

Minutes of June 15, 2017.

Present – Caroline O’Neill, Nancy De Luca, Jane Martin, Jacqueline Weisman, Dr. Lisha Cabral, and Dr. Elizabeth Homan.

The only item on the Agenda is the School Committee interview of Assistant Superintendent Finalist Dr. Elizabeth Homan.

Chair Weisman opened the meeting at 2:50 and welcomed Dr. Homan. Chair Weisman informed Dr. Homan of the format to be followed which was: the introduction of School Committee Members, followed by Dr. Homan’s opening statement (5 minutes), School Committee questions and follow-up (40 minutes), Dr. Homan’s closing statement (5 minutes), and questions for the Committee (10 minutes).

Dr. Homan made an opening statement providing an overview of what led her to become an educator. Her first actual teaching experience was as a figure skating instructor. She felt the drive to pursue a career in education in large part because of “a profound fascination with literacy.” When she was in the doctoral program at the University of Michigan, while doing research for her dissertation, she visited teachers from all over “when Common Core landed,” in order to explore how teachers’ social connections impact their practice, including the use of technology.

Dr. Homan noted that she is a member of the Superintendent Leadership Team in the Waltham Public Schools. In her role, she has worked with every department, every principal, and much of the faculty at all levels. Among other things, she focuses on systems integration.

Ms. O’Neill asked the following questions:

1. Please describe your involvement, if any, in the recruitment and hiring of teachers or other staff. Our building principals are primarily responsible for overseeing the selection process of new faculty, but what specific practices would you encourage to promote consistency across schools? What ideas do you have about how a district can attract and retain outstanding educators?

In her current position, Dr. Homan oversees 17 teachers and other staff. She told of having recently lost a key team member in the middle of the year. In the process of finding a replacement for that individual, Ms. Homan said the key was to “tap into [her] networks.” She noted that it’s important to make sure to have connections with local colleges and universities, to make sure to have a “diverse cadre of administrators” attend job fairs, and to invite promising learning teachers to tour the district.

In relation to the process of hiring faculty, Dr. Homan emphasized the importance of ensuring that candidates are comfortable with Universal Design, and that they conduct a demonstration

lesson, preferably in front of students. In these situations, she would look at how the candidate plans for a diverse group of students, and, in a “debriefing” session after the lesson, she would look for the capacity to reflect on what went well, what didn’t, what the candidate might have done differently.

2. Can you describe a time when you tried to convince the administrators and faculty of an individual school, or of an entire district, to adopt a significant change in practice? How did it go? What did you learn from the experience?

Dr. Homan’s immediate response to this question was, “That’s my job!” She has undertaken what she characterized as a “major redesign” in the technology area for teachers, students, and staff. She listed a number of innovations that are in the process of being put in place in the district, including new learning management systems (new grade book, new portals, etc.). She has provided extensive training for teachers, administrators, parents, and students, using a range of methods including online, face-to-face, and workshops for everyone.

3. What experience do you have in grant writing? Have any of your grant proposals resulted in funding?

Dr. Homan said she “really enjoys writing grants.” While she was working in the Boston Public Schools, she applied for and received a \$100,000 grant for teacher development from the McCarthy-Dressman Foundation. When she took the position in Waltham, she was able to bring the funds with her. Funding from another grant allowed her to purchase ten Dash robots. Students were able to program the robots to act out events leading up to the civil war, an example of interdisciplinary learning, which Dr. Homan made it clear she values highly.

Ms. De Luca asked the following questions:

1. What has been your experience with the educator evaluation process? What impact do you think the process has on the quality of instruction in the classroom?

Dr. Homan emphasized that, when evaluating a teacher or other staff member, it is important “to allow space to falter, struggle, take risks.” She believes in encouraging her teachers to take risks, so she tries to help them develop goals that focus on gathering data from multiple sources, on tracking student progress on lots of standards, but not on establishing a specific level of achievement for students. She noted that it’s important for teachers to understand the multiple ways they have to measure student progress.

2. Describe the methods of communication you have found to be most effective when communicating with students, faculty, staff and parents. How do you adapt when your methods don't seem to be working?

