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# Easthampton schools hopeful takes pride in district

By **CATHERINE BAUM**  
Staff Writer

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**EASTHAMPTON** - A finalist for superintendent of schools, Nancy Follansbee describes herself as a "process person."

Follansbee, the director of curriculum in Easthampton for four years, said she makes her decisions based on data and research, thoughtful analysis and discussions with her colleagues. She noted she follows an agenda to make thorough choices in a timely manner.

"I want all ideas on the table," Follansbee said to the School Committee during her job interview Tuesday. "I think I can help move the district forward by being a good listener, engaging in a collaborative process, having a vision and having goals, and knowing how to get them done."

An Easthampton resident, Follansbee, 61, said decisions must be driven by student needs. In tough economic times, she suggests the district pursue more competitive grants, create new services like volunteer tutors and combine grant monies where possible to meet student needs.

Follansbee said she is proud of Easthampton's curriculum framework, particularly how the school district has made opportunities for teachers to collaborate on teaching methods in professional development workshops and curriculum committees. For example, she said, a history teacher at the high school will ask a history teacher at the middle school to provide his or her perception of student strengths and areas in need of improvement, and then provide feedback. The district's curriculum is listed on the schools Web site, she added.

"Traditionally there are walls between middle school, high school and elementary school, but when we get teachers together, they really are very eager to talk," Follansbee said. "I think teachers sharing their expertise is one of the best forms of professional development you can have."

Hampshire Educational Collaborative recently recognized Follansbee with an award for her curriculum work in Easthampton. Follansbee said she is most proud of contributing to the work that has led to program results recognized by the nation, state and local organizations. The state is currently studying Easthampton to learn how it improved fourth-grade math results in two years, as evidenced by MCAS growth data. Easthampton's fourth-grade math growth is in the 78th percentile, as compared to the 40th to 60th growth percentile state average.

In terms of improvement, Follansbee said she believes the district needs to expand its communication with the general public. She suggested using social media Web sites to post videos of what goes on

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JERREY ROBERTS

Nancy Follansbee, Easthampton schools curriculum director and one of four candidates for city school superintendent, speaks during her interview before the School Committee Monday in Easthampton.



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in the classrooms, and having parent volunteers give tours of the schools to other parents. "I think we need to send a positive message to our community about what exists here in Easthampton," Follansbee said. "I think we have a jewel of a school district here."

Follansbee's interview concludes the four finalist interviews. The other candidates the School Committee members is considering are Williamsburg elementary schools principal Alfred Venne; Brenda Needham, former superintendent of schools in Windsor, Vt.; and Elizabeth Zielinski, assistant superintendent of Quaboag Regional School district in Warren.

The School Committee will discuss the candidates and hopes to make a decision at the panel's next meeting, Thursday, March 11 at 7 p.m. in White Brook Middle School.

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