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District 113 names Deerfield principal new chief

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Christopher Dignam (HANDOUT / Township High School District 113)

Deerfield High School Principal Christopher Dignam has been named the next superintendent of Township High School District 113 in a vote the school board hopes will bring closure to controversies involving the district's leadership.

"This has really been a two-year process and the district has had a lot of upheaval," said Annette Lidawer, president of the Township High School District 113 school board, on Monday.

Dignam's appointment to the top job comes less than a year since he joined the school system after serving as principal of Lane Tech College Prep High School in Chicago. The school board Monday approved a three-year employment contract at a base salary of \$205,000. He'll move into the superintendent's job June 28. He already holds credentials to serve as a school superintendent in Illinois.

The district will immediately begin searching for Dignam's successor as principal of Deerfield High School.

Prior to joining District 113, Dignam served five years as assistant principal, and three years as principal of Lane Tech, a selective-enrollment magnet school within the Chicago Public School system.

"Dr. Dignam has already had such a positive impact on Deerfield High School," Lidawer said in a news release. "We are confident that in his new role, he will infuse the entire district with cutting-edge programming and innovative ideas that benefit all of our students."

In mid-2014, the school board voted to part ways with Superintendent George Fornero at the end of the 2014-15 school year in response to a firestorm that exposed widespread distrust in the central office administration. The ensuing search for a schools' chief led to the selection of a California superintendent who became embroiled in controversy, and asked to be released from her three-year contract four months before her starting date.

Daryl Herrick, a retired Wisconsin school superintendent, has been serving as interim superintendent for the 2015-16 year.

For the current search, the school board used BWP Associates, an executive search firm, to recruit and screen applicants. According to Lidawer, the firm received 30 completed applications for the advertised position and narrowed the field to six candidates who were interviewed by the school board.

Three semi-finalists were interviewed a second time by the school board. They also appeared before several dozen people with some stake in the school system. The 39 interviewers were split into three; mixed groups that included teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, community members and students.

Lidawer said the school board was impressed with Dignam's depth of knowledge, his hands-on approach to education and his commitment to putting students first.

"We have also been fortunate enough to witness firsthand his inclusive, collaborative and interactive approach towards leadership in his role as principal of Deerfield High School," she said in the news release.



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