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## Masco candidates at a glance

**By Colin Steele / Csteele@Cnc.Com**

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*The Masconomet Regional School Committee interviewed its three finalists for the district's superintendent position last weekend and could choose a successor to Kathleen Lynch as early as next week.*

*During the two-hour interviews on Saturday and Sunday, the candidates talked about their experiences as educators and why they would be strong leaders at Masconomet. School Committee members said they would not comment on the interviews until after they visited the candidates' districts and the candidates visited Masconomet.*

### **Dr. Claire Sheff Kohn**

Kohn is the superintendent of Princeton Regional Schools in New Jersey and has 32 years of educational experience. Like Masconomet, her district includes three self-governing communities.

"I understand what it means to communicate with multiples of everything," she said.

During her Saturday morning interview, she stressed the importance of communication in a regional district. In Princeton she uses newsletters to get the schools' messages out, meets with parent-teacher groups regularly and has good relationships with the local media, she said. Communicating with the community is important year-round - not only during budget season, when the schools need money, she said.

In Princeton she worked to improve what she described as a sometimes rocky relationship between past superintendents and the school board, which often resulted in heated meetings.

"We used to be the best show in town," she said. "Now we're kind of boring. A superintendent's dream is to have a boring meeting."

"You'll love this place," School Committee member Barry DeNofrio quipped.

Kohn is pursuing positions in Massachusetts because she said she has "strong ties here." Her first superintendent job was in Hull, and she has received degrees from Stonehill College, Boston College and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

She visited Masconomet last Friday and met with students, teachers and faculty.

"I have to say that I was extremely impressed."

### **Dr. Michael Ananis**

Ananis, who has instituted new financial controls and successfully negotiated more than 20 union contracts as superintendent of School Administrative Unit 39 in Amherst, New Hampshire, told the School Committee he would be a good match for Masconomet during his interview Saturday afternoon.

"The experience that I've had would serve this community well," Ananis said.

He explained the course of action he would take, if hired, to familiarize himself with and become visible in the Tri-Town communities: "Listen and look and listen and learn and listen and look, and the learning doesn't stop ...

"There's an awful lot to learn when you become superintendent of schools about becoming familiar with the communities."

Ananis was involved in a controversy several years ago when, as he put it, he used some material that was not in the public domain during a graduation speech. He talked about the incident when the School Committee asked him if there was anything in either his personal or professional life that he regretted.

"Never before and never since has that kind of thing happened to me," he said. "Instead of getting hung up on blame or punishment, I really do believe that our task here is to help people and to go above it ... That particular experience was a defining moment."

After the local media picked up on the story, Ananis offered his resignation and took the superintendent job at SAU 39, according to the School Committee.

Ananis has 33 years of experience and has served as an assistant superintendent, special education director, assistant principal and guidance counselor. Last year he was one of four finalists for the superintendent job in North Andover. He holds degrees from Harvard College, Harvard Graduate School of Education and Boston College.

### **Dennis Richards**

Even though he is up for the top administrative position at Masconomet, Richards has and always will focus on education, he told the School Committee during his Sunday afternoon interview.

"I didn't go into education to be an administrator," said Richards, who began his career 34 years ago as an English teacher.

Now an associate superintendent in Reading, Richards has worked to coordinate the curriculum between four

elementary schools, two middle schools and the high school, he said. But he is experienced in the administrative aspect of the job as well. The Reading school system has no business manager, personnel director or technology director, leaving the superintendent and associate superintendent to handle those responsibilities.

"We do it all," he said. When Reading's superintendent left the district in the early 1990s, Richards served as interim superintendent until the School Committee hired a successor.

Unlike the other two candidates, Richards does not have his doctorate. He did not find the time to finish his dissertation at the Harvard Graduate School of Education because that work coincided with changes in his career and the birth of his children, he said.

"I chose to focus on my work and my family," he said.

Richards received his bachelor's degree from Merrimack College and has two master's degrees: in English from Middlebury College and in education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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