



Winchendon Public Schools

Date Approved/Released

8/10/23

Date Approved/Held

School Committee Chair

Joint Meeting of the School Committee and Board of Selectmen

June 26, 2023 - 6:00 pm

Town Hall, 2nd Floor Auditorium

Attendance:

School Committee: Ryan Forsythe, Chair; Greg Vine, Vice-Chair; Karen Kast-McBride; David LaPointe; Thad King, Superintendent

Board of Selectmen: Audrey LaBrie, Chair; Richard Ward, Vice-Chair (via conference call); Danielle LaPointe; Barbara Anderson; Melissa Blanchard

1. Call to order

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Audio visual disclosure is read.

3. Selection of New School Committee Member:

R. Forsythe discusses the need to appoint a new school committee member to fill the seat being vacated by Alicia Jordan. The newly selected member will begin their role on August 1, 2023 and will serve until the next town election in May of 2024. At that time, the member may seek to be elected for a full term. By the application deadline of June 22, the school committee and the board of selectmen had received eight letters of interest and/or resumes. The committees prepared the following questions for each candidate:

- a. Please give one or two examples of what you see the Winchendon Public School district is doing right, and tell us how you would strengthen and continue to grow those aspects of the district.
- b. Please give one or two examples of what you see the district is doing wrong, or areas needing improvement, and tell us how you would address those issues.

Members of the boards may ask clarifying questions as needed. Chair LaBrie will choose names out of a bowl to determine the order of which the applicants will be invited to answer questions. If the applicant is not present at the time their name is called, the committees will move on to the next applicant. Any applicant not present when their name is called will not be invited back up to answer questions after their name is called. All remaining members of the school committee, not including Ms. Jordan because of her resignation, and all members of the board of selectmen will be invited to nominate one or more applicants to become candidates to be voted upon. Applicants do not need to be present to be nominated. At the end of the nomination period, nominations will be closed and a discussion of the nominated candidates will be invited by all members of the committees. At the end of the discussion period, each remaining member of the school committee, not to include Ms. Jordan, and

all members of the board of selectmen will be invited to vote by roll call vote. Candidates are not required to be present to be voted for and can successfully be appointed with a majority of votes cast. Multiple votes may be necessary to establish a majority, and once a candidate has been selected, the joint meeting of the two boards will conclude, and the board of selectmen will continue their regularly scheduled meeting.

Chair LaBrie calls Mike Gaspar. Mr. Gaspar discusses the schools coming out of DESE oversight and the dual enrollment program as two things the district is doing well. The special education department's recent issues are of concern to him. He feels he could be helpful in implementing policies and procedures to help students, administrators follow guidelines and achieve goals set out for them. He would like to address the reason for the high turnover rate to help build a successful team. Clarifying questions by Mrs. LaPointe regarding where the candidate stands once the problems in the district are resolved and whether he is interested in running long term. Mr. Gaspar states he is in it for the long haul because he wants the best education for his children. K. Kast-McBride asks what kind of time commitment he is able to put toward preparing for the meetings and if he is aware that a lot more may be involved and that he may be stopped on the street or have to deal with phone calls and Facebook messages. Mr. Gaspar states his job is flexible and he has the time to commit. He feels he is approachable and easy to talk to which he hopes would encourage people to come and talk to him.

Chair LaBrie calls Mike Barbaro. Mr. Barbaro discusses his part in helping bring the district out from underperforming and the early literacy program the superintendent has been pushing the last few years and its proven success. He discusses the district's initiatives in helping students by covering the costs involved in sports and food as we are a community with food insecurities. He discusses the work needed in the special education department, and he would like to see special education separated from pupil service. He discusses the lack of morale within the schools and would like to see that improved. Mrs. LaPointe asks if he is interested in the position on a long term basis and if he is aware of the time commitment that is required for a school committee member. He states he would be interested in a long term position and he understands that the time required can range from 20 to 40 hours depending on what is put into subcommittees, negotiations and attending all the meetings. He is comfortable with the time commitment. G. Vine asks what role Mr. Barbaro feels the school committee should play when it comes to the retention of staff. Mr. Barbaro states he is aware that the committee has no right to intervene in the retention of staff, only the superintendent. He states the role of the committee is to deal with policy and finance and the retention of staff is in the hands of the superintendent. K. Kast-McBride asks if Mr. Barbaro agrees that the superintendent should be answering these questions when they are asked. He states that as the committee is the superintendent's boss, if asked a question he should answer, even if it is not what the committee wants to hear. He elaborates on the importance of communication between the superintendent and the committee.

Chair LaBrie calls Mike Gaynor. Mr. Gaynor discusses the leadership of the superintendent. He believes the district has appointed excellent administrative leadership, including Dr. Jonathan Landman. He feels the district needs to work on getting a standards based curriculum that is rigorous and challenging and prepares students for their MCAS testing, college and career readiness. He feels the strength of the district is in recruiting people like Dr. Landman. He discusses concerns about the special education department and the importance of providing strong special education services to students, promoting equity and inclusion as well as social emotional learning. He feels it is key to help students feel safe, valued and important. A member of the board of selectmen asks for his intentions with a long term appointment. Mr. Gaynor states he would be in for as long as possible and would consider running for long term appointment. He discusses his family and his background in education

and believes there should be teachers on the committee to help recruit the best candidates to allow better outcomes for students. He states he is comfortable with the time commitment required.

Mrs. LaBrie calls Kevin Nelson, who speaks on the importance of the free activities Winchendon offers, the quality of teaching in the district. He discusses concerns within the special education department and bullying within the district. He also expresses concerns about the high turnover rate in the district. He is here because members of his community encouraged him to do so. He is willing to do what is necessary to commit the time needed to serve on the committee, and he would be interested in running for a long term position.

Mrs. LaBrie calls Adam LeBlanc, who discusses the progress that students are making as presented by the Toy Town Elementary principal at a recent school committee meeting. He praises the teachers within the district and their drive. He has concerns about the special education department and feels that the rush of trying to figure out turnover should be handled in a more methodical manner. He would be interested in running for a long term position, and he has no problem with the time commitment. G. Vine comments on how at the last school committee meeting, Mr. LeBlanc made it sound as if the district were falling apart at the seams and suggested a wholesale change in administration. He asks if he could maintain an objective assessment of the people he would be coming to work with, including the superintendent and the principals that are still here. Mr. LeBlanc states that he looks at the facts, and if there is something wrong, he will be first to proclaim it. He accepts there are things he does not know, but if he gets on the board and is allowed to see them, then he will admit if he is wrong.

Mrs. LaBrie calls Anthony Findley, who discusses the small classroom size and the teachers' dedication to their students as one of the strengths of the district. He feels the teacher retention is good at Murdock and discusses the relationship between the teachers and students and himself as a coach. He has concerns about retention at the top level, stating that he is one of the longest employed coaches in the district. He has seen a revolving door at the administrative level. He would be interested in running for a long term position, and he is comfortable with the time commitment required. He sees this as his opportunity to make the school better.

Mrs. LaBrie calls Brandis French who discusses the teacher in the district and how much they love their students and the work done to ensure their students are engaged. One thing she feels the district could work on is retention. She has not experienced extreme issues with special education, other than communication issues with her daughter receiving speech. She would like to run for a long term role and her flexible job would allow her to commit the time needed to serve on the committee.

Eddie Ford is called and discusses the benefits of dual enrollment in the district and the Sunshine Cafe, which is a great way for students to gather after school as well as manage a business-like opportunity. He would like to see the district branch out further and increase student activity in the community. He discusses concerns regarding the special education department and issues with the superintendent as he hears parents complaining about the superintendent's lack of response to them. He has no issue with the time commitment.

R. Forsythe invites all remaining members of the school committee and all members of the board of selectmen to nominate one or more applicants to be considered as candidates to be voted on. He reminds the room that applicants do not need to be present to be nominated. Discussion is had regarding the length of the term. R. Forsythe clarifies that state law states that if a seat becomes vacant,

it gets filled until the next annual election, which would be May of 2024. Mrs. Blanchard nominates Anthony Findley. Nomination is seconded. G. Vine nominates Brandis French. Nomination is seconded. Adam LeBlanc is nominated. Nomination is seconded. A question arises about whether members can nominate more than one candidate. R. Forsythe clarifies that according to the town clerk, there are no limitations on the number of nominations at the time of voting. Each member of the board has the option to vote for one candidate at the time of nominations. A question arises about whether the committees are doing rank choice voting. R. Forsythe explains the voting is one vote per candidate without rank voting and the necessity to elect an individual is the majority of votes cast. Mike Gaspar is nominated. Nomination is seconded. Mike Gaynor is nominated. Nomination is seconded.

Nomination period is closed. The five candidates nominated are:

- Anthony Findley
- Brandis French
- Adam LeBlanc
- Mike Gaspar
- Mike Gaynor

Chair LaBrie thanks everyone who took the time to put their names in. Mrs. LaPointe asks whether Mr. Findley being on the committee jeopardizes his coaching position in any way. Superintendent King states he can only comment based on the elections earlier where the district had a candidate that was an actual employee, and it seemed the attorneys thought it was ok, so he does not believe it would impact Mr. Findley's coaching.

The votes fall as follows:

- Anthony Findley - 3
- Brandis French - 3
- Adam LeBlanc - 3
- Mike Gaspar - 0
- Mike Gaynor - 0

Discussion ensues. R. Forsythe states the committees have the prerogative to vote again on all 5 candidates or vote on the 3 who received the numbers of votes. After discussion, motion is made to vote from the 3 candidates who received votes. Motion is seconded. Vote is unanimous.

Second vote results in a three-way tie again. Discussion is had about the qualifications of the 3 candidates. Adam LeBlanc withdraws his name from the candidacy. Mrs. LaPointe moves to accept Mr. LeBlanc's withdrawal. Motion is seconded. Discussion takes place. K. Kast-McBride states the attorney general's office indicates that Mr. Findley may have a conflict of interest. R. Forsythe discusses the recent school committee election when an employee was written into the ballot. The district sought legal counsel's opinion on the right of the individual to retain their employment and continue to serve on the committee. The response of the attorney was that the individuals that are written into the law that are expressly prohibited from working for the district and holding a seat on the school committee were limited to certain positions, which did not include that person's position. The eligibility of a coach was not discussed with counsel. Mr. Findley adds that he has yet to be appointed to a coaching position. After vote, motion to accept Mr. LeBlanc's withdrawal passes unanimously.

The committees vote on the remaining 2 candidates. Mr. Findley takes the majority vote. R. Forsythe

congratulates Mr. Findley.

4. Adjournment:

K. Kast-McBride moves to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by G. Vine. Vote is unanimous. Meeting is adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted: Liz Latona
Liz Latona, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent

Documents Attached: None