

SAINT PAUL, MN
MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING
November 19, 2009

Questions asked by the Board of Education in the interview of Dr. Deborah Henton for the position of Superintendent for Saint Paul Public Schools.

1. Eliminating the achievement gap is a moral commandment, and SPPS has established major initiatives that are beginning to bear fruit.
 - Tell us how you would support those current initiatives
 - What approaches would you wish to pursue?
 - What leadership and guidance would you provide to ensure that these approaches are properly evaluated and adjusted over time to meet changing student needs?
2. Tell us about your personal journey around cultural proficiency, and how you translate that to ensuring high achievement for every one of our students.
3. We want to talk about transitions. You were with SPPS for 7 years, but left 2 ½ years ago and took the superintendency in North Branch, a rural district with only 3,000 students.
 - With your superintendency experience in such a different district, what are some of the key challenges around a transition back to SPPS, and working with people who have remained in place?
 - What are the critical components necessary for a successful transition to SPPS superintendent, what resources would you draw upon, and what kinds of supports would you need?
4. You are hoping to become superintendent of a very diverse and pluralistic school district.
 - What resources and strategies will you draw upon to successfully engage our families, students, staff, and community toward a common vision and successful outcomes for students?
 - As a follow-up, what are your ideas about engaging families who are inexperienced with participating, or who have had negative experiences with education; how would you support your staff to successfully and respectfully reach out to such families?
5. You have tremendous passion, belief, and commitment. How do you know when it's time to drive something forward, and when it's time to listen and learn? How do you balance the need for authentic collaboration with the requirements for individual leadership?
6. Give us your best 3-minute speech convincing St. Paul families from across cultures, incomes, and languages, to send their children to St. Paul Public Schools.
7. Tell us your thinking about shared accountability – the district, students, families, and the entire community. How would you specifically communicate to our families and students what their responsibilities must be to ensure school success?
8. We know that collaborative relationships and partnerships are critical to student success.

- What have you done to build external relationships that have measurably improved student outcomes, and how would your particular leadership skills shape how that would be done under your tenure as a superintendent?
- Once those relationships are built, what have you learned about maintaining relationships like these, and how would you bring those learnings to the role as superintendent here?

9. We anticipate budget cuts for several more years, and are considering using a Zero Based Budgeting approach for our 2010-11 fiscal year. Of course, some funds are legally or otherwise restricted or targeted, and we have a long history of site-based budgeting.

- As a superintendent, what kind of process might you follow to prepare a draft budget?
- Describe in detail the “budget boot camp” process you used in North Branch and how the new Spanish program and its funding came about as a result of your budget cutting discussions.

10. There is concern that our District needs healing in key relationships. Tell us about a time when you moved into a group with trust issues. What did you do to improve the situation? What skills are critical in situations like this, and what behaviors would you expect your direct reports to model?

11. Let’s talk for a moment about the students for whom traditional schools do not work. Please share your experience, philosophy, and organizational approach to alternative education.

12. What successes or failures have you had collaborating with unionized staff to move forward student achievement? What have you learned from those situations and to what extent does any of that apply here?

13. What has been the most demanding or challenging decision or situation you had to make or face with a school board, what was your role, the role of the Board and what did you learn?

14. What leadership roles have you played on critical education issues at the state, regional, or national level? What difference did you make? How might you use those learnings and your discretionary power as superintendent to elevate issues that are critical to St. Paul Public Schools?

15. As superintendent, what leadership would you provide to recruit and retain qualified professional staff of color?

16. Our attention to the critical need to close the achievement gap could create the impression that we are less concerned about reducing class size and maintaining a challenging learning environment for our highest-achieving students. What would you do to ensure that SPPS is meeting the needs of all of our students, and how would you communicate that effectively to our staff, students, and families?

17. In your previous interview, you talked about a Q-Comp effort in North Branch. Please provide a complete description of the process, partners, pitfalls, and outcomes. How much of that might apply to SPPS, and what might be both the potential benefits and serious pitfalls?

18. The guidelines for the second round of ARRA funding, Race to the Top, just came out last week. We don't expect instant expertise with those, but as our superintendent, how would you work with the MN Department of Education to ensure that St. Paul would be well positioned to access those funds?

19. When you leave St. Paul after 10 great years as superintendent of St. Paul Schools, what stories will be told by people in different St. Paul communities about your time here?

20. As technology becomes increasingly important to support student learning in our schools. There is an increasing need to bring families up to speed with technology. What are some key opportunities that you would see to engage families and their students in using technology?