

WFAE 90.7

After abrupt leadership switch, the CMS board chair talks about a search and next steps

WFAE | By [Ann Doss Helms](#)

Published April 28, 2022 at 5:35 PM EDT

Less than two weeks after the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board fired Superintendent Earnest Winston, Chair Elyse Dashew says plans for a superintendent search haven't moved to the forefront yet.

The serious work will probably take place after the November school board election, she said Thursday. Six of the board's nine seats are on the ballot.

"You know, I think we can get a plan established and ready to go, but to really dive into it, it might be wise to wait for whoever's going to be on the board post-November," she said.

Hugh Hattabaugh, a retired administrator who worked five years with CMS, started as interim this week. He has announced plans to reorganize administrative and support staff to provide more support for schools.

Dashew says there's no agreement that Hattabaugh couldn't be a contender for the permanent job. She said one of the first steps will be talking to people about what they want from the next leader.

"I would like to put together some sort of an advisory team," she said.

Winston is the fourth CMS superintendent to leave in the past 10 years. Two others were forced to resign, and one never got a long-term contract. All lasted less than three years.

But Dashew said she doesn't think that will hurt the district's chances at getting high-caliber applicants.

"It's sort of a prize district to come to work in," she said. "It is just seen as a real innovator around the nation, and Charlotte's such a great place to live."

Dashew said leadership churn is common in large districts, especially since the pandemic hit. She said she joined the Council of the Great City Schools executive committee in January, and four of the six superintendents on that committee have left their jobs.

Bonds and student assignment

Hattabaugh's immediate tasks include his proposed staffing changes, working with the board to [get a budget approved](#) and closing out this school year.

But two other big projects loom. One is preparing for a 2023 school bond vote. Dashew says that can't wait, which means the district needs to start soon on updating its priority list for construction and renovation projects.

The other is looking at student assignment, which is one of the most controversial tasks any district can undertake.

CMS board policy calls for a comprehensive student assignment review every six years. Before leaving her job April 1, Associate Superintendent Akeshia Craven-Howell had said this was the year.

Dashew and Chief Operations Officer Brian Schultz, who oversees student assignment, both say details haven't been decided yet.

"I believe we will be going ahead and doing a comprehensive review," Dashew said. "I doubt that it will be as dramatic as what we did last. I don't think it's healthy to just completely shake things up and reinvent things every six years."

The last comprehensive review, which spanned almost four years, led to a complex new system of prioritizing magnet admissions and trying to diversify all schools based on socioeconomic status. At Tuesday's meeting, Chief Accountability Officer Frank Barnes told the board the maps that those labels are based on still haven't been updated with 2020 Census data.

For now, CMS is working on boundaries and magnet plans for schools that are being built or repurposed with bonds approved in 2017.