

# Akron Beacon Journal

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## EDUCATION

# Akron school board approves separation with Michael Robinson, names new superintendent

**[Jennifer Pignolet](#)** Akron Beacon Journal

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Michael Robinson will walk away from Akron Public Schools with \$200,000 in hand — and Mary Outley will be the permanent superintendent of the district.

The school board on Monday approved a separation agreement with its [embattled superintendent](#), who officially leaves the district a few months shy of finishing the second year of his five-year contract.

The board voted 4-3 to approve a separation agreement, which will have to come back before the board again after Robinson signs the document, Board President Carla Jackson said.

Under the deal, which was read at the board meeting before the vote, Robinson will voluntarily resign and release the district and board from any legal liabilities.

Board members Barbara Sykes, Rene Molenaur and the Rev. Greg Harrison voted against the agreement, arguing that Robinson had violated board policy and that \$200,000 was too high a price for Robinson to "go away," as Sykes put it.

"This will not go away," Sykes said. "This is telling our children we're not willing to fight for them."

In a surprising development immediately following the split vote, board member Diana Autry made a motion to make [Outley, who was serving as interim](#)

[superintendent](#), the district's permanent leader pending contract negotiations.

That would mean forgoing a superintendent search process, which usually is an open process that includes conducting public interviews and private interviews with the board. Outley served as interim two years ago but was turned down for the permanent job in favor of Robinson. Only four current members of the board were serving at the time Outley interviewed.

Board members hotly debated the idea, with some noting they had never met as a board to discuss next moves or what they want in the next superintendent, and hadn't even [asked Outley if she wanted the job](#).

Outley — summoned by a security guard from upstairs — walked into the room in the middle of the discussion and confirmed she did in fact want to be the permanent superintendent.

"I would be honored to serve Akron public schools as its next superintendent if given the opportunity," she said.

Sykes attempted to call an executive session, but Autry declined to revoke her motion on Outley's appointment, so it had to go forward in that moment.

Ultimately it was again a split vote, 4-3, with Sykes, Molenaur and Harrison dissenting, to offer the permanent job to Outley.

## **Robinson departure follows investigation**

Robinson's departure comes after a [four-month investigation](#) by independent attorneys showed Robinson — who spoke when he arrived in Akron about his history of being bullied as a young child, and wanting better for students today — had frequently bullied his own staff, threatening to fire them regularly, berated them publicly and in private and had using demeaning language about from children.

The investigation painted a picture of a leader who failed to see how his actions were problematic, who lead with fear and who could not admit fault.

In one case, Robinson denied having retaliated against an employee, stating he could have fired the employee but chose not to. The investigators noted retaliation was not limited to termination, but Robinson failed to comprehend that.

He also admitted to speaking in a threatening way about a board member's children, who are APS elementary students, and defended it by saying she had spoken to him in a demeaning manner.

The findings of the report align with allegations raised in a Beacon Journal story released April 7 that revealed Robinson frequently threatening to fire his staff

The board voted 4-1, with two members abstaining, two weeks ago to put Robinson on paid leave after the investigation was completed. Jackson said at that time the board had a path toward a final decision and would announce it at or before the April 28 board meeting.

A letter from the board's attorneys at Bricker Graydon, who oversaw the third-party investigation done by Brennan, Manna and Diamond, said they did not see a path forward for the board to retain Robison as its superintendent.

They offered three possible endings for Robinson's time in Akron: termination, resignation or a separation agreement.

Resignation was a ball fully in Robinson's court. But both options available to the board, termination and a separation agreement, came with costs.

Termination requires the accused to have a chance at a formal hearing, and the district has to cover the cost. It also leaves the accused with the ability to further appeal to the court system or file a separate lawsuit. A separation agreement releases the district from that possibility.

Jackson noted at the end of the meeting that Robinson had about \$900,000 remaining on his contract, if he finished out the five years.

***This story will be updated.***

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