

## **Why Lenox, Why Now? A Letter to the Lenox Superintendent Search Committee**

There is so much to love about Lenox, and clearly, this has been recognized for generations, leading Lenox to become one of the nation's premier destinations. Travel guides from Fodor's to Frommers advise travelers to make Lenox their home-base as they visit the region to explore the Berkshires. Lenox's charm and exceptional cultural amenities are certainly not a secret, evidenced by the vibrant tourism industry that thrives in the town. Beyond the glitz and glam of posh resorts and Gilded Age estates lies another treasure reserved for those who make Lenox their home. That treasure is one of community.

Covid-19 has impacted all of us and left us mystified by its uneven effects and unpredictable impact on those we know and love. Living through a pandemic helps refocus and reframe our lives and what is important when considering our mortality and the fleeting nature of time both spent and unspent. My wife and I are no different in this regard and found ourselves engaging in deep conversations at the kitchen table most nights after putting the children to bed for the evening. These discussions centered on what is truly important to us as a family and asking the question about are we truly living the life we wish for and whether we would electively choose to spend our life in the area of Allentown, Pennsylvania. We realized that we live lives and raise children in a non-inspiring suburban reality, going through the daily rhythms of a busy young family and spending more time dedicated to making a living than living a life. We also recognized how easily one slips into these patterns, and the years quickly fly by.

My wife and I identified that we were both missing a critical feature that provided us with such profound joy when we were growing up and that the missing element was community. In our large, sprawling commuter neighborhoods, little community exists, and our children and we find ourselves living lives largely unknown. My experience growing up in a small, tight-knit community can not be more of a polar opposite of our current reality. Our children don't know the joy of going outside to play with friends nor the blissful joy of a safe community where one can roam about with nary a care in the world. Now maybe we can never recapture that innocence of our childhood, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't try. Lenox provides an outstanding opportunity to experience community in a beautiful and vibrant town with rich cultural amenities. Lenox is highly livable. The Lenox superintendent search committee deeply embedded the authenticity of the community throughout the process. The priority placed on community was evident in the hours of personal communication throughout the process and the interaction between search committee members and their connection to the people and places of Lenox on a first-name basis. It was clear that Lenox is a place where people

feel known and deeply connected, and the town thrives on the mutual interdependence of all who contribute to the community.

One of my best friends is a Jesuit priest who has worked in communities all over the globe. His Jesuit training conditioned him to accept living anywhere and emphasize people rather than a place, likely influenced by Ignatius of Loyola's military background. While I agree with the Jesuits on the importance of people and appreciate the tremendous contribution they have made to the world through their focus on social justice and their work with the poor, I have to respectfully disagree with the assertion that place is of little importance. My wife and I share the belief that place is a critical component in living a meaningful life. We both find tremendous inspiration that fills our imaginations and leads us to be our best selves personally, professionally, and creatively. There is no coincidence that authors like Edith Wharton have found similar inspiration in Lenox. Lenox is a special place that provides a walkable and bikeable community with unique restaurants, interesting shops, gorgeous parks, and artistic venues. For us, this is an ideal place to raise our daughters, Emma and Ellie, in a town that offers unparalleled connectivity to all of the features that we believe combine to provide a life well-lived.

I recently visited Lenox, and the town certainly looked the part as if it had been dropped from a Hallmark Channel movie right into the heart of the Berkshires, picture-perfect beneath a blanket of fresh snow. Morris Elementary is a beautiful school and would be a wonderful school for my daughters to grow and learn. As I sat in the lot at Lenox Memorial Middle and High School, I could imagine Emma and Ellie milling around on the tree-lined sidewalks with friends outside the school. We even found a reasonably-priced home on Morgan St. that would add to the idealized vision of being able to walk to school and access the downtown in a few short minutes. For our family, this is about as near-perfect as it gets, a work-life balance that promotes healthy family life and an active lifestyle.

With a decade of turbulence in the superintendency in Lenox, I understand the desire for stability as the district moves forward. I enjoy stability, which is why I spent nearly ten years in Stroudsburg and six years so far in North Penn, essentially dividing my twenty years as an educator between those two districts. As I shared earlier, this decision about providing our family's ideal situation is not one that we arrived at without significant discernment. This reckoning intersected with a natural opportunity to think about a new professional direction as I completed my doctoral program at the University of Pennsylvania. With a 1st grader and a 3rd grader, we are looking forward to providing a long-term, stable schooling and social environment for our daughters. We are seeking an opportunity that can be our final stop to avoid disruption for our girls.

At 43, I am both young enough to provide long-term stability and old enough to remain in the ideal situation until I retire. Lenox offers a place and community that can be a forever home for our family and a rewarding and affirming place to work as an educational leader. In the present, I believe that my experiences as a leader in a high-performing district and my particular capacity to lead diversity, equity, and inclusion work are an optimal fit to meet Lenox Public Schools' present needs. Likewise, I feel that my broad experience as a teacher, overseeing RTI/MTSS, as an elementary/middle school principal, leading curriculum, and special education, also enables me to donate the multiple hats necessary in small districts. Additionally, I have led committees that have worked to improve the district through a host of initiatives, including the transition to full-inclusion of special education students; introducing a full-day kindergarten program; a new teacher evaluation system; moving from targeted-assistance to schoolwide Title 1 programming; the implementation of 1:1 technology; an innovative, individualized professional development program; curriculum audits, revisions, and adoptions in literacy, science, and math; instructional changes that support English Learners; enhancing instruction to embrace 21st-century skills; leading the transition from RTI to MTSS; programs to support the social-emotional well-being and mental health of our students, and leading diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at both the state and district levels.

While the superintendency represents the pinnacle of one's professional career as an educator, I think of the superintendent's role not as an end but a beginning. My career desires are to provide leadership as a superintendent and participate as an adjunct professor, writer, embrace a public leadership stance, and advocate for public education in the region, state, and nation.

Respectfully submitted by,

*Marc J. Gosselin Jr.*