Board Ensures Leadership Stability and Affirms Dr. Anthony Hamlet’s Performance with 4-Year Reappointment as Superintendent

PITTSBURGH, August 26, 2020 – Today the Board of School Directors for the Pittsburgh Public Schools voted to reappoint Dr. Anthony Hamlet as Superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2025. The Superintendent’s current contract expires June 30, 2021.

Appointed May 18, 2016 with an initial salary of $210,000, Superintendent Hamlet’s current salary after meeting objective goals for the 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years is $229,372. The Superintendent’s final contract and new salary is not yet finalized and will be submitted to the Board for review and approval upon recommendation of the District’s Solicitor.

The Superintendent will hold an in-person press conference with Board Members and his Leadership team on Tuesday, September 1, in celebration of the start of the school year. Please find below statements read this evening by Superintendent Hamlet and Board President Sylvia Wilson, related to this evening’s Board vote.

In Other Business – Board Votes to Move Forward With Fall Sports
Following significant input from students, staff and families, the Board voted to let fall sports proceed for the 2020-2021 school year. Team conditioning will continue while the District finalizes the schedule for sport physicals and “ImPact” testing. The official start date for fall practices will be announced once the schedule for physical is finalized. An All-In webinar focused on ensuring the safe return of athletics will take place tomorrow at 6 PM and can be viewed on the District’s website and Facebook page.

Statement from Superintendent Anthony Hamlet
I want to thank the Board for this vote of confidence. And while the misdirected self-interest of a few attempted to take away from the progress we have made together, we are now able to move forward squarely focused on improving outcomes for our students. With only 35 Council of Great City Schools recommendations left to complete and the groundwork that has been laid with the initiatives of our Expect Great Things strategic plan, we have laid a strong foundation for the next five years.

One thing for sure is we are living in truly uncertain times, but what is not uncertain is our responsibility to ensure our students are prepared to be successful and competitive in the 21st Century global economy.

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Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our students have proven themselves resilient, intelligent and considerate of their fellow man – putting them far ahead of previous generations. It is incumbent on us to ensure we develop these assets of our students.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

I want to say to those who have shared their concerns regarding the achievement of black and brown students in our district, that I hear you. Yes, we have inevitably lost some of the ground we had made with our students due to the closure of schools this past spring. This will make for a tough road ahead. As the African proverb says, “If you want to go fast - go alone. If you want to go far - go together. I am committed to bridging all divides as I know that each of you play a valuable role in the success of our efforts to improve student outcomes.

We will not lose sight of our charge to work against racist ideas and policies that prevent our students from experiencing a bias-free education. I look forward to working closely with Kathi Elliott and Gwen’s Girls to continue our work to reduce the disproportionate rate of arrests affecting black children. We also will continue our intentional efforts to eliminate racial disparities in the achievement of African American students, as outlined in our On Track to Equity Plan – our most extensive and comprehensive equity plan to date.

Even in the midst of a pandemic, we are committed to the work we have begun through Imagine PPS; our strategic plan for the future. Now more than ever, we must make the changes to our system necessary to get the results we want for our students. I take this charge as Superintendent as my number one priority. I know that taking steps to align instruction to standards, increase progress monitoring, elevate data reporting, invest in new curriculum and improve professional learning for all staff are not the kinds of actions that grab headlines, but without these steps, Pittsburgh Public Schools would not be primed for the road ahead.

Imagine PPS builds on the work we have begun and puts into super drive our efforts to empower students with the knowledge and life skills they need to thrive in our global economy. Through Imagine PPS, we continue our work to design an educational delivery model that aligns to the values of our city and positions us to reach our goals for students.
Right now though, my immediate first course of action is ensuring that we are prepared for the successful start of school on Monday. Through a collaborative effort with the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, we have been able to develop a Memorandum of Understanding to support full time online instruction. I remain committed to this spirit of collaboration as we continue our efforts to ensure Pittsburgh Public Schools remains fiscally sound, academically strong and a first choice for students, families, teachers and other staff in Pittsburgh. I want to thank all of our school leaders, teachers and school staff for their flexibility and commitment to putting students first. I also must thank the members of my Executive Cabinet, central office, operations and IT staff for their commitment to children and families of Pittsburgh.

When I arrived at Pittsburgh Public Schools, to take on my first superintendence, I left Palm Beach County intent on making Pittsburgh my home. I understood the challenge ahead and the time it would take to truly transform the District for all students. I now have a heart for this city, its residents and most importantly its children. And today we now have the stability we need to ensure all students receive the high-quality education they deserve and that all graduate with a plan for their future and beyond.

Statement from Board President Sylvia Wilson
I would like to take a moment to warmly thank all those who took time out of their days to submit their concerns, gratitude, hopes, and support during the last two days of Public Hearing comments and those who sent emails. We sincerely hope that you all understand that your positions were not only heard but also profoundly considered.

