

Looking For a Leader

A Guide to Searching For a Superintendent

A GUIDE AND CHECKLIST FOR THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

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**Prepared for the exclusive use of its members by the
Massachusetts Association of School Committees**

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INDEX

LOOKING FOR A LEADER	3
The School Committee’s Guide to the Superintendent Search Process	
THE CHALLENGE OF LOOKING FOR A LEADER NOW	3
WHAT’S THE BEST TIME FRAME FOR A SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH	6
WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU KNOW YOU MUST SEEK A SUPERINTENDENT	6
SEARCH PREPARATION	7
MANAGING YOUR OWN SEARCH	11
BUDGETING FOR A SEARCH	
“What’s this going to cost?”	12
A QUICK CHECKLIST OF ITEMS IN THE SEARCH PROCESS	13
DISCRETION IN PLANNING FOR YOUR SEARCH	15
SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOL COMMITTEES	16
CONDUCTING SUPERINTENDENT SEARCHES	
MASC MEMBER SERVICES (Basic Membership)	19
SHOULD WE EMPLOY A SEARCH CONSULTANT	20

LOOKING FOR A LEADER

The School Committee's Guide to the Superintendent Search Process

Hiring the superintendent of schools is one of the most important decisions the School Committee will make. The person you select to lead your district will influence the school district for years to come. Your ability to meet high standards, improve student achievement, serve every student effectively, find outstanding personnel, build for the future, develop positive relationships with your community and the area businesses, and secure a favorable reputation for your district may well depend upon the kind of superintendent you choose.

School Committees seek superintendents of schools for several reasons. Whether they are successful or not in finding a top notch individual may depend upon many factors including several that you may not be able to control.

During the search planning process and right through to the end, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) is here to help you review your situation, explore your options, and plan your course of action as you get ready to look for your new leader. MASC provides consultation services or manages superintendent searches for about 25 school districts every year. In many instances, districts that choose to administer their own superintendent searches rely heavily on MASC technical assistance that is available to all our members without charge. As your association, our goal is to help the School Committee find the superintendent, develop goals, and implement their policies to serve the district and the community. With our staff of experienced former and current School Committee members, we understand the concerns and needs of the School Committee and appreciate the unique relationship between members and superintendents.

THE CHALLENGE OF LOOKING FOR A LEADER NOW

Massachusetts school districts can expect to find many highly qualified and competent candidates for the Superintendency. On one hand, Massachusetts attracts candidates from all parts of the country because it is culturally rich, the population is diverse and well educated, the economy is generally ahead of the rest of the country, even in a recession, and all kinds of professional and technical support services are available to school leaders from the many colleges and universities.

In addition, the New England region and nearby states like New York are organized by school districts that often represent individual communities. With more than 2,000 school districts located within a 3-5 hour drive, this region is regarded nationally as one of the country's principal "incubators" for superintendents who may be interested in the challenge of leading your district.

On the other hand, finding an outstanding superintendent is more of a challenge than ever before. For several reasons, recruiting a superintendent to a Massachusetts school district is a special challenge. Here's why:

