

# RNESU begins search for new superintendent

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BRANDON — School officials want Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union's next superintendent to be someone who can build on the successes of their predecessor.

The RNESU School Board officially began accepting applications for the position last week.

The new hire will replace current Superintendent Jeanne Collins, who recently announced her plans to retire in June after eight years in the role.

A large search committee — composed of School Board members, administrators, one principal and one teacher — is being guided by Elaine Pinckney, a search consultant hired through the Vermont School Boards Association.

Pinckney is no stranger to Vermont education. She is a former deputy education commissioner for the state and, until June, she was superintendent of Champlain Valley School District — the largest school district in the state.

Pinckney described the search timeline as “aggressive;” the School Board is hoping to name the new superintendent by Town Meeting Day in March, she said.

“The person that they hire will set the tone for where RNESU moves forward in the next few years,” she said.

RNESU Board Chair Laurie Bertrand said the committee's recommendations will inform the six-member School Board, which will make the final decision.

Bertrand said the ideal candidate will need to have the right skills and qualities to navigate the complex and sprawling six-school, eight-town supervisory union, which includes two distinct school districts — Otter Valley and Barstow.

“We need someone who's definitely going to be able to communicate with everyone,” she said.

Bertrand noted that RNESU's willingness to innovate and be on the cutting edge of education has set it apart from other school systems in the state. The next superintendent, she said, should be someone who can carry on that tradition.

Pinckney listed additional qualities cited by member search committee during a recent meeting that included putting children first, closing equity gaps, and being collaborative, adaptable and accountable.

“I think that the RNESU board — from what I’ve heard in a couple of meetings I’ve had with them there — they don’t think their system is broke. They think that they are a system that’s moving forward and they’re looking for the next catalyst to make them ever greater,” she said.

Pinckney added that consistency will be another essential quality in order to lead across multiple school communities with differing needs.

“I think it’s really important that the superintendent, in alliance with the board, establishes, ‘these are the hallmark things we care about,’” she said.

Bertrand pointed to RNESU’s mission statements — ensuring “students will have the knowledge, skills and tools to be prepared for the next stage of their lives” — as guiding principles for the new superintendent.

While external challenges like the ongoing pandemic, student social-emotional health and behavior issues and potential changes to the state education funding system are real concerns, Bertrand said she is confident the RNESU will face them all head on.

“Our current superintendent has surrounded herself with some great people. And because of that, we are in a really good position that we can pretty much weather anything that comes down the pike,” she said.

As the search committee considers candidates, it plans to seek public input in a variety of ways — creating what Pinckney called a “continual communication loop.”

A virtual forum is scheduled for Jan. 6 from 6 to 7 p.m. (A link will be posted to [www.rnesu.org](http://www.rnesu.org) sometime next week.)

The committee is also soliciting input via the online discussion platform ThoughtExchange, also found on the RNESU website, as well as taping an informational program to be aired on PEG-TV in the coming weeks.

RNESU is also in the process of hiring a new principal at Otter Valley Union High School to replace current Principal Jim Avery, who will retire in June. Bertrand expects the Otter Valley Unified Union School Board, which she also chairs, will announce Avery’s successor by mid January.