Welcome to 2020! A kickoff to a new school year unlike any other. The coronavirus pandemic has taken us all on a ride to test and challenge our confidence, our resiliency, our integrity and most importantly, tested our commitment to the thousands of children in our care. And as we think about the future of our district, let’s be sure to keep the children as our top priority.

My record speaks for itself, as I have proven to be a dedicated servant to Pittsburgh Public Schools for over forty years as a teacher, parent, grandparent, volunteer and elected official. This experience has helped guide me to deeply consider all factors when making decisions…and to keep this precedence in mind when voting. As a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh for my Masters…the recent attacks to my integrity as Board President have been tough to absorb… but those attacks have driven me to be more determined than ever to act and respond with a razor like focus while continuing to move forward. And Moving Forward is exactly what we MUST do in order to protect all of the progress that has been made in the past four years.

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Regarding the resolution to confirm Dr. Hamlet’s contract ...During my career as a teacher, I was always evaluated every year on my performance. When I joined this board years ago, it was an eye opener to learn that no such formal evaluative process was done for previous superintendents. A sub-group of board members worked together with Dr. Lane and an outside consultant at that time to develop an evaluative instrument. Additionally, after the evaluation process was created, the state mandated a format for school boards to use to evaluate all superintendents.

Since then, the tool that we use has been updated with the assistance of the Council of Great City Schools, of which PPS is a member. It is the responsibility of this board to use that instrument to evaluate the progress made by the superintendent with very specific measurable goals. Each board member rates the superintendent on these goals based on actual data.

The process to determine the renewal of Dr. Hamlet’s contract is based on the details outlined in his contract. It was determined that this board was NOT to use subjective criteria, but to use objective criteria. Each board member is responsible to rate the superintendent in what I would hope to be an honest objective manner.

So, after assuring that there is a specific process for rating the superintendent, along with my years of experience, I resent being pictured as someone who makes decisions based on a nice personality, nice suits, nice cologne. This type of rhetoric is not helpful to the process and is insulting to my intelligence and I will also add, sexist.

My record is not the only one that’s been on the chopping block lately. Dr. Hamlet’s integrity has been under attack as well. In recent months, not only have we been at war with a pandemic, we have been faced with a media blitz of negative and mixed information – much of which was created to cast dispersions on a board that for the first time acted against traditional and historic protocols by involving the public in the process of selecting the next superintendent. There were those who fueled the mixed and misguided messages to express their dismay – taking it out of the hands of the very people who were elected to do this job.

As a black woman...as a black educator...as the mother of two Black sons...Black Lives Always Matter and I too am concerned about the levels of achievement of black students. Over the past four years, progress has been made in the levels of black student achievement. What is happening across this state and our country mirrors what is happening in Pittsburgh. The levels of black student achievement were low before Dr. Hamlet arrived.

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The pandemic is a set-back for our students of color. Change and evolution takes time. Dr. Hamlet did not bring his magic wand to accomplish this – in fact – one might remember that the teachers are in the classrooms. Changes in how teachers deliver instruction takes time as well. For too long teachers were to use prescriptive teaching which took away from what was once the highlight of Pittsburgh Public Schools. Teaching – being able to diversify instruction to meet the needs of all the students is key. Rome wasn’t built in a day. There were no outcries when previous superintendents destroyed achievement goals of students of color during their tenures.

In working with the board, Dr. Hamlet has made many critical accomplishments to date. Among these are:

1. A nurse in every campus.
2. Additional social workers and counselors.
3. The Career and Technical Programs have been expanded to include more students and to provide more opportunities for career options.
4. There has been a reallocation of resources to schools with the most needs.
5. Graduation rates have increased.
6. Attention is given to average class sizes.
7. Student voice is an important addition.
8. Community Schools have been expanded.
9. Out of School Time continued to develop and relationships with community organizations/partners grow in assisting with student needs.
10. Working on better relationships overall that hadn’t existed.

In closing, many have asked - why now - as opposed to waiting. We decided as a board to make a decision now due to the very reasons that many have asked us to wait. We need to concentrate on the education of our children. We need to get the district back on track post COVID-19 with haste. The district is making every effort to move forward in a difficult time that was not created by us. We are not alone in these struggles. We are in touch with other districts similar in size and larger to compare notes – we learn from each other. We want to remove distractions that prevent us from focusing on educating ALL of the children.

Again – why wait? We have several other considerations to resolve that impacts educating our children such as collective bargaining agreements that have expired, others that will expire soon and our financial future is worrisome. We need to maintain stability at this time so that the critical work can be accomplished.

Thank you for this time, my vote is YES to retain Dr. Hamlet’s contract.