1. The pool of available candidates is more shallow than in past years. The state's early retirement incentive program has resulted in the loss of many outstanding candidates who choose to leave the field in their late 50s or early 60s.
2. Public pension programs provide huge incentives to remain in one state, especially in the latter years when retirement benefits grow substantially over the last ten years prior to retirement. Massachusetts pension portability laws make it difficult for administrators from other states to transfer all of their pension credits to Massachusetts. For that reason, experienced educators may wish to remain in their present state pension programs in order to gain a better retirement benefit rather than transfer to a new plan in Massachusetts.
3. Many educators who would be in their prime years for principalships and superintendencies left the profession after being laid off during the early years after passage of Proposition 2 ½. Many never returned to positions in Massachusetts public education.
4. The cost of relocating can be overwhelming. "Sticker shock" over the price of a home in Massachusetts often discourages potentially superior candidates from districts with lower real estate values.
5. Relocating can present employment problems for spouses, too. Candidates will worry about employment for their husbands or wives who must also relocate.
6. Being a superintendent is a very difficult job. Not everyone wants to have it. With all the challenges of accountability from MCAS and the No Child Left Behind Act coupled with the pressures of a financial crisis and national economic recession, many potential superintendents would rather stay where they are.
7. Being a Massachusetts superintendent is especially challenging. Massachusetts is one of the few states where local communities manage their own school departments. (Most states use county systems or independent school districts.) The new superintendent must be comfortable not only with the academic side of school administration, but also the principles of Massachusetts General Laws on education and the complex school finance system that includes the Foundation Budget, state revenue distribution formula, complex special education reimbursement laws, and the nuances of working with local government – including mayors, city councils, finance committees and town meetings.
8. The Massachusetts Open Meeting Law means that many candidates must agree to have their names published as part of the screening process. While some steps can remain confidential, finalist interviews are not. It's no great shame to be passed over after becoming a finalist, but it's no great honor either. Many able candidates do not want to risk the public humiliation of being screened out, passed over, or not selected after going through several stages of a search.
9. Media coverage can get in the way of a search and discourage candidates who wish their applications to be confidential for the longest period of time. Entering a search makes a

candidate the subject of close scrutiny, and the press is neither bound by the open meeting law nor employment law. They can ask questions that would be inappropriate if not illegal for a potential employer. Many media outlets are very aggressive in chasing down stories from the candidates' local newspapers. If a candidate is controversial, that person may not want to risk having the report taken out of context before they can meet with you.

10. Individuals looking for jobs may be candidates in several simultaneous searches. You may be competing with other local, regional, or out-of-state districts for the same limited group of interested candidates.
11. Reference checking can present a special challenge. Candidates will offer names of people they want you to see or whose statements they want you to read. Probing into the many areas of potential competence is more difficult. It is not unusual for districts to receive resumes of individuals who are not currently employed but whose resumes are designed to say other wise. Similarly, individuals who have been fired, whose contracts have not been renewed, or who left "voluntarily" or "on their own terms," but, in reality, one step ahead of a termination vote are not uncommon.
12. Your community's reputation or history may be a plus, but it can also be a negative. Some of the potential negatives may include the following:
 - Unsatisfactory or unclear reasons for the departure of prior superintendents.
 - Reputation for political interference in school operations.
 - Inadequate administrative support for the district to carry out its mission.
 - District financial problems.
 - Poor relations between the local school district and the city or town government.
 - Special problems that have hurt your district's image.

However, good candidates often overlook negatives and want the challenge and opportunity to demonstrate their leadership capacities to overcome them.

It's always important to assess why you have a vacancy, why your superintendent is leaving, and what you can do to avoid problematic situations in the future. These are among the factors School Committees should consider when they start identifying their administrative leadership needs.

WHAT'S THE BEST TIME FRAME FOR A SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH

Ideally, your search should allow you time to cover all the necessary steps and public process you desire. However, there are few hard and set rules. Successful searches have taken as little as four weeks and as long as six months. They begin at all months of the year. Hiring decisions that bring outstanding and successful superintendents are made all year long.

A frequent question is “What is the best time to start a search?” or “Is late spring or summer too late to begin?” The answer is “Yes” and “No.”

A late spring or summer start may be problematic for some of the following reasons:

- You may not be able to complete your search as fast as you think.
- A late hiring decision that might not allow for a proper orientation or enough time for the new superintendent to begin planning for the start of school can be problematic.
- Many incumbent superintendents must provide 90 - 180 days notice to their current district before leaving. Thus, you may approve the appointment of your superintendent in May or June but not have the person available to you until September or later.

On the other hand, many successful searches begin late in the school year and conclude during the summer. The reasons they are successful include these:

- Many outstanding candidates are not sitting superintendents but may have successful experience as a superintendent or ranking central office administrator.
- It is not unusual for an outstanding candidate to have taken a position at a university, organization, or consulting firm only to have a desire to return to the world of public education.
- Some outstanding candidates who have taken early retirements from their districts (including out of state positions) realize that premature retirement was not a good choice and wish to get back to work. This is more common during a severe recession when people find their retirement savings will not go as far as it would had the stock market not deflated.
- Many candidates come from districts with strong administrative teams who can provide smooth transitions and even take over for the person who is leaving.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU KNOW YOU MUST SEEK A SUPERINTENDENT

Here are several things to consider when you learn that it is time to seek a new superintendent.

