OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE'S
SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH COMMITTEE MEETING

December 13th, 2018

The Boston School Committee’s Superintendent Search Committee held a meeting on December 13th, 2018, at 6:00 pm, and located at the Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building, 2300 Washington St., Roxbury, 02119. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit www.bostonpublicschools.org/superintendentssearch, email Ken Rowe at ken.rowe@boston.gov or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

ATTENDANCE

Committee Members Present: Alexandra Oliver-Davila (Co-Chair), Dr. Keith Motley (Co-Chair), Carolyn J. Kain, Carlos Brown, Pastor Samuel Acevedo, Jessica Tang, Katherine Grassa, Elvis Rodriguez, Michael D. O’Neill and Craig Martin.

Committee Members Absent: Dr. Tanya Freeman-Wisdom

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

1. Agenda
2. Meeting Minutes from November 26, 2018 Search Committee Meeting
3. Questions for and about Search Firms
4. Executive Search Firm Rubric and Interview Questions
5. BPS Superintendent Search Firm Interviews 2018 Score Card
6. BPS Superintendent of Schools Desired Characteristics
7. Isaacs, Miller Executive Search Proposal
8. McPherson Jacobson, LLC Executive Recruitment & Development
10. JG Consulting Proposal RFQ Superintendent Search Consultant Services
11. b.w.p. and Associates Superintendent Search Proposal
12. HYA BPS Superintendent Search Proposal
13. Co-Chair Alexandra Oliver-Davila’s Notes from Interviewing the Search Firms

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Alexandra Oliver-Davila called the meeting to order at 6:14 pm.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

-Alex thanked everyone for coming.
-The committee reviewed the meeting minutes from the November 26th meeting.
-Carolyn moved to approve the minutes unanimously, and it was passed.

-Went to Public Comment early (see comment #1 from John Mudd)

-After Public Comment:

-Alex: I want move on to the Search Firm Process. We received seven proposals, all the members ranked the proposals, and a small group of us interviewed four firms. I will walk through my notes (provided). The one that came out at the top was Issacscon Miller (IM), they had a robust presentation, and this is their hometown. They have a woman of color in the lead. They have found people that have been retained. They haven’t done a superintendent search, but their mission aligns with ours. They are excited to make an impact in Boston because this is in their backyard. They are big on diversity, and they have high retention rates. They also have a goal around community and community engagement. They are not the usual firm that is a factory of turning out superintendents. We felt they were an appropriate candidate.

-Keith: They have done superintendent searches in the past, just not recently.
-They were well prepared, and they understand the dynamics of the Schools because they are from Boston.
-They have a track record of finding people outside of normal networks.

-Sam: Following up on their deliberate choice to not engage on Superintendents?

-Keith: Because of money.

-Carolyn: From what I heard it was because they mostly work with non-profits and that aligned more with their goals. They were head and shoulders above the rest. The have the experience in the public sector. They felt they could have a meaningful impact that is why they want to take this on. They are more selective, this is line with their mission.
-They also emphasized the size of their network.
-They do extensive reference checks and background checks.
-They look at the needs of the school districts. One of the named partners worked on the hiring of Secretary of Education, Ernie Duncan, and brings experience in the education field from the Obama administration.
-They are high quality firm, and we need their outside of the box thinking. We need a fresh look and fresh approach.
-Their discussion on engagement of families and communities was impressive to me.
-They are innovative and forward thinking, and I was happy to see that. They are willing to work with us because they are Boston based, and they can have a meaningful impact.

-Sam: They know their competencies. There are cross-fires in superintendent searches. Last meeting we talked about how could any human being fill all of these roles.

-Carolyn: They said the person not only needs to be talented but experienced in working in a diverse community. Second Tier is not what Boston needs right now.

-Katherine: They don’t have a can set of candidates which I like.

-Keith: That was key, because we know some search firms bring their lists and they do that routinely.
-Some of the other firms clearly didn’t understand Boston. This was evident as we were asking them questions. Some firms flailed about on some of our questions.
-The listening sessions have really helped us, because of the emphasis of needing someone that understands Boston and large urban settings.

-Michael: Sam in answer to your question. Other firms don’t do superintendent searches because of financial reasons, and their business model.

-The lead for Isaacson Miller is very experienced.

-Economics don’t work for some firms and they have chosen not to play in that space.

-“Why us, why now” – we have a civic obligation to be involved. They will move to a flat fee to

-We asked every firm about what is going on in Boston, what are people saying on a national level?

-Some firms have known about Boston. One of the named partners of one of the firms didn’t know why the last superintendent left and he had visited Boston once, and he thought that made his firm capable.

-One other firm that I will mention: JG Consulting was very good.

