

IPSWICH SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
APRIL 10, 2013
MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL ENSEMBLE ROOM

CALL TO ORDER

Dr. O'Flynn called the special meeting to interview a candidate for Superintendent at 7:05 p.m. with the following School Committee members present: J. Loeb, J. Bauman, S. Gresh, B. Hopping, R. Roesler. Dr. O'Flynn explained the procedure to the audience for three nights with three superintendent candidates. The second, Dr. William Hart, Assistant Superintendent in Pentucket Regional School for seven years, visited for the day in the district schools, meeting with administrators, and had dinner with the School Committee. The question/answer format for the evening went as follows:

Gresh question: How do you collaborate with the town government, businesses or institutions, other school districts, and the majority of households in Ipswich which do not contain school-age children to garner support for the budget process, multi-year planning, program and budget development?

William Hart answer: Yes, willingness to collaborate with the community as a whole and various institutions has been the cornerstone of my leadership for the past 21 years. Pentucket Regional is a school district, which is identified as a 21st Century School, producing students who graduate with skills and knowledge to succeed. I worked with students, parents, community, administrators, School Committee asking them for feedback. The themes were highly successful people, thinkers, collaborators, and creative explorers. We moved our district forward with the information from these stakeholders. Because of that, it wasn't Hart's idea, the community as a whole answered the question. People have bought into the 21st Century skills agenda. In Leominster we worked with a college dean in a TriCity collaborative and spent several years together with the university and the high school—it became a model for the country.

Loeb question: What do you see as the role of the School Committee beyond their basic statutory requirements? How do you describe, with some specifics, your preferred working relationship with the School Committee?

WH answer: Hiring, firing, police and budget and some untimed residual impact which isn't necessarily positive. No matter how the State wants to divorce the structure of the school from the Committee, I think it is important that we work very closely together. There are grade points in that collaborative. I'll be seeking your advice on curriculum issues; you will be seeking my advice on budget. We have to come up with a common vision, and I see it as the work of a team.

O'Flynn question: Negotiation with educators' unions both establishes a level of trust and appreciation with your teachers and dictates the level of resources available to support the educational needs of the children in the district. Describe how you have balanced the competing needs of kids and teachers either in negotiations or other educational settings.

WH answer: Good decision making is all about being able to balance. Work with a teachers' union and other relationship doesn't start with negotiations. It starts the day you start working. When you seek people's advice and counsel, you are developing that type of relation—give and take—people become far more reasonable on both sides of the table.

Gresh question: What are the two or three most important ways education is changing as a result of emerging technology innovations? Can you share a specific example with us from your current district?

WH answer: We are taking a pretty comprehensive approach in my current position. I see, as I look at Ipswich, a lot of focus on "stuff". Our primary purpose in my district is how we are defining the teaching and learning process: 21st Century thinking. There is a shared definition of powerful learning, pushing you out of your comfort zone, an element of reflection. When we look at technology, we are looking through powerful learning and 21st Century skills. SPED-using assistive technology is a great way to work with the non-verbal student, another powerful tool for student/teacher. We have students where we want them to communicate by writing stories. The characters are animating while the kids are writing. We are looking through the lens of what we want the kids to do. Smart boards are in every classroom.

At Pentucket, every professional is on a team. My doctorate is "Highly Effective Teaming". We focus on trained facilitators: Where everybody has been, look at how we see data making, analysis of where we are, and where we want to be, how you complete the solution that you have identified. This year we have done the technology piece—one member who is a specialist (every month after the regular school day for 1½ hours) trains us once again to see the use of technology growing exponentially.

Hopping question: How do you define student success and what specific evidence can you cite in your current district that demonstrates improved student growth and academic achievement during your tenure there?

WH answer: Critically important. State and Federal government has done a wonderful job of identifying with Common Core. Students need other skills such as self-confidence. This takes a lot of nurturing. We use the advisor/advisee model. Every adult in the school of 2,000 students works with about 10 different students so that there is one person who knows each student well and looks out for his/her best interest. There are multiple opportunities for students to have access; to be assessed. Pentucket's MCAS scores show growth and academic achievement to be quite impressive. Two elementary schools are at the top.