What kind of search will you conduct? You will need to decide on the following as soon as you anticipate that you will have a vacancy:

1. Temporary or Interim Superintendent. It is not unusual for a vacancy to occur late in the academic year. Rather than move forward quickly and risk drawing from a smaller pool of candidates, you may want to fill your position temporarily, on an interim basis, while you conduct a search over a longer period of time. You will also need to determine how long your interim superintendent will serve. Some serve for as long as a full year. Consider this:

- Your time frame. Do you simply need to fill a short gap prior to the start of the school year or until a clear appointee is identified to arrive shortly? Will you need an interim superintendent for a number of months while you conduct a search? Will you want to take a longer time for the search and use the interim superintendent for as long as a year? MASC maintains a list of experienced professionals willing to act as an interim superintendent.
2. Internal Search. Districts with credible inside candidates, including those with strong potential may choose to do an internal search first before considering a more broad, external search. (See below.) On one hand, this may improve morale and recognize your strong internal candidates whom you have cultivated as leaders. Strong succession management is a sign of a good organization. On the other hand, considering and passing over internal candidates may have a counter productive impact. For that reason, districts often opt to engage in an open or external search and welcome internal candidates to apply on equal footing with others.
 3. Open or External Search. If you elect an external search, you will need to consider how broadly you will conduct the project. (See below.)
 4. Running Your Own Search or Retaining a Search Consultant. If you wish to conduct an external search, you must decide whether to manage your own process or retain a search consultant. If you wish to consider a search consultant, interview from the roster of individuals and organizations that provide those services. Excluding your own staff and School Committee time, a search can cost as little as the cost of postage, printing, and advertising (for a search you manage yourselves) to \$8,500 - \$35,000+ for consulting services.

MASC provides technical assistance to many districts that manage their own searches. With our help, they are able to handle the administrative, tracking, advertising, interviewing, and reference checking. The major advantage to managing your own search is in cost savings and the ability to retain full control over every aspect of the process. The significant disadvantage is in having to handle the time consuming details and processes within your own district with staff on hand. This often requires you to reprioritize other projects.

SEARCH PREPARATION

As you begin your search for a new Superintendent of Schools, MASC recommends that you give careful consideration to the following. The extent to which you develop these criteria may vary with the status of the superintendent-to-be (acting, interim, internal search candidate, external search candidate).

Right at the start it is important to assess the district needs, strengths, areas for improvement or growth, and aspirations for the future. Some districts need organizational leadership, administrative management, development of relationships with the city or town, public relations, or rebuilding of an image to attract students. Others may require financial reorganization,

recovery from crisis, alignment of curriculum with the state frameworks, reaccreditation, or complete turnaround. No two districts are alike.

Even more, you should assess why you have a vacancy in the first place. You may be losing a long-time, successful leader to retirement or failing to renew the contract of your incumbent. Your relationship may have been historically strong or recently deteriorating. Your community may be a strong supporter of public schools or cynical critic of the cost of public education. All these factors can weigh into your decision about how to craft a search and recruit a great pool of candidates.

Focus groups, community meetings, and surveys can be very helpful in organizing the search, but also, self-assessment of the district and the School Committee can be highly instructive.

1. Determining the qualifications required for your superintendent and the criteria by which you would assess candidates.

- Consider the reasons that your vacancy exists (see above) and determine why you're looking for a leader and what gaps that leader should fill.
- Examine the current job description versus the actual duties being handled by the incumbent or interim superintendent.
- Does the job description need to be updated?
- What is the required minimum standard for applicants? For example, will you require a doctorate, minimum number of years of experience, or specific experience (e.g., principalship experience; financial expertise; curriculum proficiency; other administrative background)?

