

News & Record

Guilford Schools leaders laying groundwork for process to fill superintendent opening

Jessie Pounds Mar 11, 2022

GREENSBORO — The process to hire a new superintendent for Guilford County Schools is in its infancy, but it has already sparked some tension.

The district has an opening coming up because Superintendent Sharon Contreras said in mid-January that she will leave this summer to take a position with The Innovation Project, a nonprofit group of North Carolina school superintendents that tries to develop innovative strategies for public education.

Deena Hayes-Greene, chairwoman of the Guilford County Board of Education, said Friday she anticipates an open conversation with the board about the search at an upcoming meeting. She said she wants the board to consider information about how other school districts are handling their superintendent openings and searches right now, before they commit to any possible next steps, such as hiring a search firm or search association. She said she's heard people from other school districts say they are facing challenges with their superintendent searches.

But board member Anita Sharpe said Friday that, with the vacancy still looming, she thinks the process has moved too slowly. That's contributing to her suspicions that she is out of the loop and she is also unhappy with Vice Chairwoman Winston McGregor gathering the information, without being asked to do so by the full board.

McGregor said on Tuesday that she had spoken the week prior with representatives of the Council of Urban Boards of Education, Chiefs for Change and the **Council of Great City Schools**. Hayes-Greene asked her to make the calls and take notes.

McGregor said she and Hayes-Greene planned to have a discussion about what she has learned and then "get with the board" to share the information and discuss what the board's process will be.

She shared the update in response to comments Sharpe made toward the end of Tuesday night's school board meeting.

"I have asked a couple of times of our board leadership just where we are in the process of searching for Dr. Contreras' successor," Sharpe said. "Cricketts."

"I was informed today from outside sources that there is a plan for the selection of our next superintendent," she said. "If there is such a plan, it is important that all board members be aware of it since it is our responsibility, by law, to undertake the superintendent search. I have heard the identity of the selection and that there is a consulting plan in place to assist the person selected for a period of time. I would appreciate an update, either in public or in private session, whichever is appropriate, as to this plan. If there is such a plan, it is the duty of the full board."

McGregor said she had told Sharpe and other board members that she had scheduled the conversations with the national groups.

"I have absolutely no idea what Anita is talking about from this 'outside source,' this rumor, this misinformation," she said. "I know that people say all kinds of things in the world that are completely unverifiable and completely untrue."

Sharpe responded, despite Hayes-Greene saying that Sharpe was speaking out of turn. Sharpe said the superintendent search should be an effort of the whole board, not undertaken by one person.

McGregor then reiterated that she was just gathering information to bring back to the board, and Hayes-Greene echoed McGregor.

"You got the information, so did everyone else here, that the board will be involved in a process. We were going to review the information together, and you got that," Hayes-Greene said on Tuesday. "Winston and I have not talked. There is no plan, no firm. There is no candidate, no nothing."

Sharpe said she sent an email after the meeting apologizing for, “coming back at” McGregor and Hayes-Greene after McGregor’s comments and said she should have just let them have their say without trying to interject again. She said she’s still concerned about the search.

Picking a superintendent might be the last big job Sharpe, a Republican, and McGregor, a Democrat, have as board members. Neither is running for reelection this year. Hayes-Greene filed to run again in the Democratic primary for District 8.

Guilford County Schools last sought a new superintendent after former Superintendent Maurice “Mo” Green announced in December 2015 that he would be leaving for a job as the executive director of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in a few months.

On the day of Green’s resignation announcement, then-board-chairman Alan Duncan said the board would discuss next steps to replace Green at its next meeting later that month.

The board members did just that. At the urging of the board’s attorney, Jill Wilson, they voted to authorize her to advertise for a search firm to look for the next superintendent, without committing that they would hire any, and met in a lengthy closed session to discuss candidates for interim superintendent.

They voted at their next meeting, in January, to appoint Terrence Young, the school system’s then-chief information officer, and Nora Carr, then-chief of staff, as co-interim superintendents. At the meeting after that, the board selected the North Carolina School Boards Association to conduct the search.

By mid-February, they had a deadline for candidates to apply and a series of public input sessions scheduled. Contreras was hired in late June 2016 and started work as superintendent that August.