The 21st Century skills include the use of portfolios for every child as a rubric. In the elementary grades (4, 6, 8) they present to their parents and in the High School there is a panel of teachers, peers, and administrators who give (requirement for graduation) feedback. Assessment is measuring the right things to show growth in the self-determined measure.

Roesler question: What strategies might you use to improve a school system such as Ipswich that is already viewed by many as a successful district? How do you balance sensitivity to the preservation of the elements that have made the system successful with the need to change and improve?

WH answer: Go out into the community and find out what you do especially well and what do they think are the challenges? Ideas emerge. The things that have consensus is what you do. You ask a whole cross section of people and come back with the themes that have won out.

Another is objective data and deciding whether it is reflective of the type of achievement that is wanted. If not, work on the gap.

Hopping question: Describe 2 or 3 learning activities you engage in regularly that provide a model of life-long learning for our staff and for the community outside of school. How do you make people aware of your ongoing learning activities and share your experiences?

WH answer: One of the foundation responses for me is “Try to walk the walk” as far as being a reflective practitioner. Two examples: a summer academy of professional development, a series of common reading of literature/research, and I bring that work back to Principals for feedback. Math Task Force with teachers to teach in a more effective way. Global Studies with 21st Century skills and how we fit into the plan. I’m currently finishing up Creating Innovators, Tony Wagner’s most recent book. I attended a technology conference at Holy Cross recently. I am a life-long learner.

Bauman question: Although we have a full-time Director of Business & Finance, how do you see your role in the overall budget process and what would you identify as the most important school business function you will need to perform? What is your view of and approach to long range budgeting in today’s fiscal environment?

WH answer: A budget is a manifestation of a building’s goals and should be the advocate and promoter of the vision, mission, and goals and show the community how to identify the alignment of goals with budget. I have experience in long-term strategic planning. You ask the community to help with priorities—first, second, third—and the ability to finance these things. The facilitator of that whole process is central which you have to manage, keeping your eye on SPED personnel, transportation issues, and food services.

O’Flynn question: Proposition 2½ dictates a level of budget restriction that prevents Ipswich from comprehensively meeting educational needs of our students. Describe your experience with either a prop 2.5 override or an equivalent campaign for an increase in resources for your district.

WH answer: Have not been successful but am very good at capturing the message and getting it out in a variety of ways. You capture people's excitement and enthusiasm by making the district's needs tangible. You have to be very clear about this tangible evidence, working with the community to identify the mission, the plan, build the momentum so we can say this is a school that we can make better by supporting.

Bauman question: Describe an innovative educational program that took shape in your district and the implementation and results of that initiative.

WH answer: I have spoken about the 21st Century piece. In Leominster as Principal of 2,000 pupils, 165 staff, and 225 employees, I knew immediately that it was incredibly unstructured—teachers together but the kids wandered. The way this was going to work was if we clearly identified rigorous curriculum. We wanted a project-based interdisciplinary approach, a powerful learning experience for every student. To do that I needed to have adults be the drivers. We took that school and broke it up into 5 sections, each of 350 students. We gave adults common planning time to develop lessons, assessments and practices. Almost immediately in the implementation, discipline referrals dropped, grade averages jumped, and standardized test numbers went up. We took the systemic approach.

Roesler question: Can you describe a scenario you have encountered in your professional career which required you to handle a controversial or challenging issue? Specifically how did your response demonstrate your approach to solving an issue that might have had a negative impact on your school district and how did you respond to those who opposed your decision?

WH answer: In Leominster, we had an advisor/advisee program—1 adult to 10 kids. With research and collaboration, in January we were going to watch it begin. I had 90% of the faculty with me. The morning after we began, my building rep needed to talk with me regarding some faculty believing that this was a change in working conditions. The relationship between the union and myself was very important. My mistake was that I hadn't asked people to come to the table in the first place. The plan was put on hold while language was put in place over the next six months together, and the next September we launched the advisor/advisee program.

O'Flynn question: What are your general observations of what you saw today?