2. Determining the extent of staff / community involvement

To what extent will you involve the community or staff in the process? There are several areas where the school community or public at large may want to have a role, and these areas should be explored and roles determined ahead of time. Because of public interest, the requirements of the Open Meeting Law, and the need to maintain a credible and open search process, it will be important to consider the public's role.

For example:

- Community Goals and Objectives and Using Focus Groups. Most searches are preceded by a series of focus groups with members of the community at large and members of the school community to identify goals, objectives, criteria for the superintendent, and search processes.
- Search Committee. There are several formats for the Search Committee. The School Committee may act as its own search committee, but most often, a panel is selected to handle steps such as screening and initial interviewing of candidates. This "panel" may include none, one, some or all of the School Committee members. If a quorum of School Committee members is involved as the search committee or part of the search committee all meetings must be in public session.

- Resume Screening. You are likely to receive many resumes for your Superintendency. A screening committee is often utilized to review resumes and rank them for the School Committee.
- Interviewing. Searches usually involve at least two rounds of interviews. Districts use several formats. It is important to determine who will interview candidates at which stage.
- Observing. Many elements of the search process take place in public. However, some may take place in executive session based on the situations at hand and the applicability of the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

3. Determining the “compensation” (i.e., salary, benefits, etc.)

Place a value on the job, not on the person who may fill the position. MASC can provide you with salary and benefit information for superintendents in districts comparable to yours.

You may want to determine a salary “plus a benefit package to be negotiated.” Often the benefit package enhances substantially the value of the overall employment offer or the simple salary base.

You must face the fact that the range of salary and benefits will have a direct relationship to the number of candidates – especially in communities where real estate prices are high.

4. Develop a time line for your action steps.

Establish a firm calendar of events working backwards from the date you expect the new superintendent to assume his/her duties.

Include planning dates to design the interview format and the dates and times the interviews will take place.

Be very clear about deadlines for submitting applications. Define what is an acceptable format (postmark, received in house, received by fax, etc.).

Decide if you will interview all internal candidates who meet your qualifications and criteria. This is strongly recommended, but School Committees should be cautious in not giving false expectations to candidates or the community.

Base your interview questions on the criteria and skills required for the job.

5. Advertise Thoughtfully

An internal posting of the vacancy should fulfill all the advertising requirements for an internal search.

If you go to an open, external search, you will need to assess the most effective ways to announce and publicize your vacancy. MASC can advise you on effective vehicles and

strategies for announcing your vacancy and seeking out candidates including the best places to advertise.

6. Appoint a contact person

All inquiries regarding the search should be directed to the contact person. This may be a member of the School Committee who is coordinating your search, a personnel officer of your district, or your search consultant. This ensures that all candidates are given consistent information. It also ensures that confidential information is kept confidential. We recommend that the contact person be a member of the school committee for internal search purposes and for searches that you manage yourselves.

7. Develop your Process Documents and Protocols

Several items comprise your search protocols. They include:

- The formal application.
- The list of requirements for submission. These often include letters of reference, transcripts, statement of academic vision, responses to certain additional questions, writing samples, and resume.
- The process for compiling and confirming receipt of the candidate information.
- Agreements as to who must cover the expenses of candidates coming from out-of-town for the interviews. Remember, there may be as many as two or three visits to your district and an additional one for you to visit the candidate's district.
- Arrangements for interviews, including logistics and content.
- An inventory of questions for candidates for interview sessions at various stages of the process.
- Plans for site visits. Candidates should know ahead of time that finalists will be expected to arrange a site visit. This is a critical stage in the process.

8. Develop a contract proposal

Work on a draft employment contract and have it completed prior to the appointment. Be ready to present your appointed candidate with a proposal in order to avoid reacting to his/her proposal. Candidates will be well prepared with model contracts favorable to them.

MASC has always advised school committees to conduct an internal superintendent search when the committee believes that there are qualified candidates working within their school systems. It is non-productive to conduct an external search spending time and money to find "the right person" if "the right person" is already there. It is important to explain that perspective to the public.