-JG Consulting: 8/10 of their last superintendent searches were people of color, very Texas based.

-They placed the Commissioner of Education in NY.

-These people are well aligned in the Latino Network

-I think they bring a lot to the table.

-One concern is that they haven’t done any searches east of the Mississippi

-I recommend bringing them in when it is time to hire the superintendent’s team, and help them get that experience

-They were well informed about Boston.

-Isaacson Miller was the one to really know what is going on in Boston.

-Carolyn: They were more informed than any other firm. JG Consulting is a second tier firm, up and coming, they are not the right firm for us.

-Michael: discussed how they review references and background checks.

-Sam: Was Isaacson Miller a candidate in 2015?

-Michael: Last time we tried getting 3 firms in Boston to respond, but we only heard back from one. We were trying to get responses from Boston firms last time, but we didn’t have much luck.

-Jessica: I wonder if the firm understands Boston, is it an issue that people are too close to Boston, conflicts of interest? I’m looking at names of people they have hired in the past, and there are some red flags to me. It makes me wonder if it is better to have a firm that isn’t compromised on their relationships.

-Michael: Erica Miller, the lead partner, is in DC, and not Boston based, but the firm is.

-Keith: They have a good track record on retention rates. That is a big thing they talked about.

-They also want to know how we will support those folks once they are here.

-We will be able to help shape their conversation with the candidates.

-Sam: Jessica to dovetail on your comment. If we think outside the box. They have done non-profits in the City. When I look at their list, what is the impact of those searches on the institutions their searches have taken place. I’m impressed with the people they have brought into the non-profits they were hired by, and it has improved those organizations.

-BC High and two others.

-They have brought transformative impact on three non-profits.
-Michael: They helped the board get to the hire at BC High.

-Katherine: They hired a woman for an all-boys school, and she is the first woman to run the school.

-Jessica: Another question. If they are adjusting their fee, can we vote on it without knowing their fee?

-Alex: It is contingent.

-Carolyn: You get what you pay for. It is contingent obviously. If they are a little more, I think it is worth it. We shouldn’t short change the process. We want quality, this is not a low bid process.

-Alex: based on our conversation, they are able to work with us. They think they can make an impact.

-Elvis: I was a part of Citizens Group? This is a great firm. We get what we pay for. I would prefer to pay more if we are getting someone to fill in the shoes. We need a leader as soon as possible. I think they will work with us.

-Carolyn: We need someone to be here for the long-term, and get grounded in the community and system. We need help getting there. We need this process to go well, there is a lot of concern in the community. This is the firm that most impressed me.

-Keith: Their financial structure is much different than the other firms. This is a partner driven firm, everyone has a say around expenses. They have all sat and talked about how this search will look financially. It is employee owned. They want to do this search and they have to figure out how it will work for them. We didn’t mention funds until the end. We got it out of them early of what they will do and how they will approach the search before we talked money, and they can’t change what they said earlier.

Jessica: Is there anything else that was compelling not in the proposal?

-One of the other proposals had a thorough community engagement plan. In what detail are one of the top two choices able to explain or describe an authentic community engagement plan?

-Carolyn: This firm (IM) talked about engagement of families and the community, and they spoke how they will communicate to the community.

-Other firms were canned responses. This firm was more genuine.

-Community Engagement was a clear priority to them.

-Family advocacy groups, etc.

-Alex: The proposal that had a good community engagement plan in their proposal didn’t talk about it. IM didn’t write it out in their proposal as much, but they talked about it a lot in the interview.

-Regular updates with the community.

-I felt out of all the candidates IM was the most authentic.

-Keith: the other firms, when we told them we already did a community engagement process, they would stop. The good two firms thought it was cool, but we will still keep going and gather more information.

-Carolyn: They were not expecting that we had already done a community engagement process, but they thought it was great we had already done it.
-Craig: At least with JG Consulting some of their people have served in this role (superintendent). IM has not worked in a school system. While interviewing how did that play a role in the ratings?

-Alex: we really like JG Consulting. But they don’t understand the depth and complexity. They are very new.
   -IM has done enough high level work in the area, they know the space. They may bring candidates differently than we have seen in the past.

-Carolyn: JG Consulting has only been around for 4 years, and I don’t think they are at this level yet. They would be great for hiring cabinet level staff. We are a unique community with unique needs. They seem like a group that had worked together in the past, they are up and coming, but they aren’t ready for prime time in Boston.

-Craig: With them serving as superintendents in diverse communities. I think it is notable that they have served, and placed in big diverse communities. IM doesn’t have the same experience. Some things they (JG Consulting) can learn.

