

The Boston School Committee held an in-person meeting that was live streamed on Zoom and Boston City TV on June 23, 2022 at 5:30 p.m. in the School Committee Chamber of the Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building, 2300 Washington Street, Roxbury, MA 02119. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit www.bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee, email feedback@bostonpublicschools.org or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

ATTENDANCE

School Committee Members Present: Chairperson Jeri Robinson; Vice Chairperson Michael D. O'Neill; Stephen Alkins; Lorena Lopera; Rafaela Polanco Garcia; and Quoc Tran.

School Committee Members Absent: Brandon Cardet-Hernandez; and Student Representative Xyra Mercer.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

None.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Jeri Robinson called the meeting to order and led the pledge of allegiance. She announced that live, simultaneous interpretation services were available in the nine major BPS languages.

Ms. Robinson explained that the Superintendent Search Committee was tasked by the School Committee to conduct a thorough search for the next leader of Boston Public Schools. Beginning in March, they began by hosting a series of public listening sessions and community stakeholder meetings. The feedback voiced by students, families, educators, and other community partners was incorporated into the Superintendent's job description and informed the Search Committee members' interview questions. Beginning with 34 candidates, the Search Committee narrowed the pool to 8 candidates throughout May and June, and conducted several rounds of interviews with the candidates. On June 17, the Search Committee conducted its final

deliberations and voted to select a group of finalists for the School Committee's consideration. Two candidates have since withdrawn from the process prior to the start of public interviews. The two final candidates are: Mary Skipper, Superintendent of Somerville Public Schools, and Dr. Tommy Welch, Region 1 School Superintendent at Boston Public Schools. Dr. Welch will be interviewed tomorrow.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW

Ms. Skipper provided an opening statement, recounting the important role education played in her early years growing up as the child of a single mother. She worked as a BPS teacher, founding headmaster of TechBoston Academy, and BPS High School Network Superintendent before serving as Superintendent of Somerville Public Schools from 2015 to the present. She emphasized her commitment to coalition and team building, focusing on students, and building a vision for BPS.

Dr. Alkins asked Ms. Skipper what specific strategies she has utilized to improve outcomes for Black students, what outcomes and measures she used, and how she has addressed systemic racism. Ms. Skipper spoke about the importance of diversity hiring practices and using data to create targeted programming. She recalled her experience in Somerville reducing the overidentification of black and brown boys in sub-separate educational settings.

Noting that the language that is most spoken in BPS other than English is Spanish, Ms. Lopera asked her question in both Spanish and English. She asked Mr. Skipper how she has created positive partnerships with students, families, and community members who speak a language other than English. Ms. Skipper spoke about her experience in Somerville hiring bilingual staff to serve families who speak a language other than English, creating a single registration system, and increasing support for English Language Learners (ELLs).

Ms. Lopera asked Ms. Skipper if she is committed to ensuring native language access for multilingual learners and multilingual learners with disabilities as it is the official policy of BPS. Ms. Skipper affirmed her commitment to native language instruction and described her experience in Somerville expanding dual language access and creating a newcomer academy

Ms. Polanco Garcia asked Ms. Skipper about her philosophy and commitment to providing access to native language literacy and instruction. Ms. Skipper said while she does not have direct experience in this area, she would support the will of the community.

Mr. Tran asked Ms. Skipper for her definition of equity. Ms. Skipper spoke about equity as giving students what they need through funding, policies, and practice. She described her experience in Somerville removing barriers for marginalized students. She said it's important to have a uniform understanding of equity in order to ground decisions.

Ms. Robinson read a question on behalf of Mr. Cardet-Hernandez asking Ms. Skipper to provide evidence about her work in special education reform and disability justice. Ms. Skipper spoke about her experience in Somerville supporting students with autism and ELLs with disabilities and partnering with the community.

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Ms. Robinson read a question on behalf of student representative Xyra Mercer asking Ms. Skipper her thoughts about students playing a key role in their education and asking how often she would like to meet with student leaders. Ms. Skipper said she would like to meet with students often and spoke about the importance of listening to authentic student voices.

Mr. O'Neill asked Ms. Skipper to describe her approach to fiscal management, investing Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, and generating private funding. Ms. Skipper said that a budget is a value statement. As Somerville Superintendent, she invested ESSER funds in social-emotional support, academics, intervention, special education compensatory services, and new programming for English learners. Ms. Skipper spoke about her experience galvanizing partners where there are gaps in order to meet the needs of students.

Ms. Robinson asked Ms. Skipper how she would position and work with the Opportunity Gaps Office for maximum impact in deepening anti-racist consciousness and closing opportunity and achievement gaps for the most marginalized student populations – including students of color, English language learners, students with disabilities, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds as well as for examples of demonstrated success in closing gaps. Ms. Skipper said that closing opportunity and achievement gaps cannot be the work of just one office. She said that she would build a cross-sector team to close gaps.

