

# **Spotlight on the Board**

## **Notes from the District 15 School Board Meetings**

### **September 20th, 2007**

This was a Special Board of Education meeting called to interview and select an executive search firm for the vacancy of Superintendent of Schools 2008-2009. The previously selected search firm, HYA and Associates, withdrew from the search citing the perception of a conflict of interest due to Board member Gerald Chapman's association with the firm.

*Reference:* Daily Herald and Palatine Countryside articles dated September 15<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>  
[www.fcwpta.org/articles\\_and\\_handouts.htm](http://www.fcwpta.org/articles_and_handouts.htm)

Board members Gerald Chapman, James Ekeberg and Nancy Lee Carlson were absent.

### **Citizens Address the Board**

#### **Jen Zold –**

Just recently understood the situation that came to her attention regarding Mr. Chapman, a member of the Board, and him having some very close association with a certain search firm that the Board is considering hiring for the very important position of superintendent. There are three concerns that come to her mind. One is obvious; the monetary gain that has the potential to be made, #2 is that if there is any particular leaning or agenda that only one school board member may have, that may in affect, color the search process and affect it in a way that is not fair because all of you should have a vote, have the same impact as one single person. And finally, because this controversy has come to light in the public to a certain extent – she would really hate to see the new leader of our school district, coming in the very first day and there is some controversy that is involved with him coming on board. If it is as simple as selecting any other search firm – and she doesn't know if it is too late - there are many search firms out there, this can be done a number of ways.

**Board member Kelly Keenan** – Answered that Chapman's firm is not being considered any longer.

#### **Mary Vanek –**

The search for the next superintendent creates an opportunity for the newly constituted Board with a new President at the helm, to show the public that it is committed to openness, transparency and the ethical conduct of the Board's business. What the public is seeing looks like secrecy and cronyism with the selection of Gerald Chapman's search firm (HYA) last week. The Daily Herald mentioned that HYA had withdrawn due to a potential conflict of interest; yet the Countryside today reported that the firm might still be in the running. Hopes the Board understands that there is a huge conflict of interest in having Chapman and his firm involved in the search process. HYA's own Web site indicated that Chapman is a senior associate, owner, director and treasurer of the Hazard, Young & Attea (HYA) firm. That goes beyond what an independent contractor would be - which is what the newspapers are reporting his relationship is with that firm. Said that Chapman, with his many years of experience with District 211, should know that this is a conflict of interest prohibited by the school board policy and also the Illinois School Code. This type of insider dealing - with Board members trying to make contracts that will benefit themselves and their friends - just makes the public deeply distrustful of our publicly elected officials. Any person who would hope to gain financially from their school board position doesn't deserve to hold the office.

**Keenan** – Just wanted to say that Jerry Chapman is not here today. Regarding those allegations, we don't know if they are true or false. So while the HYA Web site might have said something, we actually at this time do not know if Chapman was an owner of the company, do not know if he had any financial gain and that's something maybe everyone should take up with Jerry Chapman. We just don't have that information at this time.

## **Board Discussion and Reports**

### **Interviewing of Superintendent Search Firms**

Three search firms were brought back for additional questions and answers regarding their qualifications and search methods. Those firms were – in order of appearance – IASB (Illinois Association of School Boards), School Exec Connect and BWP & Associates. Each firm was interviewed for approximately 20 to 25 minutes. This was the second interview for all of the firms. First interviews were conducted on Tuesday, September 4<sup>th</sup>.

Questions asked by Board members included:

**Keenan** – Wanted to know what each firm thought the pool of candidates would be without filtering anyone out initially? Who would help in the filtering process (criteria)? Asked what the role would be of the current superintendent in the search? Could a sitting Illinois superintendent be recruited? What was the difference between a partner in their firm and a lead associate? How were candidates recruited by the firm?

**Board member Wendy Rowden** – Is interested in a consultant who is interested in learning about District 15's community and culture. How would the firm handle the diversity of our community in the search process? How would they be involved? Wanted to know the firm's team members that would be involved in the search. What organizations did the firm belong to? What networks did they have outside of Illinois and access to candidates who are not currently superintendents?

**Board member Sue Quinn** – Wanted to know each firm's thoughts regarding involving the community in the superintendent search process? How would the criteria data be collected? If the final candidates brought to the Board by the firm were not what they were looking for, what happened next?

**Board president Tim Millar** – Asked about recruiting methods used by each firm? Their thoughts on advertising, networking, etc. Wanted to know how many districts they served and the size of those districts. What was the average years of experience of superintendents? Would the firm go out of state to search for more experienced candidates? Number of associates in the firm.

## **Action Items**

### **Acceptance of Letter of Withdrawal from Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates**

Motion to accept the letter of withdrawal from HYA made by Rowden, seconded by Keenan  
Approved 4:0

(Keenan, Millar, Quinn, Rowden voting "yes"; Chapman, Ekeberg, Carlson were absent)

Reference: District 15 Board Member Conflict of Interest – Policy 2:100

[www.ccsd15.net/AboutDistrict15/BoardofEducation/HTML/BoardPolicy.html](http://www.ccsd15.net/AboutDistrict15/BoardofEducation/HTML/BoardPolicy.html)

## **Selection of Superintendent Search Firm**

Motion to hire BWP & Associates as the search firm made by Rowden, seconded by Quinn

### **Board discussion prior to vote:**

**Rowden** – Glad to have the opportunity to interview the firms again. Likes BWP the best because they talk about finding the right fit for our community defined by the profile that will be generated by a wide variety of groups. Those groups include the Board's input, staff, community and parents. They say they will find the fit for us not that they know what the fit for us is – they are not here to tell us what we should have. The other piece is their wanting the process to be something that develops a positive relationship and interaction. Thinks that by involving the community, working together as a Board, that we want this to be an educational process that creates and builds a more positive culture in our community. Likes that BWP sees this as a process that is valuable and not just a task to do. Feels that BWP has an opportunity with their relationships to provide a national search. They said that a national search is great but District 15 is in a Midwest culture. Based on Rowden's experience in education, she believes there is a culture in the Midwest and our candidates are going to come from the Midwest. Not that the district is close-minded to national candidates.

