

## **BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**February 6, 2023**

**Meeting location:**

**LGI Room**

### **1. Call to Order**

At 5:30 PM, Mr. Morrison called to order the meeting of the Bedford School Committee. Other members present included Ms. Scoville, Mr. Morrison, Mr. Brosgol, Ms. Guay and Ms. Mehta-Green and Hanscom Representative Ms. Sarah McGinley

### **2. Public Comment**

No Comments

### **3. Superintendent Candidate-Finalist Interviews with: Dr. Portia S. Bonner (candidate #1) and Clifford Chuang (candidate #2)**

- Each candidate was given 90 minutes to answer questions presented by School Committee members
- Each candidate introduced themselves to School Committee Members
- School Committee Members introduced themselves to each of the candidates

**Dr. Portia S. Bonner, Candidate # 1, Interview questions and responses**

**Clifford Chuang, Candidate #2, Interview questions and responses**

1. Why Bedford? Please tell us about the trajectory of your career and how Bedford fits into your vocation now? (Brad)

**Candidate #1 response:** 30 years' experience in education. Started out as a classroom science teacher, was Biology chairperson, Assistant Superintendent. Likes the size of Bedford and feels its diversity is an area of strength. Sees Bedford's uniqueness as a positive. Dr. Bonner feels her background could benefit the district and bring unification to all groups. Dr. Bonner also feels that the student-centered approach the district has is a strength.

**Candidate #2 response:** Thanked School Committee for the opportunity to meet and greet everyone today. Interested in Bedford for its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Social Emotional Learning; and Academic Excellence (DEI), small community to get to know people, families and students. Cannot do all the things he would like to in current position working for the state.

2. Can you give us some examples of how you have worked with parents (and students) to

build support for the public schools in your previous positions? (Sheila)

**Candidate #1 response:** Worked to build up school councils to give parents and community members an opportunity to be heard. Attended student advisory groups, sporting events, theatre and musical events to get a sense of what students were doing.

**Candidate #2 response:** eight years teaching, nineteen years working at state level in Massachusetts and New York. Information needs to be accessible to parents and community to engage and to voices be heard.

3. What steps would you take as Superintendent to best support our Hanscom and METCO students? What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing each of these groups, and how would you address it? (Sarah M)

**Candidate #1 response:** Learned a few things today after speaking to staff and students. Hanscom students are here 2-years max. How do we draw them in to feel included? As for METCO, what are we doing in the curriculum to make each of these groups feel included? Do they see themselves, how do they share their voices. All students should feel this not just METCO and/or Hanscom students. Are events planned in or near METCO or Hanscom so these students don not always have to travel to Bedford?

**Candidate #2 response:** Works closely with METCO and military families in current role. Would work on credit transferability and integrate it into Bedford. At state level, students, METCO and Hanscom representatives on School Committee have voting powers. Would Bedford be willing to do this?

4. Discuss a large-scale change initiative you have led? How was it received by the stakeholders? What was the outcome? (Ann)

**Candidate #1 response:** Gave example of a master facility plan from time in CT. Most enrollments are on the decline. Had to find ways to merge and close out building and maintain class sizes. This was a five-year plan. Held many meetings with parents and community to ensure best outcome. People came together and worked collaboratively to ensure students transition went smoothly.

**Candidate #2 response**

5. The 2021 MCAS scores seem to have been artificially high, while the 2022 scores showed the actual impact of the pandemic on learning. The state has recently released its vision of how it expects scores and schools to recover. What do you think of DESE's new recommendations? (Dan)

**Candidate #1 response:** Give staff time to reflect on past practices, support staff, strengthen enrichment programs for students and look at curriculum, look at math and literacy. Some of these things Bedford is already doing. What supports can we provide to teachers? During COVID, they had time to de-stress. We need to find a way to get back to doing this. Bedford is a high functioning district and it still needs to find ways to get students up to speed because students are behind and still catching up after COVID.

**Candidate #2 response:** Agrees that scores seem high. Some students struggled during COVID while others weathered COVID better. Students still need time to recover as do district and schools.

