

Approved by
the Select Board on:

8/10/2020

**Minutes
Town of Belmont**

Select Board

Joint Meeting with the School Committee

Virtual Meeting on Zoom

Wednesday, June 24, 2020

7:00pm

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: September 3, 2020

TIME: 9:53 AM

CALL TO ORDER:

A meeting of the Select Board was called to order at 7:00pm by Chair Roy Epstein. Vice Chair Tom Caputo and Select Board member Adam Dash were present.

The meeting was joint with the School Committee to interview candidates for a vacant School Committee position. The School Committee called itself to order at 7:02pm. Catherine Bowen, Amy Checkoway, Michael Crowley and Tara Donner were present. Chair Andrea Prestwich joined the meeting shortly after it was called to order, due to technical difficulties.

ACTION BY CONSENT:

Interview for School Committee appointment and vote select finalists

Chair Epstein explained the format for the interviews. Each candidate would be given two minutes for an opening statement. Next, the candidates would respond to two predetermined questions, one minute allowed for each question – all the candidates would answer the first question prior to moving onto the second. Finally, each candidate would give a one minute closing statement. Following this, there would be a chance for discussion among the School Committee and Select Board prior to voting. To vote, each member of the School Committee and Select Board would send an email (in real time) to Chair Epstein and Chair Prestwich listing their top five choices; once all the emails had been received, results would be read aloud into the record and votes tallied. The top five vote getters would move onto a more in-depth interview the following evening.

Originally there had been fifteen applicants for the position, however three had withdrawn. The twelve remaining candidates present at the meeting were: Vicki Amalfitano, Seetha Burtner, Evelyn Gomez, Elizabeth Goss, Elizabeth Killeen, Jeff Liberty, Haixi Liu, Meghan Moriarty, Peter Pantazopoulos, Shirish Ranjit, Pamela Schmidt, and Jessica Whited.

Opening statements: The candidates provided opening statements, summarized in brief below.

- *Amalfitano:* Three year Belmont resident. Professional background as healthcare administrator/executive and educator. Experience with complex bureaucracy, complex workforce situations, and improving outcomes with reduced resources. Currently doing consulting work part-time, allowing for time to serve on the Committee. Recent experience transitioning to remote learning as a teacher of a healthcare marketing course at Harvard. Bring talents, energy and perspective as a newcomer to Belmont.

- *Burtner*: Lived in Belmont since 2005. Works as a special education advocate in districts across Massachusetts. Serving as Burbank PTA president and Town Meeting Member. Vision for Belmont Public Schools (BPS) is to nurture openness and curiosity, foster inclusive classrooms that meet learning needs from variety of backgrounds, and preparing students to be citizens and contribute to a diverse workforce.
- *Gomez*: From LA, but has spent majority of adult life in Boston pursuing post-secondary education (undergraduate in aerospace engineering; graduate school in education at Harvard). Professional experience as teacher, non-profit director, and currently at Lemelson Institute at MIT. Vision is to empower students to become interdisciplinary problem solvers using technology. See the current situation as an opportune time to think about the future of education and how to make it more equitable.
- *Goss*: Parent of a soon-to-be Belmont High schooler. Business owner of a boutique immigration law firm. Contributed to Belmont as a Town Meeting Member the last several years; also on the vocational education working group and Porchfest board. Noted the painful transition to remote learning and upcoming budgetary challenges – Belmont is lucky to have avoided staff layoffs, however there is unique challenges ahead in reimagining education.
- *Liberty*: Lived in Belmont 10 years, two kids at Chenery. Product of Boston Public Schools. Wealth of experience in education as teacher, leader in public education context, helped design schools, started a school in Boston. Started an international organization to build capacity of teachers to bring innovation into the classroom. Worked on ways to strategically incorporate technology into learning. See BPS as having great assets but also challenges, amplified by COVID.
- *Killeen*: Lived in Belmont since 2009, two kids in BPS. Professional career as an attorney, volunteer experience at schools with PTO. Concerns for the schools: growing enrolment, especially 3rd and 6th/7th grade class sizes; relatively low per-pupil expenditures compared with cohort towns; identifying other sources of revenue for the schools; long range capital planning. Important that every student receives a comprehensive education, no matter what September looks like.
- *Liu*: Profession experience in commercial software industry. Current position at the firm 'Crunch Time' has provided experience helping restaurants adjust to COVID – this would be relevant for the transition to online learning. Also, will bring skills of delivering customer satisfaction. On a personal level, lived in Belmont for eleven years, two kids in BPS.
- *Moriarty*: Two rising 4th graders at Butler, served as PTA president for last three years. Educator and small business owner, business focuses on educational research and program evaluation. Worked previously as a teacher in both public and private schools and evaluating pre-service teachers. Prioritize a collaborative approach – recently reached out to have conversations with key stakeholders to better understand issues facing BPS.
- *Pantazopoulos*: Born and raised in Cambridge, lived in Belmont since 2000. Two children, have experienced firsthand the difficulty of homeschooling during the pandemic. Professional experience building consulting company catering to executives and implementing financial supply chain management products. Have experience working on large budget projects, delivering on-time and on-budget. Key aspects of experience: working with State/Federal regulators to understand regulations, coordination of planning/budget/resources for large projects, making data driven decisions.
- *Ranjit*: Express gratitude to School Committee and teachers of Belmont for their efforts in transitioning to online learning with COVID. Been in Belmont 14 years and in the area 20 years.

