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Baltimore City Schools CEO to chair urban schools council after current contract ends

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Sonja Santelises, CEO of the Baltimore City Public School System, is set to be the next board chair of the **Council of the Great City Schools**, an advocacy group representing 78 of the country's largest urban school districts.

Baltimore's school system is a member of the nonprofit coalition, which promotes improving education for students in urban areas. The organization announced Santelises' appointment as the chair-elect Wednesday. The chairmanship is an unpaid, one-year position she will assume on July 1, 2025.

Santelises assuming the chair of the organization's board of directors would not prevent her from staying on as CEO of Baltimore's school district, said Andre Riley, a BCPSS spokesperson.

"This is not a transition point," Riley said. "We're a member of that organization. She will be part of their leadership."

The chair of the 156-member board must be a superintendent or school board member of an inner-city district. Santelises [signed a third contract](#) last month to lead the Baltimore school district as CEO for her ninth year until June 30, 2025.

If Santelises' contract expires and is not renewed, she won't be able to continue serving on the council's executive committee as an officer, said Tonya Harris, a spokesperson for Great City Schools.

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners has been open that it plans to replace Santelises after her current contract expires. Ronald McFadden, chair of the school board, in June described the one-year contract as an extension, while Santelises called it a renewal. The board's negotiations with Santelises were finalized just weeks before her previous contract expired.

Members of the Baltimore Teachers Union and Baltimore's Public School Administrators & Supervisors Association [gathered outside the district's headquarters](#) Tuesday to call for the school board to launch a public national search

for the next CEO. Members are concerned the board will replace Santelises with a candidate they chose without public input.

Baltimore school board members are unpaid and have full-time jobs. McFadden is an assistant principal in Baltimore County, and Shantell Roberts, the vice chair, works for Baltimore Gas and Electric Co. This month, Baltimore Unity Hall, a community social justice nonprofit, appointed school board member Ashley Esposito as its new executive director.

Until Santelises assumes the role, the board chair of the Council of the Great City Schools will be Marcia Andrews, a member of the Palm Beach County School Board in Florida. Andrews took over as chair July 1. Santelises is slated to replace her next year.

The council is led by its executive director, Raymond Hart. The council is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools, according to its website.

The council's board chairs lead legislative conferences for the organization and conduct financial audits as part of a 24-member executive group. Council officers are nominated and voted upon.