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What makes a perfect principal?

By Sally Applegate / Correspondent

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School Committee members weigh in on the subject

In an ideal world, what are the qualities a school should look for in its leaders? School Committee members offered their ideas to the Principal Search Committee last week as the search continues for new principals for the Thomson and Sargent schools in North Andover.

School Committee member Charles Ormsby, Ph.D. said it was important to find candidates with a solid focus on academics, with leadership skills. He suggested high moral character is crucial, as it is important for the staff of a school to be able to have a high degree of respect for and confidence in the candidate ultimately chosen as principal.

Committee member Bruce Baker, Ph.D. said the preferred candidates should be enthusiastic and skillful at communicating with students and parents, and be an active part of the community. They should have advanced degrees, training and education. Baker said it is important that the search committee not react to any perceived flaws in the principals that will be leaving. Seeking to find a candidate that does not have these particular flaws could cause the committee to overlook a really outstanding candidate, Baker suggested.

School Committee Chairman Daniel J. Murphy, Esq. said the search committee should look for people who are bold and can express new ideas, taking on the school administration as advocates for what is best for the school. The candidates should have the interpersonal skills to recognize each student and teacher they encounter in school classrooms. The ideal candidates will be energetic, willing to work beyond the prescribed hours.

Jeff Howard, president of the North Andover High student council, said a good candidate would act as a leader of education, focusing on development of a diverse and interdisciplinary curriculum.

Ormsby suggested the search committee "needs to put in an enormous effort to get the right candidates."

School Superintendent Harry Harutunian agreed, saying, "there is nothing more important that a superintendent does" than to find top administrators for the schools.

The final candidates will be put into a single pool for the positions at both the Thomson and Sargent school,

and interviewed by personnel from each school, according to Harutunian.

An audience member asked if local teachers were being encouraged to apply for the position of principal. Harutunian said the job openings have been posted in the Boston Globe and school principals are being told to encourage North Andover teachers to apply for the position.

"It's always an interesting situation when local teachers are applying for a position," Harutunian said. He noted the process must be kept confidential in order to avoid hurt feelings among local teachers "if they're not promoted."

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