6. One of the challenges Bedford is facing is giving equal thought, attention, and action to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Social Emotional Learning; and Academic Excellence. How can we create a rigorous academic environment and also support these other priorities? Give us an example of how you have put this into action. (Sarah S)

**Candidate #1 response:** Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Social Emotional Learning; and Academic Excellence are not separate areas. Students should see themselves in books and materials and feel safe and welcomed. Staff need to see how to connect all these areas.

**Candidate #2 response:** Rethinking grading, how to access student learning, social emotional support is needed for all students. As a classroom teacher gave students ways to show they understood the materials if they did not do well on a written exam to win points back.

7. As Superintendent, what would be your top priorities relating to academic opportunities and enhanced rigor in the district? (Sarah M)

**Candidate #1 response:** Bedford has so many opportunities for students already and yet the students want more. World Language would be an example of this. May staff could have a flex schedule to offer things they are passionate about that is different from what they normally teach or perhaps offer online options to students.

**Candidate #2 response:** Top priorities to enhance rigor. What do families want, what do educators want. Many conversations need to happen. I heard a lot from the community today on this topic. The district needs ways for students to go out into the community, apply what they are learning, and find opportunities for employment. Much like Shawsheen Tech does without duplicating the way they do it.

8. Labor issues across the Commonwealth between teachers' unions and municipalities are becoming more commonplace. How would you work to ensure that our next negotiations are successful? (Dan)

**Candidate #1 response:** Commonality- have an open door policy to try to hear staff, build relationships with union members, and look at past practices of negotiations. How do we work to retain staff and compensate them- fiscal and hiring difficulties are nationwide.

**Candidate #2 response:** Successful with negotiations. Communication and trust are the keys. The competition to find qualified educators and staff is cut throat right now.

9. Teaching post pandemic has been challenging and burnout is high. What are specific ways that you would support the teachers on a day-to-day basis? (Sarah S)

**Candidate #1 response:** Support teachers. Today in speaking with staff, they would like to get back to having ED camps as they did pre COVID. They miss the district feeding them, collaborating with staff and PTO. Teachers need ways to destress just like students. Burnout comes quickly for teachers and staff.

**Candidate #2 response:** Support teachers and build a solid relationship with them and other staff. Remove small stressors to help teachers focus on tasks to support students.

10. Please give us an example of a time when you advocated on behalf of an educator or colleague who received criticism from the community. (Brad)

**Candidate #1 response:** I had to advocate having a person put on leave not to be terminated. No employee services were in place at the time and the person needed counseling. Worked on getting the person what they needed and they received counseling.

**Candidate #2 response:** Support even if the decision made is not the most popular. Listen to complaints and feedback. Troubleshoot with your team.

11. Please describe a situation in which data revealed failure of a major initiative in which you were involved. How did you know? What did you do in response? (Ann)

**Candidate #1 response:** Gave example of failure to implement data- about a school uniform. Had to gather data came up with a dress code not a uniform policy. Some schools in the district chose to use the policy while others did not. The policy seemed to satisfy the parents that pushed for the change as well as give those parents not in favor of the policy a voice as well.

**Candidate #2 response:** Data failure when working at charter school. ELL and Special Education students were not being reached. Had to look at the data and find ways to ensure we did everything possible to provide the services they were entitled to.

12. Special Education is a particular challenge because of the complexity of rules, service needs, and student and parent concerns. When you assess the effectiveness of your special education programs, what are some of the criteria you use? Tell us about a problem or challenge you have addressed involving special education and how you worked this out. (Sheila)

**Candidate #1 response:** Would need to look at the data. Are over identifying students, are we in compliance, are we meeting goals and helping those students we do see challenges in? Are we doing all we can to service these student's in district? When is the right time to outsource services for these students? How are we using staff correctly? How do we improve attendance and graduation numbers? All these things need to be considered.

**Candidate #2 response:** The challenge is, are all students needs being met. Need to use partnerships strategically, are students making progress based on their IEP. Access needs to be accessible to families, families need help to advocate for their child's needs.

13. What steps have you taken to decrease achievement gaps during your experience, and what results did they yield? (Sheila)

**Candidate #1 response:** Make sure students master skills, make sure students learn in chunks not all at once approach.

**Candidate #2 response:** Advisory, Tutoring, early college skills, diversity in team/staff. Students need at least one adult to help them in all areas of life not just academics.

14. Challenges in literacy instruction face school districts everywhere, including Bedford. Our district is gathering data on the best approach to teaching literacy moving forward.