An internal search recognizes the merits of perspective candidates already working in the district. It in no way restricts the school committee from conducting an external search in the future should that become necessary.

IF YOU ARE MANAGING YOUR OWN SEARCH, CONSIDER THIS:

MASC can assist you in every aspect of your search process as part of your association membership. Here are some of the important factors to keep in mind.

- It can take from four to six months to complete a search, and even longer if you experience problems. Work out a careful time frame. Searches can be rushed and completed very quickly but this requires a shorter application period, abbreviated community involvement, more quickly expedited interviews, and faster but thorough reference checking.
- Plan carefully to anticipate the date you want your new superintendent on board. It may be necessary to develop a transition plan where your former superintendent remains available or where your new superintendent arrives early for an overlap period.
- The best time to seek a superintendent is one that allows for a start date in July or August. Many districts begin in September for a next-July or September start date.
- Plan for a means of determining how your new superintendent will bring qualifications that will fit and accommodate your district's requirements and needs.
- Identify your point person who will lead the search; this should be someone in charge who can make decisions that must be made quickly.
- Before you advertise, carefully select your criteria, job qualifications, credentials, and a salary to post. Review comparable data on salaries to ensure you will be competitive.
- Determine if your outgoing superintendent is going to have a role in the process. (Often this is neither necessary nor desirable.)
- Identify how you will involve the public in screening, interviewing, and assisting in the process. Make sure you have a fair process for using non-School Committee members if you elect to invite the public to participate.
- Plan your advertising program to attract as many applicants as possible.
- Agree *in advance* what candidate expenses you will pay. Will you pay to bring in semi-finalists or finalists, and which of their expenses will you reimburse?
- Try to anticipate issues and problems that may arise during the search.
- Schedule interviews that provide a fair apportionment of time for all candidates.
- Develop insightful questions for your candidates. (MASC can assist you in developing these questions.)
- Plan thorough site visits to the home district of your candidates. This is your best vehicle to ensure that your candidates are a) whom they say they are; b) subject to reference discussions by people who really know them; and c) doing a good job in their districts.
- Prepare a model contract before you begin negotiations for a final agreement.

BUDGETING FOR A SEARCH: “What’s this going to cost?”

Plan on the following expenses and identify which ones are covered in-house vs. what you will need to pay for:

- **A search consultant** **\$9,500 - \$50,000+**
- **Internal clerical assistance** **In-House expense**
- **Advertising** **\$4,000 +**
- **Printing (brochures, applications)** **\$500 (2-color) - \$1,500 (4-color)**
- **Postage** **\$ 250 - \$600**
- **Expenses for candidates** **Varies. Can exceed \$10,000.**
- **Expenses for Search Consultants** **\$1,500 - \$10,000***
- **Expenses for School Committee on Site Visits** **Up to \$2,000 per member if air and hotel are required.**
- **Legal Expenses for Contract Review** **Varies****

* Can vary if search consultant goes on site visits.

** If not built into the basic consultant fee, these additional expenses may vary depending upon nature of contract negotiations and availability of municipal counsel to negotiate the contract.

A QUICK CHECKLIST OF ITEMS IN THE SEARCH PROCESS

The Search Process:

- What is your timeline for each step in your search (listed below).

The Application:

- Have you designed the form to include the content you wish?
- How many letters of reference do you want and of what nature (professional, personal, academic)?
- What kind of credentialing confirmation do you want?
- Who will verify completeness and accuracy of data?

Advertising Your Vacancy:

- How will you recruit from among professional and academic ranks?
- Where will you place your advertising?
- What collateral material will you use to promote your vacancy? (e.g., search brochure)

Screening the Candidates:

- Who will receive the applications?
- Who will review the candidates?
- Will you use a screening committee, school committee subcommittee, school committee itself, or a variation?
- What parts of this process should be confidential?
- Which candidates will get initial interviews?
- Will you treat internal candidates differently from external ones in guaranteeing interviews?

Interviews:

- Who will arrange the interviews?
- Who will serve as the candidate liaison to keep in contact with them and guide them to the interviews?
- Who will do background checks?
- Who will conduct the interviews? How long will they be? When and where will they be held?