WH answer: I did research—followed about a year of School Committee meetings. One of the things that was so impressive is how strongly people felt about your school system. They really appreciate the good work, the personnel, and the people of the community who have been contributing. Needed: (a) somebody strong working on curriculum, (b) technology—I get a sense that several years ago you were on the cutting edge,-- and (c) the issue of wanting somebody that can help the community be stronger with administration, students, town personnel. I reference the packet (provided to each Board member) about what I have done (individual documents). I have a long history of working in great communities like yours and getting to the next level.

Loeb question: When faced with real and perceived socio/economic and demographic differences between 2 buildings that serve the same grade levels, how do you determine the best way to allocate resources?

WH answer: The best way is to take a look at some of the many indicators and make objective analyses: 1. Student/teacher ratio; 2. Allocation of funds as connected to per pupil allocation; 3. Overall budgeting basis and how allocated. Equity isn't always equal. It is reasonable to have greater resources if there is a socio reason. You have to be very objective. It can be very emotional when you take things that are common but isolate them and check the data for the wrong reason.

Loeb question: How do you use technology for your personal use?

WH answer: On a continuum, I am probably right in the middle. I email daily. I am getting my feet wet with Twitter. I use bibliography to get messages out. I am interested in developing a blog. I could envision myself doing a blog.

Loeb question: What is your view of the role of outside funds (e.g., grants, donation, etc.) in a school budget? What should the relationship and use be between outside funds and appropriated funds?

WH answer: In most cases, outside funds should supplement the operating budget. Title I can be counted on for funding. Grants are wonderful as are local business donations. Pentucket uses Choice funds in the Operating Budget. I have been a participant in the budget process but not a facilitator. I have worked with School Committees to prioritize.

Hopping question: How is your visibility accessibility? The vast majority of Ipswich citizens do not have students in the schools. How do you go about getting support?

WH answer: Any opportunity to get part of the population who have a disconnect makes it necessary to get them into the schools. Get performances into elderly housing. Invite senior citizens (with transportation provided) to come to the schools. Good schools affect home prices and it makes sense financially to invest in the schools.

Hopping question: In terms of your presence in the schools, do you plan to make that part of a routine for you? How many times a week?

WH answer: I am in the schools almost daily. In a meeting with the principal I walk around the school, stopping in briefly. "Instruction rounds" is a practice I use, having started with the administrators and moved to teachers. We are focusing on what the students are doing—rigorous exercises, connecting with computers.

Bauman question: Have you dealt with accreditation? Any surprises?

WH answer: Just finished the presentation. Pentucket's 21st Century is what the NEASC want to see.

O'Flynn question: Why did you get into education?

WH answer: My family were educators and I wanted "OUT." At my father's suggestion, I went to substitute teach and loved it. I began as a middle school teacher and then went into administration.

Gresh question: What do you believe are the top challenges facing special education and what are the most important things a school district should be doing to address these challenges?

WH answer: The primary point is "regular education." Too often a school system is focusing on one type of learning, not suitable for all. SPED has to have multi opportunities to assess academic contents. We have to create "task-based curriculum" where a 21st Century skilled content can be nourished in some strong powerful tasks and the student can soar by himself. The student who struggles can get support. Our assessment systems are memory based. One example: Our science head in AP Biology set up a scenario where, at a Super Bowl party everybody got sick. Students picked through the analysis to find the reason. The most significant educational issue is "regular education."

Part II – When is it appropriate to educate them here and when, elsewhere?

WH: Using trained professionals who are dedicated and stay with the job.

Gresh question: Are there one or two questions you expected us to ask but didn't?

WH answer: What would I want you to know: I have tried to put some things in the packet, evidence from my experience in Leominster and Pentucket's model school.

Hopping question: Why you? Why now? Why Ipswich?

WH answer: I think I am an excellent match as to what your community describes as a Superintendent. I am passionate—I know curriculum—I want to get to the next level. This is (my) clear evidence to get to the next level. You know the importance of terms and how they can have a profound impact on an organization when they are professional.

Why me? Because I think I am "alive!"

Why now? As good a time as any. I am looking for a superintendency.

Why Ipswich? You align with what I want. I want my first superintendency to be my last superintendency.

Dr. O'Flynn commented on the terrific note to end, saying how he appreciated Dr. Hart's patience and endurance.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.