**Keenan** – Leaning towards School Exec Connect. Liked that consultant's level of involvement. He went through every single comment three times, thought about it, processed it, and rethought about it. There are a couple of things she didn't like about BWP.

**Millar** – Wanted to mention that the costs between BWP and School Exec Connect were basically similar. Bickert (now part of BWP) did the search for Dr. McKanna as well as District 211 (Roger Thornton). Millar is focusing on having the bigger network because in Illinois there isn't that many school districts near our size. The IASB doesn't recruit but also most, if not all, their district searches have been small districts. They are not the bigger, high profile districts. School Exec Connect has done some of those but clearly not as many as BWP.

**Rowden** – When she mentioned a Midwest focus – she didn't mean to say she doesn't think that BWP is not national. Definitely thinks their fingers go out nationally. Just goes back to Rowden's sense that BWP is saying what the Board is saying. Like Keenan connected with School Exec Connect, Rowden connects with BWP.

**Keenan** – BWP (Bickert) already did D211 and D15. Ready for somebody new.

**Quinn** – Appreciates that, but doesn't want new for newness sake. It is more important that the candidate has the new perspective. Thought the IASB had their own perspective that is not necessarily the culture of the Board. Wants to make sure that they are hearing us and what the Board is looking for in candidates. Thinks the other two firms do a much better job of saying that we are here to work for you, hear what your requirements are and your community. Bring all of that together and look at this search as a team-building exercise. Quinn thinks this really is a part of a community building exercise because we are picking new leadership. Likes BWP better partly because she feels a better connection with the individual consultants. It was interesting to hear the same people come back twice because it reaffirms/validates that feeling. Thinks BWP has a broader, deeper network and experience. They have regional offices all over the country, thinks that may be key to tapping one or two unique candidates – that might be what the Board is looking for and doesn't want to miss that opportunity. Concerned that School Exec Connect has a tighter focus on the Midwest and is not quite so national.

**Keenan** – For her, there is a conflict of interest issue with BWP because they brought in McKanna. Not a direct interest – but there is some influence base. Thinks we need new

people in here doing a different job. Thinks there are a lot of the same issues like there were with the other firm (HYA).

**Millar** – With bringing the firms back again, it is amazing to learn how close they are all related. They all start from the same place, they all know each other.

**Quinn** – There is a very small pool of superintendents and a very small pool of search firms. They are all former superintendents. She doesn't see a problem with Bickert (firm that brought McKanna in 2003) – it is only one of four firms that came together to make BWP (in 2005). Although the gentleman that was here tonight was from Bickert and did that search. In a way, it almost validates that the Board gets the superintendent that they desire, not the search firm. It is more a reflection of the Board choosing the superintendent. If the search firm does a good job, they are not going to pick a good superintendent so much as the Board is going to pick the superintendent that it wants.

**Rowden** – Thinks Quinn is right. Those superintendents (McKanna and Thornton) were brought to the community based on what the community and their Board said they wanted at that time.

**Keenan** – That is not Keenan's issue. It is not that they didn't bring candidates that weren't qualified or what they expected – thinks all of the firms will do that. Her issue is the same as she had with HYA. HYA would have brought in candidates that matched the Board's criteria; what was difficult for her was that there was a major conflict of interest. There was a Board member that had a strong relationship with HYA – that could have a line of influence that would make her uncomfortable. She is not saying that BWP would, just saying that there is the same line of influence there that is behind the scenes.

**Rowden** – Doesn't understand that point; no one on the Board works for BWP.

**Keenan** – Thought that Chapman had a relationship with Bickert when Bickert did the search for District 211 (Thornton). Thought that the BWP representative did get a candidate crossed off the list when he was the sitting superintendent in Wauconda. He said he received information and passed it onto the search firm, not the Board. She thought that Chapman was involved in the superintendent search for D211. McKanna also came from Bickert. There is a direct line that makes her uncomfortable. There is an opportunity there to get involved.

**Rowden** - Hates to leave the impression that influence may or may not exist. Thinks it is different knowing that a Board member is directly associated with a firm vs. the possibility that there may be some link we may not know about.

**Millar** – All the firms are very connected. They build their base with ex-superintendents. No matter who it is, all firms know each other, they all work together.

**Rowden** – When someone is named as a partner, associate, treasurer or on their Board of Directors that is a whole different relationship. Everybody started at the IASB. Every single person is a superintendent, has some relationship with the IASB. These people are connected because they are all part of the same organization. Doesn't want to dismiss Keenan's concern because the Board definitely does not want any perception of impropriety. The Board wants to be open and involve the community as much as possible.

### **Motion to approve BWP – Approved 3:1**

(Quinn, Rowden, Millar voting "yes"; Keenan voting "no"; Chapman, Ekeberg, Carlson were absent)

*Reference:* BWP Associates [www.bwpassociates.com](http://www.bwpassociates.com)

**Adjournment** - The Special meeting ended at approximately 9:05 p.m.