Selection Process:

- How many semi-finalists and finalists will you want? Is there a minimum number?
- Who will notify the successful and unsuccessful candidates?

Site Visits:

- Who will arrange them?
- Who will make the visits?
- Do you want your consultant to join you?
- Who will you want to interview?
- Who will make the site visit report?

Final Interviews:

- Who will arrange the interviews?
- Who will serve as the candidate liaison to keep in contact with them and guide them to the interviews?
- Who will conduct the interviews? How long will they be? When and where will they be held?

Formal Superintendent Selection – Final Stage:

- What process will you use?
- Who will be responsible for notification of unsuccessful candidate(s)?
- Who will facilitate expense reimbursement?

Negotiating the Contract:

- Who will negotiate the contract?
- What is your approval process?

DISCRETION IN PLANNING FOR YOUR SEARCH

The events leading up to a superintendent transition, including a search, are not always so easy to plan, especially if a member or group of members would like to replace the chief executive. For example, occasionally a superintendent learns during an evaluation process that extension or renewal of their contract is unlikely. At the same time, members come to realize at some point that there may be consensus to change superintendents even though no vote, meeting, or discussion has taken place.

MASC members often ask us for information like the following:

- How does the search process take place, if one is going to happen?
- What does the candidate pool look like, just in case we might be looking?
- What are the political implications of such a change on short notice, or even with some evolving consensus in our community based on your experiences to date?
- What are the rights of the affected parties?
- How does the Open Meeting Law affect my ability to discuss options with my colleagues?
- What does the incumbent's contract or employment status mean in terms of the process(es) we must follow in changing leadership.

MASC staff speaks with individual School Committee members every day on a range of subjects. We often discuss questions about transitions of leadership with our members when they call. However, individuals must understand that our members are School Committees and such issues are only reviewed with individuals in general terms. Specific proposals or processes related to superintendent contracts, employment, hiring, and dismissal are the exclusive purview of the School Committee acting as a body. We urge members to consult with their committee chairs, conform to the Open Meeting Law, and use the appropriate steps such as their evaluation process, contract reassessment, or notice provisions to keep their colleagues and superintendents aware of their intent and activities.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOL COMMITTEES CONDUCTING SUPERINTENDENT SEARCHES

I. Be particularly careful about how thoroughly and how early you do your background work on candidates and reference checking. Here's why:

- Not all references will be fully forthcoming. Some will be eager to do whatever it takes to get rid of their superintendent. Others will be biased in favor or against an individual for personal reasons.
- Not all candidates are who they say they are in terms of their employment status.
- Not all candidates are truthful about their credentials, academic training, current employment status, or employment history.
- Superintendents may have left their previous positions under difficult-to-discern circumstances.
- Superintendents may have left under fire but performed with excellence.

THEREFORE:

- Conduct your background work skillfully. Use the Internet or Lexis/Nexis to check status, district information, and media coverage of the candidate and the district.
- Require an authorized academic transcript for each relevant credential or degree.
- Seek early feedback on basic information about candidates, including employment status, employment history, and current performance issues.
- Seek information from a range of sources.
- Consult with MASC for guidance in checking references in other states. They work with superintendents and school committees, and their loyalties are to you.

II. Be mindful of the role the media will play in “helping” you do your search.

You, your search consultants, and the media have different clients and, thus, differing loyalties. The School Committee's loyalties are to the community and the students. Your consultant's loyalties are to the School Committee. However, the media's loyalty is to their readers and the First Amendment.

In some communities, reporters are eager to identify candidates and do their own background checks sooner than your process might require. For example, if you wait until the names of semi-finalists are announced to begin checking backgrounds, you might find out that a candidate may have an embarrassing element to his/her background, a controversial past, or something that can be taken out of context to discredit the person. Local reporters, on the other hand, are not bound by any school policy or process requirements. They can start digging right away, and they can talk to anyone and ask any question they like. Moreover, they are accountable to their editors, not to you.