What are your thoughts on the teaching of reading, specifically phonics, how would you expand writing opportunities for Bedford students, and how would you evaluate and institute change if a shift in approach was in the best interest of Bedford students?

(Sarah M)

**Candidate #1 response:** Phonics is key. Approach and instruction are important for teachers to focus on. Teacher assessments are limited and cannot tell all the areas a student is not reading, if they are at grade level. We need to make sure we are addressing all the student's needs. Writing needs to be worked on and elevated and changed. Reading is key in doing everything.

**Candidate #2 response:** Do practices align? Phonics-decoding skills need to be in place in the curriculum.

15. Oftentimes the arts and athletics is the only thing that brings students to school. How do you prioritize extracurricular programming while simultaneously prioritizing academic programming? (Sarah S)

**Candidate #1 response:** Sports should not be the only avenue for students to express themselves. Some students are quiet and do not have a way to express themselves in a large or loud way. Be flexible when needed to get students to sporting and other school based events.

**Candidate #2 response:** There is equal value in sports and academics. Can playing sports, at the high school level, be counted toward Physical education credits? Would the point value system need to be adjusted to allow for such a change.

16. We are likely facing a decrease in our school-aged population over the coming decade. How would you plan for declining enrollment? (Dan)

**Candidate #1 response:** Formulate a master plan based on the data

**Candidate #2 response:** You would have to look at enrollment patterns and population data. Strategize and allocate resources where the students are. You already have METCO and Hanscom that feed the district students. Are you willing to entertain school choice? How do you attract more educators to Bedford?

17. How do you manage with constrained resources? (Ann)

**Candidate #1 response:** I have lots of experience having worked in urban areas. You have to be innovative, learn to do more with less. Create ways to maintain day-to-day needs yet remain frugal.

**Candidate #2 response:** Prioritize, push back on generating reports that people do not read. What are other sources of revenue? DESE has a grant program, make most impact with what you have.

18. What are your strategies for fostering a positive relationship with the School Committee regarding a) making educational policy for the district; b) setting budget priorities and formal spending plans; c) engaging in collective bargaining, and d) creating a solid administrative and policy making team that supports the district's goals and objectives? (Sheila)

**Candidate #1 response:** Meet with School Committee members when coming into a new district. Hold retreats go over expectations they have of me gain an understanding of one another spend time to build relationships. Look at policies to make sure they are up to date. Budget must align with school improvement plan and principals must maintain budget during the year.

**Candidate #2 response:** Understand where everyone is coming from. Do we have subcommittees? Find different area of expertise to assist us with our needs.

19. Why do you think we talk about Bedford as a unique community? In what ways do you feel Bedford is unique? What are some of its unique strengths... and unique challenges?  
(Dan)

**Candidate #1 response:** I see importance of exposure to diversity, challenge residence to deal with differences and navigate in the world. Partnership with Air Force base. Open opportunity for short-term students to experience Bedford community is invested in children. District is in a good space see areas of growth.

**Candidate #2 response:** Bedford's uniqueness is its size. Smallness can be a strength or weakness. Bedford is small only in terms of its size compared to other school districts. Even with decrease in enrollment working on ways to close opportunity gaps and support all students for success. Thank you to the committee for this opportunity.

#### **Adjournment**

Mr. Brosgol made the following motion: **7:00 PM adjourn meeting for a 15-minute break to allow candidate one to exit and prepare for the second candidate.**

**MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Mehta-Green**  
**MOTION APPROVED 5-0-0**

Ms. Scoville	Yes
Mr. Brosgol	Yes
Mr. Morrison	Yes
Ms.Mehta-Green	Yes
Ms. Guay	Yes

Meeting reopened at 7:35 PM and Clifford Chuang's interview began. School Committee members read interview questions, and the candidate gave his responses.

#### **Adjournment**

Mr. Brosgol made the following motion: **9:15 PM to adjourn the meeting and not to reopen to the public.**

**MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Mehta-Green**  
**MOTION APPROVED 5-0-0**

Ms. Scoville	Yes
Mr. Brosgol	Yes
Mr. Morrison	Yes
Ms.Mehta-Green	Yes
Ms. Guay	Yes

  
School Committee Secretary

  
Date

