

# Chagrin BOE to seek new school leadership with search firm

By SAMANTHA COTTRILL

Chagrin Falls Board of Education members are embarking on their search for a new school leader with Superintendent Robert Hunt leaving for a new position in the greater Chicago area at the end of the academic year.

After hearing presentations from three different search firms last week, the board unanimously approved a contract with K-12 Business Consulting Search Services at a total of \$17,900. They took their official vote on the new firm in a special meeting Monday.

Just earlier this month, Dr. Hunt accepted a position as superintendent of the Barrington 220 Community School District in Chicago, Illinois. Having served as superintendent for Chagrin since 2012, he committed to finishing out the academic year with the district to ensure a smooth transition of leadership. His contract with the Barrington 220 district will begin July 1.

In addition to the New Albany, Ohio-based firm, K-12, the board heard presentations during their Jan. 20 meeting from Ray and Associates, Inc., which is based in Cedar Rapids, Iowa with a Columbus office, and Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA), based in Schaumburg, Illinois.

K-12 conducted the board's search two years ago for a new treasurer, resulting in the hire of current Treasurer Ashley Brudno. Feeling the familiarity of the firm's process, board members agreed they felt comfortable putting them up to the task of finding a new superintendent.

"I like that we have an existing relationship with K-12. Their process would be similar to what we did before, and I found that process incredibly helpful, and I think it yielded the perfect outcome," board member Sharon Broz said of their treasurer search. "If it's not broken, why fix it?"

"I think K-12 definitely knows us the best," board member Greg Kanzinger added. "They know our community the best, I think they know the state of Ohio really well and I think they could put something nationally if we asked them to."

a statewide network.

Dr. Hunt noted that Ms. Oxley and Mr. Ash's names are recognized by superintendents across the state for their experience in education leadership. "I know them all, and you've got people who have been very successful superintendents in their own right, and then have done things beyond an education," he said.

K-12 offers three levels of searches, bronze, silver and gold, Mr. Mohr said in his presentation to the board. With each increasing level, more community engagement is involved in developing a superintendent search profile.

"The highest level of involvement we have is gold level," Mr. Mohr said. "This [is] pretty much a search that has literally all of the bells and whistles. Not only do we have up-front community engagement in developing the search profile that we'll put together for you, but when you do decide the candidates that you would like to interview in the first round, we [also] have community and stakeholder engagement in that."

The board agreed that the gold level would be appropriate for the district.

"This is the superintendent search. I think we're looking at a gold level of engagement, and this is a very involved community," Mrs. Garvey said in a discussion with fellow board members on their options. "I don't think we'll want to short change the community input aspect of what we're doing."

"I agree to the gold level because of the importance of the job," Mr. Kanzinger said.

The firm also offers national exposure not included in the cost of a leveled searches, which could cost up to an additional \$5,000 for three printed ads during Education Week, Mr. Mohr said. This could add another two weeks to the search process because of the deadlines associated with the national publications.

Mr. Mohr noted, however, that anybody searching for a position in Ohio is likely to be looking to the BASA website anyway and that "cold-calling" candidates from out of state is not as likely to result in hiring someone who was not already thinking of moving to the state.

When asked how COVID-19 could affect

or not to ensure everyone has access to input.

"That's our recruitment tool," Ms. Oxley said. "That's how people really go in and figure out, 'Am I a match, am I not a match for this district,' based upon all of that input."

Mr. Ash added that having this profile "enhances the transparency" for all involved in the search.

After the March 12 deadline for candidate applications, Ms. Oxley said the K-12 team would work over that following weekend to prepare a portal to the board with detailed information on every candidate, as well as a summary for more efficient review.

"That secure portal has every piece of information you'd ever want to know, including what grade they got in social studies in college. All the reference letters, everything," she said. "We will [also] create a summary for you, because that can be overwhelming to read all that information based upon the number of candidates that you may receive."

The first round of interviews will take place March 29 and 31, either in person or via Zoom, Ms. Oxley said.

If in person, Mr. Mohr said K-12 could set them up in an open space with social distancing in place, like in a gymnasium or cafeteria.

Ms. Oxley and Mr. Mohr said the format of the first-round interviews could be determined as the dates draw near and as the state of the pandemic may change.

Reference checking will begin in April to narrow the search down to two finalists, she continued, who will then come in for their final interviews and community meet-and-greets, which the board ultimately decided to take place on April 13 and 14 with board deliberation on April 15 in a special meeting.

"It will start with the meet and greet with the community and then it will move into an opportunity for you to do your interviews, followed by a dinner, if you think we should go to dinner," Ms. Oxley said.

