

Akron Beacon Journal

Akron Public Schools, board approves separation agreement

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Christine Fowler Mack is resigning as superintendent of Akron Public Schools.

The school board Monday night voted 6-0, with one member absent, to approve a separation agreement with Fowler Mack that pays out the entire remainder of her contract, a total of \$462,585.68.

The agreement, which was released to the Beacon Journal after the meeting, also includes a non-disparagement clause for both Fowler Mack and the board.

Fowler Mack's signature on the document is dated Feb. 5.

No reason was given for the resignation. The board held no discussion and made no comments about the separation during the meeting.

Board President Derrick Hall said in a statement released after the meeting that the resignation was voluntary but came after discussion with the board.

"After careful consideration by the Board and the Superintendent, we have agreed that Ms. Fowler Mack will resign from her role as Superintendent effective March 4, 2023," Hall said. "While the Board remains appreciative of her service as Superintendent, it accepted her voluntary resignation."

Fowler Mack was not present for the meeting and did not answer a phone call seeking comment, but also released a statement through the district following the vote.

"It is never easy to leave a place we love," Fowler Mack said. "My decision to leave Akron Public Schools was made easier by my knowing the outstanding work, increased supports, scholar focus and measurable progress I was privileged to lead since I was named superintendent in 2021.

"My decision to separate at a time of such pivotal change and opportunity for APS was made with careful thought, prayer and discussions with my family. In this moment of transition for

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always call my home."

The agenda was updated at 5 p.m. to reflect the pending vote on the separation agreement, and Assistant Superintendent Tamea Caver sat in for Fowler Mack at the meeting.

Fowler Mack's resignation is effective March 4 but the board also approved appointing Executive Director of Elementary Education Mary Outley as interim superintendent, effective Tuesday. She will be paid \$277.07 per day on top of her current administrative salary, according to her interim contract released Monday night.

Per Fowler Mack's agreement, she will remain with the district through March 4 in a remote role as an "educational administrator" to aid in the transition to the new interim superintendent.

Outley will become the second woman and second Black woman — after Fowler Mack — to step into the top role in Akron's school district.

Fowler Mack was in second year of three-year contract

Fowler Mack's departure comes just 19 months into her three-year contract.

The resignation marks the end of the strained relationship between the school board and its superintendent. In her first evaluation last year, then-board President N.J. Akbar called her first year "a failure" due to a lack of leadership. The board had been working on a second evaluation of Fowler Mack for the last several months but has yet to release the finished document.

The board has publicly pushed Fowler Mack on several issues, including the district's long-term planning process for facilities and programming. A meeting to discuss recommendations on the plan scheduled for last week was canceled.

The board has held two closed-door sessions in recent weeks, releasing only that the subject was "personnel." The board oversees only two employees, the superintendent and the treasurer, and is in the process of searching for a new treasurer. Previous meetings that were about the superintendent's evaluation or the treasurer search were publicly stated as such.

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Becoming the Akron superintendent was full-circle for Fowler Mack, who graduated from Akron's East High School and started her teaching career in the district. Her father is former school board president the Rev. Ron Fowler.

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She left the district early in her career to chart her own course, working in Kent and the Cleveland Heights school systems before landed in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. She left there as the chief of portfolio planning, growth and management.

Tension between Christine Fowler Mack, Akron Public Schools board

But her tenure at APS was never smooth sailing, as a fraught relationship with the school board led to tension that caused community leaders on multiple occasions to voice concern over the dynamic and how it would affect the direction of the district.

In her first evaluation, released about 10 months into her contract, Akbar criticized Fowler Mack heavily on a personal and professional level. He called her insubordinate, in addition to labeling her first year on the job "a failure." Two other board members, including the board's new president, also leveled strong concerns, particularly around Fowler Mack's communication with the board. The four other members of the board were largely positive in their review.

Before that, tensions had simmered for months, including around the board's delayed approval of new positions Fowler Mack proposed in her first day on the job, the process for planning to spend the district's nearly \$100 million in stimulus dollars and the future of the former high school in Kenmore.

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