

January 25, 2019

CITY OF WALTHAM
CITY CLERK'S OFFICE

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RECORDED

Mayor McCarthy,

We are writing directly to you as the next scheduled School Committee meeting is not until February 6 and we have no other public forum to voice our concerns before then. As parents of Waltham Public School students, we are deeply concerned about the current leadership in our school system. This past week an announcement was sent out to the staff at Waltham High informing them that after a "nation-wide search" our Superintendent doesn't feel any candidates are qualified to lead the high school as the new principal. Currently we have a Superintendent who has announced he is leaving at the end of the spring, an interim assistant superintendent, an interim principal at the high school, an interim principal at Kennedy, as well as other interim directors and assistant principals in the district. We worry that Waltham is now perceived as a district that is constantly in flux. This will make it difficult to attract strong teaching and leadership candidates to our district and to retain the talented educators already in our schools.

In addition to the lack of stability in our district another significant concern is the lack of transparency with which this process took place. In many neighboring communities parents and teachers are given the opportunity to meet the finalists; this was never done in Waltham. We were only told there were three finalists and the community was never provided with the names of any of these candidates. Parents first learned of Dr. Echelson's decision through social media where it was shared that the staff received an email explaining that no candidate passed muster. Recently, Belmont parents were given a bio on each of the finalists in their own principal search with detailed information about each candidate and their professional experience. Waltham parents were given none of this. This lack of transparency is unacceptable and we feel the Superintendent needs to answer for this.

The Superintendent has failed our students, teachers, and city in not selecting a new principal for Waltham High School. A committee of 22 volunteers spent months going through the process with direction from the Superintendent regarding the qualifications he felt a worthy candidate must possess only to end up with no candidate chosen as the next leader of Waltham High School. We believe that an internal candidate was one of the finalists. Why wouldn't this person be given the opportunity to lead our school moving forward? This would give stability to at least one position at a critical point in time for our high school and for our district. With the future of many significant projects and initiatives that will have long-term impact upon our schools and our wider community in question how can we leave these important decisions to yet another interim appointment? We worry that the appointment of an interim principal, serving under the leadership of what will likely be an interim superintendent next year will only further reinforce the growing, negative perception that our district suffers from chronic instability and a lack of clear and consistent direction.

Sincerely,

Concerned Parents of Waltham

CC: Members of the Waltham City Council
Members of Waltham School Committee
Editor of the Waltham News Tribune

Letter from Concerned Waltham Parents Regarding Current Leadership of WPS