In one community, a reporter made inquiries in an out-of-state community and found that a candidate for superintendent in his town had been charged with “sexual harassment.” The story broke and sent the search into turmoil. The School Committee was embarrassed that this had not turned up in preliminary checks. There was a good reason. A disgruntled member of a union bargaining team had falsely accused the superintendent. The story had a shelf life of one day before it was forgotten, but it did appear in a Nexis search. Had a more thorough discussion taken place, however, the search committee could have responded to media inquiries right away. Another candidate was rumored to have been caught shoplifting based on the reading of an article in the local newspaper. The real story: it was his predecessor, not him who had been arrested for theft.

NOTE: This problem reinforces the critical importance of your site visit. On a site visit you can decide whom you want to interview, explore the community, speak with civic leaders, talk to a range of school department employees, consult with PTA officers, etc. If reporters embarrass you with questions about why you didn't know this or that, you can respond that it was because your final interview process included an in-depth site visit to the home school and community.

THEREFORE:

- Do a more thorough check early on.
- Use the Internet and Lexis/Nexis, if available, to check out local reports in the district.
- Ask every candidate who is about to move from the screening process to the “semi-finalist” stage, “Before you go to the next step, we need you to answer these questions:
 1. Are all your credentials in order and accurate, including your academic transcript?
 2. Are you aware of the salary range and are you willing to go forward to the next stage?
 3. If offered the position, are you still willing to accept or give it most serious consideration?
 4. Is there anything else about you or your background that we need to know or that you would like to tell us, including anything that a prospective employer needs to know, especially if the media is going to uncover it before we do?

III. Adhere faithfully to the Open Meeting Law.

The law allows for an executive session “to consider and interview applicants for employment by a preliminary screening committee or a subcommittee... if an open meeting will have a detrimental effect in obtaining qualified applicants;”. Once a prior screening process is concluded, however, all interviews and screenings must be in open session. The court has found that a single objection from a single candidate is justification for holding the initial screening process and/or interview in executive session.

Depending upon how you define your process at the start of your search, the “initial screening” may include the review by the “search committee” and initial interviews. Some processes use an independent search committee while others use subcommittees of the School Committee or the full Committee itself. If you have combined the initial

screening with interviews, that stage may be held in executive session by a search committee. However, all subsequent steps in the process must be held in open session.

You may make your process more open than the law allows. Many School Committees wisely define clearly what the steps in the process will be so there is no doubt about the roles of the participants and the public visibility of the various stages. One School Committee set up a community screening committee and provided that all sessions would be held in public. The screening committee made up of board members and others, ignored this directive and used the language of the law to justify convening in executive session for interviews of candidates. The entire interview process had to be scrapped and started from the beginning because the School Committee's policy of open sessions had been violated.

IV. Post Your Vacancy Internally

Some union contracts require that you post vacant positions internally. While there may be disagreement about your obligations to involve your employee unions in your search or to post the notice of the vacant superintendency, it is a good idea to circulate the notice of vacancy and job posting as you would any other internal position.

MASC MEMBERS MAY RECEIVE THESE SERVICES WITHOUT FEE AS PART OF THEIR BASIC MEMBERSHIP:

- Rapid Response to your questions and concerns for all aspects of superintendent searches including advice and guidance for planning your search, recruiting, setting up your interviews and site visits.
- Assistance in finding an interim superintendent (if necessary)
- Technical guidance from your field director on search processes and protocols after you've started
- Search strategizing before and after problems arise
- Hosting community meetings/focus groups/brainstorming
- Posting your vacancy on our Web Site
- Distribution of your vacancy notice to our 52-member NSBA network of state school boards associations
- Assistance to districts doing their own searches, reaching out to our 1400 person recruiting list of potential candidates and contacts. *
- Ability to check references with our colleagues across America
- Guidance on where and how to post advertising.
- Assistance on public relations issues related to your search.
- Orientation of your Search Committee including guidance on Open Meeting Law and other applicable laws and regulations
- Assistance with troubleshooting issues (e.g., media, advertising, problem candidates, glitches)
- Background materials on job descriptions and position profiles
- Assistance in developing excellent questions for candidates from the school committee member's perspective.
- Assistance in organizing site visits.
- Assistance in contracting.
- Follow-up workshops to help build team work and appreciation of the Superintendent/School Committee relationship.
- The full roster of resources of MASC.