Dr. Alkins asked Ms. Skipper how she would expand BPS partnerships for STEM education opportunities with nonprofits and corporate bodies and improve access to STEM education career paths, focusing on schools and demographics that are often the most marginalized. Ms. Skipper spoke about her success expanding STEM education opportunities in Somerville and as school leader at TechBoston Academy in BPS. Dr. Alkins asked how she would evaluate and enforce accountability within the central office. Ms. Skipper said she would employ a deeper communication system to boost morale and bring needed stability to the district. She spoke about pandemic recovery and said that she and her team would begin by focusing on doing a few things well rather than doing many things partially.

Ms. Lopera asked Mr. Skipper to share her experience with alternative education and how she would strengthen the district's current programming. Ms. Skipper said that the district must have deliberate programming for off-track high school students. She said she would strengthen the reengagement center, provide creative programming, and consider adding a 13th year to provide students with college coaching. She spoke about her experience in Somerville providing strong student support, using cross functional teams and examining student-level data.

Ms. Polanco Garcia asked Ms. Skipper about her approach to the recruitment, licensing and retention of faculty and staff who are competent to teach in at least two languages, asking her to cite examples of successes and challenges. Ms. Skipper spoke about the importance of having multilingual teachers and staff. She recalled her experience in Somerville building a pipeline of diverse teachers and providing teachers with professional development and advancement opportunities.

Mr. Tran asked Ms. Skipper to list the top three projects she would address in her first three months as superintendent. Ms. Skipper said that she would focus on building a diverse, talented

team, building trust and transparency with the community, and strengthening systems and structures. She added that she would be open to hosting a series of community meetings.

Ms. Robinson read a question from Mr. Cardet-Hernandez asking Ms. Skipper to describe her strategy for strengthening school culture, building and rebuilding trust with families, and acting faster. Ms. Skipper spoke about the importance of retraining staff, using mediation practices, and offering strong mentoring programs.

Ms. Robinson read a question from Ms. Mercer asking Ms. Skipper how she would support student leadership, specifically the Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) and what steps she would take after students have protested or are protesting. Ms. Skipper said that she worked closely with BSAC as a BPS high school superintendent and values student voice and agency. With regards to protesting, she emphasized the importance of ensuring student safety. She said that she encourages students to research and understand issues, consider walking out, then walking in to maximize classroom learning.

Mr. O'Neill asked Ms. Skipper if she agrees that the district is responsible for ensuring student success beyond high school graduation and what she would change. Ms. Skipper said the district has a responsibility to ensure college persistence. She spoke about the importance of building strong partnerships and helping students navigate the college application and financial aid process. Mr. O'Neill asked Ms. Skipper how BPS can make Madison Park Technical Vocational High School a great model and a desirable option for students. Ms. Skipper recommended introducing vocational education to students earlier to spark their interest in middle school and show students and families the opportunities that exist. She emphasized that every district needs a strong vocational technical program that includes a strong academic component.

Mr. O'Neill asked Ms. Skipper her thoughts on hub community schools. Ms. Skipper said that students must have their essential needs met in order to learn. She said that the district must meet those needs and then accelerate the learning for all students.

Ms. Robinson asked Ms. Skipper how she would design a cohesive central office that delivers quality support and service to schools for equitable student outcomes. Ms. Skipper spoke about the importance of building a strong team and having effective communication.

Ms. Lopera asked Ms. Skipper her thoughts about the district's practice of providing schools with declining enrollment with soft-landings. Ms. Skipper said that all BPS stakeholder must have a shared understanding of what is the trigger for school closure, adding that the district must support students and families impacted by mergers and closures.

Ms. Robinson invited Ms. Skipper to ask the Committee questions. Ms. Skipper asked the Committee what success would look like for the chosen superintendent in year one and year three. Dr. Alkins said he would like the next superintendent to spend their first year listening to the community, focusing on achievement for black and brown student

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achievement, ELLs and special education students, and engaging in regular communication with the Committee, providing strong checkpoints for accountability along the way. In year three, Dr. Alkins said he would like to see the superintendent leading progress in the district's facilities work.

Mr. O'Neil spoke about challenges with leadership uncertainty. He said he would like to see the next superintendent spend year one focusing on stabilizing the district, building trust and transparency with families, addressing the challenges detailed in the DESE review, and finalizing the Boston Teachers Union contract. In year three, he would like to see the next superintendent lead progress on with academics and facilities. He said that it's important for the district to demonstrate progress in order to get more families to buy into the district.

Ms. Skipper provided a closing statement, thanking the Committee for the opportunity to be considered for the position of BPS Superintendent. She recalled reconnecting with a former student who is now a staff member at school visit earlier in the day, which she found rewarding.

ADJOURN

Ms. Robinson invited viewers to learn more about the candidates and view recordings of all the panel discussions at bostonpublicschools.org/supt-search. People are encouraged to email feedback to the Committee via superintendentsearch@bostonpublicschools.org. The Committee will vote on the selection of a final candidate at a remote meeting on June 29th at 5 p.m.

Approved - At approximately 7:35 p.m. the Committee unanimously approved a motion to adjourn the meeting by unanimous consent.

Attest:



Elizabeth Sullivan
Executive Secretary