-Carlos: JG had some good places with Dallas-Ft. Worth, a bigger district than ours. Very successful, one of their first placements.

-Michael: I spoke with a member of that district. JG wasn’t doing the search at first and another firm was but they screwed up, and then came back to the pool of firms, and then JG recommended the future hire. JG has a great technology platform. They focused on their tech platform. All of the candidates can upload all the necessary documents. They are into their tech platform, it’s interesting and something of the future.
   -Not having experience at a high level on the east coast is an issue.
   -They are good in the Latino network, but I think they would have a hard time explaining Boston’s challenges.

-Sam: In the interest of time. We have crystalized. Have we reached a level of consensus. We have a local firm, and we have heard positive things from the public about this firm. It is an exciting prospect of having another search firm to come in after the superintendent search. Are we ready to call for a vote?

-Carolyn: moves to recommend to approving IM doing the search.

-Sam: Is a chair willing to call a second, I second.

-Michael: Do we want to put some financial parameters around it based on a flat fee.

-Carolyn: It’s not an open checkbook. We are a district of a budget with over $1bn. What is our budget?
   -We approve a motion that IM be awarded subject to negotiations to mutually agreeable financial terms.

-Elvis: is there a number we should propose.

-Carolyn: it doesn’t work that way.

-Michael: the School Committee is trying to raise philanthropy funds. Last time we raised $150k, we used about $120k. The Chair is asking foundations that have supported the district in the past, and going to many organizations. The Chair has raised the issue of whether there should be public funds involved.

-Keith: The School Committee has a vote on this.
Michael: It gives the co-chairs flexibility.

-Craig: Who negotiates?

-Alex: Co-chairs of the Search Committee with the School Committee Chair.

-Michael: I do propose if the motion passes to do a second motion about us recommending to BPS that JG Consulting do cabinet searches in the future.

-Alex: We are calling the vote for IM based on negotiations for the financial fee:
   -Jessica Tang abstained
   -All other committee members in attendance voted Yes in favor of Isaacson Miller being selected as the search firm for the Superintendent Search contingent on negotiations for a reasonable flat fee.

-Michael: Search Committee recommends to the School District that JG Consulting be considered for future executive level searches.
   -Second vote for JG to do second searches for BPS at the cabinet level?

-Carolyn: Second Michael’s motion

-Alex: any objection to this motion?
   -There was none
   -Next piece on the agenda is the job description. It is done. The one in your folders is not the right one. I will send you the right one.

Public Comment again (see comment #2 from Barbara Fields).

-After second public comment.

-Alex: mentioned the City Wide Parent Council meeting next week. Tuesday, 6-8 pm.

-Sam: This will be a full blown listening session for 2 hours.

-Carolyn: Some of us have gone before, but we should all try to be here.
   -In terms of process, School Committee is meeting on the 19th. I don’t know if other people will come, but I won’t be there.

-Michael: I anticipate this will be discussed later in the meeting, because there is another issue.

-Alex: Thanked everyone. We are meeting on January 14th as well.

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. John Mudd, Advocate: I’m very worried on the Search Firm process that the 2 week turnaround over the Thanksgiving holiday was not the best way to get responses from strong firms. The big firms that do mass recruitment were able to respond, but I’m also not a fan of the firm that did it last time. I’ve had experience with John Isaacson, they are pros, and they are Boston. They have done a lot of private school searches successfully. It would have been nice to have more like them
at this level. I’m happy with this ranking. HYA did not do as good of checks on the last search as they could have. The result was predictable in my opinion. Get checks from leaders in SPED Pac, local legal services, Universities, foundations, and education reporters from local papers.

a. Is this the final job description? The search firm may want to hone it. We are after an education first individual. We should be blunt about that. Also include language around family and community engagement. I would encourage you to get that done.

2. Barbra, Fields: I wanted to speak when you were deliberating on the firm. Back in November we went to a conference. They had a stand there on superintendents. They had a workshop of how to hire a superintendent. JG was doing the workshop. Professional development is sorely missing in our district. Regarding other consulting firms. The results of the surveys. People want an education leader. What I hear, is people want an educational leader. JG is made up of educational leaders, many have been superintendents. From what I heard about their process we were impressed for 90 minutes. You said you were concerned about the length of time they have been in business and whether they know the east coast which is transferable. Personally, I think they are quite capable of doing this job. Around their technology, every candidate they get them to respond to all the same questions and see the pool’s responses. I’m disappointed JG didn’t make it. I know IM’s work, and they are good too, but I’m also not saying anything bad.

ADJOURN

At approximately 7:29 p.m. the Committee voted by unanimous consent to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:

[Signature]

Kenneth Rowe
BPS Superintendent Search Committee Staff