Professional experience as an entrepreneur and technologist. Vision for education is preparing kids to be competitive in the global economy.

- *Schmidt*: First generation daughter of immigrant, mother never attended high school. After obtaining MA in Education, spent eight years in Title I classroom with mission of helping students achieve their goals through education. Have dealt closely with teachers' unions. Experience with preparing numerous IEP's, including for own son. Financially literate and prepared to help address the BPS budget challenges.
- *Whited*: Lived in Belmont two years. Full-time college professor in biology at Harvard, runs a lab of 15 people. Skills of project planning and management as well as communication. Want to ensure all students can live up to their potential, and believe this can happen even with the current circumstances.

Question round:

First, each candidate provided responses to the following question: *"What are the most important values, perspectives, or experiences you would bring to the School Committee?"*

- *Whited*: Stake in BPS is personal – as a single mom and college professor, know what kind of education we should be striving for. Expertise in biology will help in dealing with COVID situation.
- *Schmidt*: Financially literate – understand that BPS strapped for cash, helped participate in the screening process for the budget this year. Understand the perspective of teachers as well as dealing with unions; help to foster the relationship between the two during this challenging time.
- *Ranjit*: Cultural diversity – experienced and understand the Asian and American schooling approaches. Perspective of global training and mentoring.
- *Pantazopoulos*: Listening skills. Taking complex problems and applying data driven solutions. Negotiation and relationship building skills. Budgeting, but also comprehensive long-range planning.
- *Moriarty*: A holistic and timely perspective across all schools in the system, from recent meetings with PTA presidents, Superintendent Phelan, and other stakeholders. Value transparency – parents and care-givers should be both informed and asked for feedback.
- *Liu*: Perspective as a Chinese immigrant, growing up with a very different education system. Value/experience from current job, using data to deliver high customer satisfaction and conducting user training.
- *Liberty*: Wide variety of experiences in various educational roles – student, teacher, principal, administrator, etc. Volunteer experience in Town. Value student-family partnerships, innovation, and diversity/equity/inclusion.
- *Killeen*: Experience as a professional lawyer and trained mediator; drafting and negotiating contracts. Volunteer experience in BPS. Value education as a top priority for Belmont as a Town.
- *Goss*: Experience managing a business through COVID. Value communication as key for success – ability to distill and deliver a message in a digestible way.
- *Gomez*: Range of experiences in field of education as both student and educator. Experience developing systems to build trusting relationships and deliver innovative educational tools. Using limited budget in creative ways. Up to date on educational policy in Massachusetts from completing a certificate program.
- *Burtner*: Perspective obtained from work, hearing stories of children struggling in school to overcome academic, social and emotional learning gaps. Value that each child feels safe and is

provided with equal opportunity and access, no matter their background. Member of professional organization that provides direct input to DESE.