Mr. Mohr encouraged the board to consider a dinner with the candidates despite COVID-19, noting the importance of meeting

the individuals and interacting with them in an informal setting.

"We've done it before where they are socially distanced," he said, noting they can utilize space within the district buildings.

"The experience could be what it should be with that. I think we can make it safe," he continued. "The interview is one thing, but after the formal interview, to have the informal [meeting] where you can go to dinner with the candidate and their significant other, I think, is really a valuable thing. You really get a chance to feel what it's like to work with people like that."

Mrs. Garvey explained that the entire board would attend the dinner, and if possible, they would keep the candidates over night. The following day, each of the candidates would join two board members for breakfast.

"It's just one more opportunity to have a more casual conversation with the candidate," she said, "and help them feel more comfortable with us and us to get comfortable with them."

Mr. Mohr said the final interview dates could be adjusted as needed as the board approaches them. He expected a contract could be finalized by April 20 with an announcement ready by the board's April 21 meeting.

The board ultimately decided to opt out of advertising the position in national publications, agreeing with Mr. Mohr that candidates looking to relocate to Ohio from out of state will already be looking at the BASA website for open positions.

During last week's meeting, Mr. Mohr anticipated that Chagrin is likely to receive plenty of qualified candidates, noting the district's good timing on the search process as well as its location and ranking in the state.

"I believe your timing is right on the money right now," Ms. Oxley said last week. The team had stated that a search should begin in January or February and end by March or April.

"This is a destination district," Mr. Mohr said. "This will cast a shadow on some of the other searches that are out there."

Board President Phil Rankin agreed, stating he'd be "comfortable" with K-12 conducting the search, and board member Mary Kay O'Toole added that the firm would have a more hands-on approach in the recruitment and interview processes.

"K-12, they seemed more like they're going to hold our hand," she said.

Board Vice President Kathryn Garvey agreed that she was "leaning toward K-12," but acknowledged that she was impressed with Ray and Associates' diversity initiatives.

"I think that does go nicely with the work that we're doing for diversity, equity and inclusion," she said, "but I think that we can also incorporate some of those parameters as requirements with any firm that we work with."

Dr. Hunt agreed with the board's decision, noting that he's very familiar with the team from K-12 who would roll out the search.

"When they spoke about the reputation of these folks, you're getting the best of the best," he said.

"K-12 is very, very well known," Mrs. Brudno added. "It's kind of the first name that both treasurers and superintendents think of when we think of searches. I think they know the business, they know what they're doing [and] I think they've proven themselves in many, many searches."

The K-12 team for Chagrin will consist of president and owner of K-12 Business Consulting, Chris Mohr, as well as team members Karel Oxley and Tom Ash.

According to K-12, Mr. Mohr has 40-plus years of experience as president of the firm and past-president of Ohio Association of School Business Officials and 20 years of experience in searches.

Ms. Oxley has 40-plus years of experience as superintendent, assistant superintendent, past-president of the Buckeye Association of School Administrators and co-director of Ohio Leadership Advisory Council with a statewide network.

Mr. Ash has 40-plus years of experience as superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of government relations for BASA, past-president of BASA, a recipient of the BASA Distinguished Leadership Award and

the search, Mr. Mohr said the firm has already conducted successful searches amidst the pandemic.

"We have conducted multiple searches successfully during [COVID-19]. In fact, we've conducted a dozen in the last nine months," he said, adding that the search firm has already used Zoom for video conferencing the past two years, so they're comfortable in the program.

"We've actually been a company that's been using Zoom video for over two years because of our forecasting business across the state," he said. "Zoom isn't anything new to us."

Mrs. Garvey also volunteered to be the point person on behalf of the board for the search, noting that because she held this position in the treasurer search, she would already be familiar with the process.

### The search ahead

On Monday, the K-12 team and board held their first organizational meeting after their formal vote of approval of the firm and mapped out the schedule of their recruitment and hiring process.

The posting of the superintendent's position was to be made available on Jan. 27 with an application deadline of March 12, Ms. Oxley explained.

By Feb. 1, she said, K-12 will have a search profile submitted to the district and community to complete, including parents, students, staff and administrators. This may include stakeholder meetings, which could be conducted via Zoom.

Mr. Mohr said the goal would be for the district to obtain 100 responses to the questionnaire, noting that virtual meetings have yielded much greater responses due to their convenience. He added that K-12 could send out private access via RSVP to public forums to the community and district at the board's request to avoid outside involvement or hacking of the process, otherwise access could be posted on the district website.

He said the deadline to submit questionnaire responses is Feb. 12 with results to the board by Feb. 15 in order to get the search profile available online as soon as possible. Forms for the community, he noted, could be made available whether people attend the meetings

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