Dr. Homan has thirty people in her department. She puts out a weekly update for her staff that includes an extensive overview of recent successes and challenges, what to expect in the week ahead, and a section she terms "good reads," which offers information about innovations and trends in education. She has found the weekly update to be the most effective way to communicate across schools. She also tries to have face-to-face conversations with her staff as often as possible. She said she considers it critical to "be out at [the] schools." Depending on the preferred method of communicating in individual schools, she may use text messaging (with translations) or other strategies to communicate with staff. She said she is "constantly inviting families in" so that they have the opportunity to learn about the programs their children are using.

3. How have you demonstrated an ability to establish a positive change in the overall performance of a district? How did it turn out? What would you do differently?

Dr. Homan served on a team at the state level that piloted tools created to allow for sophisticated benchmarking in a number of areas, with an emphasis on matching budget priorities to data associated with nearby and comparable districts. She has been able to bring these tools to her district, and the initial results are promising. She talked about the importance of including in budget planning a conversation about what programs, practices, and tools being used in a district should perhaps be discontinued.

Ms. Martin asked the following questions:

1. How have you motivated staff members who may be struggling with their instructional practice? Can you give some specific examples, and how have you followed up to ensure there has been improvement?

Dr. Homan provided a detailed description of her efforts to assist a librarian in her district who was having difficulty in several areas, including collaboration with teachers, structuring lessons, and interacting with students. Dr. Homan spoke of following up several times with the staff member to reinforce the changes in her practice that had resulted from their discussions, noting that the librarian's restructuring of her lessons helped her connect far more effectively with students and led to significantly increased collaboration with classroom teachers. Dr. Homan emphasized the importance of being direct but supportive, and of encouraging reflection, when working with a staff member who might be struggling.

2. What programs have you implemented that have used technology to improve the educational process? What were the outcomes? What would you change about these

programs to make them more effective?

Dr. Homan described her work in creating what she termed an integrated literacy block. She has provided extensive training in how to integrate digital and information literacy into content area instruction.

3. Describe some ways that you have been involved with your school community outside of your job responsibilities. How has your school district benefited from these activities?

Ms. Homan stated that she felt it was important to be as visible as possible in the community. In Waltham, she has participated in a number of local events, such as races to raise funds for community causes. On a recent occasion, she and her staff put together a "tech team" to participate in a race.

Chair Weisman asked the following questions:

1. Describe the involvement you have had in developing and evaluating curriculum. Describe the process you used, who was involved, and how you evaluated whether or not the curriculum resulted in improved student learning.

Dr. Homan has had considerable experience in developing curriculum. She noted that she is currently working on the new computer science standards, which she called "amazing." She has mapped out the application of the standards and is now working on assessments.

She went on to talk about the importance of gathering data from multiple sources to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum changes.

2. What, if any, programs in your current district do you think would work well in Easton and how would you implement those programs?

Dr. Homan said that she "would want to spend a lot of time talking to teachers and in classrooms" before answering this question. She spoke in some detail about the programs that are already in place in Easton, such as UbD and Easton University, that would be key to implementation of new programs.

3. The assistant superintendent's busiest time of the day is usually 2:30 to 5:30 because that is when teachers and staff are available to meet with her. In addition, the assistant superintendent also must attend a number of evening events and meetings (including school committee meetings). Do you see a problem in maintaining that schedule?

Dr. Homan said that this schedule was "typical for [her] now." She noted that mid to late afternoon hours were presently when she met with teachers and other staff, and that she

already attends school committee meetings and evening events. Dr. Homan indicated that she did not foresee any difficulty maintaining such a schedule, noting that she has a supportive husband who is accustomed to her extensive work commitments.

4. Based upon what you have learned about the Easton Public Schools, what is your impression of our district?

Dr. Homan provided a list of observations she had made about Easton schools, including her sense that the district struggles with funding (she referenced the unsuccessful override attempt last year); that we “do a lot with a little;” that we employ “backwards planning” (UbD); and that our SPED performance is trending upward.

Chair Weisman exited the meeting at 3:50 PM. Vice Chair DeLuca continued to chair the meeting

Ms. Homan made a brief closing statement, and this was followed by some dialogue with School Committee members about a range of educational topics.

On a motion by Caroline O’Neill, seconded by Nancy De Luca, with a 3-0 vote, the Committee voted to adjourn at 4:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted

Caroline O’Neill