- *Amalfitano*: Perspective from being executive of a non-profit in healthcare industry – dealing with disruption, making tough decisions in fiscal/civic crises. Different perspective from other candidates – passionate about education but don't have children in BPS; represent population within Belmont that does not have children in schools.

Next, each candidate provided a response to the following: *"Identify two or three priorities you feel the district should address, and explain why."*

- *Amalfitano*: 1] Educational insecurity due to the pandemic; how to best customize the approach to learning across all grade levels. 2] Transformational potential of new facility for middle and high school students.
- *Burtner*: 1] Doing more with less, due to relatively low per-pupil expenditures. 2] Imbalances and disparities for minority students. 3] Early identification of learning profiles.
- *Gomez*: 1] How to teach/foster an anti-racist mindset, living and learning equitably, raising white allies. 2] Use disruption of COVID to reimagine what schools look like, integrate novel and innovative approaches. 3] Identifying our values, what we want students to learn.
- *Goss*: 1] Maintaining high quality standards of BPS; having and communicating a plan to do so. 2] Budget shortfall and upcoming union negotiations. 3] Prepare and present campaign for an override.
- *Killeen*: 1] Hiring technology specialists in light of COVID. 2] Challenge of growing enrolment with low per-pupil expenditures – presents huge budgetary challenge. 3] Immediate priority is to get through COVID.
- *Liberty*: 1] Agree that COVID is top priority – how to make learning experiences better under circumstances. 2] Role of public schools in addressing societal problems of racism, climate change, politics, etc.
- *Liu*: 1] School funding and budget concerns; how to best prepare for next override. 2] Addressing problem of early start times.
- *Moriarty*: 1] Equity and access for all students, including beyond core curriculum elements to areas such as life skills, career awareness, etc. 2] Committed to implementation and monitoring of social-emotional learning program.
- *Pantazopoulos*: 1] Unknowns due to COVID – budget challenges and potential second wave in the fall. 2] Declining Chapter 70 aide and potential changes to policies/regulations; need to make difficult staffing decisions.
- *Ranjit*: 1] Financial and non-financial resources for the schools. 2] Training kids to be competitive into next century. 3] How to socialize kids in the current situation with remote learning.
- *Schmidt*: 1] All students be given an equitable experience under current circumstances; all students/parents/teachers can come back to school in a safe environment. 2] Address mental health challenges for students.
- *Whited*: 1] Safety for students and families top priority. 2] Quality of online curriculum and ensuring equity in terms of access for all types of students and learning profiles. 3] Maintaining social connections in new environment.

Closing statements: Each candidate gave a short closing statement summarizing their motivation and/or qualifications for serving on the School Committee.

Discussion of Select Board and School Committee: Epstein and Prestwich opened the meeting for discussion. Members highlighted particular skills/qualities they were looking for in the successful candidate. There was broad agreement on the importance of educational expertise, demonstrated evidence of community participation, diversity of perspectives, and financial background to help address budgetary challenges. Epstein and Prestwich thanked the candidates for coming forward and participating in the process.

Vote: The Select Board and School Committee sent emails to Epstein and Prestwich with their top five choices (no order was implied); the votes were read aloud and tallied.


- Epstein: Moriarty, Killeen, Pantazopoulos, Schmidt, Amalfitano.
- Prestwich: Burtner, Gomez, Goss, Liberty, Whited.
- Checkoway: Burtner, Gomez, Killeen, Liberty, Moriarty.
- Bowen: Amalfitano, Gomez, Goss, Liberty, Moriarty.
- Dash: Amalfitano, Gomez, Killeen, Liberty, Moriarty.
- Donner: Burtner, Gomez, Liberty, Moriarty, Whited.
- Crowley: Burtner, Gomez, Liberty, Moriarty, Schmidt.
- Caputo: Amalfitano, Gomez, Goss, Liberty, Moriarty.

The following candidates would move forward to the next stage of the process tomorrow evening: Moriarty (7 votes), Liberty (7 votes), Gomez (7 votes), Amalfitano (4 votes) and Burtner (4 votes).

ADJOURNMENT:

The School Committee adjourned.

Motion: To adjourn the Select Board meeting at 9:04pm. (Vote passed 3-0)


Respectfully Submitted,

PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator

