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Longtime Pittsburgh Public Schools administrator Wayne Walters will lead district as superintendent

90.5 WESA | By [Sarah Schneider](#)

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The Pittsburgh Public Schools board announced Thursday that it plans to fill the district's top job with longtime district administrator and former teacher Wayne Walters.

Walters has led the district in an interim capacity since October 2021, [when former Superintendent Anthony Hamlet stepped down](#). Walters will now be in charge of setting the vision for the long-term future of the district, and following directives from the nine-member elected board.

"I love what I do but I'm not confused that this work is challenging ... but at the same time rewarding," Walters told a room full of district staff at the announcement. "We need to build back morale and improve communication. So know that I will listen and hear your concerns."

The board is expected to formally vote on the hire during its July 27 legislative meeting. Walters' first day in the permanent position is Aug. 1. District solicitor Ira Weiss declined to reveal details of the contract and said the board would discuss the length of the contract and salary during the July 27 meeting.

The district serves just over 20,000 students in 54 buildings and employs more than 4,000 people. Its \$668 million operating budget is larger than the City of Pittsburgh's.

Walters' promotion caps a decades-long career with PPS that began in 1991, with a teaching position at King Elementary School on the North Side. He was then an assistant principal for a year at Northview Heights Elementary School, and principal of Frick International Studies Academy 6-8 from 2000 to 2008.

His longest-held post began in 2009, when the Barack Obama Academy of International Studies was formed in East Liberty. Walters led the school as

principal until 2017, when Hamlet altered priorities in the central office following an evaluation of the district **by the Council of Great City Schools**.

Walters moved into the district's central office as an assistant superintendent of professional development and special programming. He was tasked with ensuring "the district impacts student outcomes by increasing teacher knowledge through a cohesive system of instructional support," according to a release at the time.

While Walters is known for his collection of bow ties, Board president Sala Udin said Thursday that he is also known for his integrity and focus on student input.

"I remain unapologetically student-centered, committed, and passionate about our students, teachers, staff and families of the Pittsburgh Public Schools," Walters said. "I know firsthand the many challenges our district faces, but I believe competence, confidence and collaboration go a long way in creating quality, equitable, well-rounded experiences and spaces of learning and joy for our students."

Next steps

The night before Walters' appointment was announced, [Udin, the board president, said during a meeting](#) that the district needed a "reset period" after the new superintendent starts.

The district faces numerous challenges, including low staff morale, a widening achievement gap between Black and white students, and an increase in discipline that removes students from classrooms. The district is also grappling with a number of outdated and under-capacity schools with shrinking enrollment.

Udin said new policies on issues like discipline would have to await "the start of a new journey by a new superintendent." He added that he hoped "Dr. Walters' goals for the first 30 or 60 or 90 days can help us to reset our work in terms of how we solve some of these problems."

After the Wednesday meeting, Udin declined to say whether Walters would be the next superintendent but added, "Stay tuned."

After the announcement, James Fogarty, the executive director of Pittsburgh watchdog group A+ Schools said he hoped that Walters would focus on student literacy, something that has worsened during the pandemic. Fogarty also said he was excited about Walters' innovative approaches when it comes to the number of schools the district operates.

"How do you recreate or create new schools in the midst of the challenges we're facing? But I do think it's really important that we do some of that big conversation now rather than waiting until it's too late," he said.

Fogarty said he hopes Walters' emphasis in his first 90 days would be on setting the stage for the school year and evaluating systems that need fixing such as transportation.

"It's about solving the big problems in front of you, reduce the waste ... which is really teacher time, let's hear it and let's act on it," he said. "I was encouraged to hear that is Dr. Walters' approach."

Fogarty and other advocates had urged the board to conduct a national search and he said he's glad the board followed through and did its due diligence.

"Now there's no doubt that the best person for the job has been selected," he said.

The search

[The board began a nationwide search in March](#) after hiring Illinois-based BWP & Associates to lead the search. [The Pittsburgh Foundation and the R.K Mellon Foundation funded the \\$60,000 search.](#)

Ultimately 29 people applied from 13 states and one other country, the district said.

[The consulting group's Kevin Castner said earlier this month](#) that the board was in talks with one of the five finalists that BWP had presented to the board. At the time, board president Sala Udin would not confirm that the board was in talks with one candidate — though he did acknowledge his goal was to hire a superintendent before schools opened in August.

Walters did not say publicly that he had applied for the superintendent's job permanently, but [several students and teachers asked the board to hire](#)

[him](#) late last month. An Obama Academy teacher and parent of two PPS students, Barak Naveh, said the district is at a crossroads that Walters can navigate. Naveh worked under Walters when he oversaw Obama as principal.

“We need someone who knows what it is like to be a teacher and administrator in this district,” Naveh said in June. “[Walters] knows this district inside and out and will always be transparent and well-intentioned. He is the right candidate in every way.”

Some criticized the search process, saying its short timeline didn’t lend to meaningful community input. Community forums were announced a week before they were held. But the consulting group argued that the district tried to

get the word out and made meetings convenient to attend by holding them throughout the city.

The board waited to begin the search for a consulting firm until board members elected in November were sworn in and began their work in December.

Though the consultant short-listed a group of finalists, the board was tasked with vetting the finalists’ background and application materials.

The board also conducted a national search when former superintendent Linda Lane stepped down in 2016. It hired Hamlet, a Palm Beach County Florida administrator. Shortly after the board announced it intended to hire Hamlet, journalists found that he had inflated numbers in his resume and plagiarized in other materials. After days of both community outcry and support, the hire was confirmed.

During his tenure, Hamlet was criticized for the district’s spending on education technology, and for taking an unauthorized trip to Cuba with four top administrators. His 2021 departure came shortly after an investigation found that he had violated state ethics rules by accepting improper travel reimbursements. Hamlet, whose contract had recently been renewed for five years, left with one year’s salary and benefits amounting to nearly \$400,000.