Pittsburgh Public Schools launches nationwide superintendent search

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The Pittsburgh Public Schools board Wednesday began the search process for a new, permanent superintendent for the district by sending a request for proposals to a select group of consultants that could help identify candidates.

The invitation-only RFP was sent to pre-selected firms, which must submit “substantially detailed proposals” to the board by 5 p.m. March 9, according to the district.

The board said it hopes to have a permanent superintendent in place by the start of the 2022-23 school year.

“The decision to conduct a national search provides the opportunity for us — as a school community — to determine the ideal type of leadership we need to guide our district into the future,” board President Sala Udin said in a statement.

Interim Superintendent Wayne Walters, who has served in the acting capacity since September, will continue in that role until a permanent schools chief is selected or until Sept. 30, 2022.

Mr. Walters — who over the past 30 years in the Pittsburgh Public Schools has risen from a teaching position to assistant superintendent before taking on the interim role — took over the district at a time of turmoil with the resignation of former Superintendent Anthony Hamlet amid fallout from ethical violations, student transportation difficulties, an uptick in unruly behavior and violence in schools, and continued challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In an interview with the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on Wednesday, Mr. Walters said “I continue to be excited about the work. I’m not discouraged, I’m more encouraged, I’m more motivated.”

Mr. Walters was coy when asked whether he would seek to become the district’s permanent superintendent. But when asked if he would accept the full-time position if the board chooses him, he said, “If, given the opportunity, I will continue to serve the Pittsburgh Public Schools.”
Mr. Udin said that community input will help with identifying the traits needed in a leader who can best serve city students, educators and the community. The board said it was committed to implementing a public input aspect into the process, the details of which will be made available once a search firm has been hired.

The board also said it remains “steadfast” in its position to be transparent throughout the process, but because of personnel and privacy issues, certain information will not be made public. And out of respect for the individuals applying for the position, the board said, the candidate pool will remain confidential until the final selection is announced.

The school board will make the ultimate hiring decision on the new superintendent.

The Council of Great City Schools, a coalition of 75 of the largest urban public school districts in the country, assisted the board by providing a list of search firms to invite their participation in the RFP process.

Ray Hart, the executive director of the Council of Great City Schools, said the organization compiled the list of search firms that other member districts have used over the years.

“We aren’t making any recommendations about who they should select,” Mr. Hart said. “If they chose to go outside of that list, that’s perfectly fine. When districts ask, we share a list of what their peers have done historically.”

The council also helps connect board members who have questions about the search process with boards in other cities that have dealt with similar concerns, Mr. Hart said.

“If a school board has questions about how another school board went about their search, we’ll connect them to a member or a district administrator to lay out what the search process was in another large urban district,” he said.

The board said it will choose a firm based on responsiveness to criteria for selection, terms and conditions contained in the RFP.

Board members are expected to approve a contract with the selected firm at a meeting on March 23.

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