* Mailing list information is available only to districts that are doing their own searches, and not to external search consultants.

SHOULD WE EMPLOY A SEARCH CONSULTANT

Search consultants can be an invaluable resource for School Committees seeking a new superintendent. Consultants bring certain resources and advantages including:

- Special contacts that enhance their ability to recruit from a larger or national base of candidates, or a more diverse talent pool.
- Experience with search management, including reference checking.
- Ability to handle all administrative details.
- Ability to maintain confidentiality by securing all paperwork during and after the search.

Not all consultant experiences are happy ones. For example:

- Consultants may not be at your side at every critical step such as being in attendance at resume screenings, semi-finalist or finalist interviewing, or at strategy or planning meetings.
- High consulting fees can bring public criticism, especially if your search ends up with candidates whom you would have recruited or who would have found you anyway.
- Consultants may not understand or follow the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, a problem that may result in the Attorney General getting involved in your search process or the media embarrassing you.
- Consultants may be less skillful at dealing with the public, the politics, and the media than in administering the technical elements of a search.
- Consultants may work with a stable of candidates they move into many of their searches, including concurrent ones, often to enlarge the pool rather than to improve the quality of prospective superintendents. You should also ensure that your consultant will inform you of any such circumstances, including situations where they are representing the same candidate(s) in more than just your search.
- Consultants may represent a special perspective – and not necessarily that of your School Committee. The appropriate role of the School Committee vis-a-vis the superintendent is one involving ongoing discussion and debate and there are several areas where the law and practice are ambiguous or contentious. Several firms deploy retired superintendents who understand and advance the chief executive's perspectives, and not necessarily those of the School Committee. Others may retain current or former school board members to incorporate (or give the appearance of incorporating) your own concerns.
- Consulting firms may use the search process as a vehicle to pressure the superintendent they recruit into hiring them subsequently for future consulting services.
- In a few years, your consultant may recruit your superintendent for another community's search.

If you retain a search consultant, keep these points in mind:

1. You're the School Committee. Do not lose control of your search to a consultant. Make sure the search is conducted under terms with which you are comfortable and that work for you and your needs.
2. Identify all charges and fees ahead of time and clarify any additional costs for expenses that cannot be identified at the start.
3. Make sure you determine who will be involved at the appropriate stages of the search. A consultant should be flexible enough to accommodate your special concerns regarding process and other steps in the search.
4. Ensure that you have a clearly explained recruitment plan.
5. Ask your consultant if they have a stable of candidates on hand or if they will be recruited anew. Ask how the candidates were recruited, especially if you suspect that candidates are being shopped around.
6. Ask your consultant how they will handle a situation in which the same consultant represents the same candidate in more than one search.
7. Interview your superintendent-candidates with questions that get at your district's needs and that draw out substantive responses. Do not accept a checklist of pre-developed questions that have been handed to you.
8. Learn how the consultant will check references carefully.
9. Go on site visits to assess your candidates in the light of their current settings. You may wish your consultant to accompany you, but you should never relinquish your own participation in a site visit to a consultant, nor let the consultant determine your itinerary.
10. DO NOT relinquish control over the superintendent contracting process, including contract negotiations, to your consultant. Collaborate if you choose to allow the consultant to be involved in the negotiations, but remain in charge. You must live with the contract, including salary and benefit package. Your consultant should never make commitments to a candidate, nor negotiate, formally or informally, without your specific authorization and detailed instructions.
11. Make sure you have an agreement in place about how you will handle a failed search, i.e., one where your finalists withdraw or where you cannot find a suitable candidate. You should arrange ahead of time both how this should be handled and how each party will explain its efforts to the public. Do not allow your consultant to point the finger at you – the client, especially if the response was poor, candidates weak, or withdrawal of individuals leaves you stranded.