

School Board

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June 10, 2019

Dear Board Members,

I want to start this letter by thanking each of you for giving me the opportunity to serve this district as its Superintendent. For the past four years, I've been able to witness the amazing work of our teachers, leaders, support staff, parents, partners and, of course, our incredible students. There is not a day that has gone by during which I have not been humbled by the sacrifice our employees and partners make to ensure student success. That is why the decision that Peggy and I have made has been extremely difficult. After 33 years of serving students, parents and fellow educators, Peggy and I have decided that at the conclusion of the final year of my current contract, I will be retiring. My final day will be June 30, 2020.

This decision comes as a result of Peggy and me evaluating the two most important priorities in our lives: faith and family. Before I am a Superintendent, I am a husband, son and brother. I am blessed to be the husband to the kindest person one could ever know. Anyone who knows Peggy or has taught with her, knows exactly what I mean. It is often said that being a Superintendent is a very challenging job. I personally have witnessed, however, that being a Superintendent's spouse is even more challenging. As a Superintendent, there are days when you know that your spouse is suffering for you, and unfortunately, there is little that can be done to ease that feeling. Despite these challenges, Peggy is incredibly supportive. She is a woman of faith and a true prayer warrior. That faith has allowed us to persevere through the most difficult times and, at the end of the day, be able to properly give credit to the One who provides the successes we celebrate. That being said, I am a husband first, and the sacrifices that Peggy has made and continues to make certainly have been weighing heavily on me for some time now.

I am also a son and brother. Thirty years ago, Peggy and I made the decision to move from Ohio to Florida to teach in Hillsborough County Public Schools. What a blessing that has been. The relationships we have formed through the years have meant so much to us. Hillsborough County Public Schools has been our family. However, 30 years of being separated from my parents, our sisters, nieces and nephews has been challenging for Peggy and me. Some events that have occurred over the past several weeks involving our extended family have given us cause to examine more closely our priorities of faith and family as I enter the final year of my current contract.

A question we have been asking ourselves is, "Based on our priorities of faith and family, what is God asking us to do?" The answer? Obedience. Obedience sometimes involves sacrifice...giving up something that, from our human point of view, we feel we should hold onto. In my case, in order to be the husband, son and brother I desire to be, I needed to make the decision to retire at the conclusion of the 2019-20 school year.

I realize that any decision I make has implications for the School Board, staff and the district as a whole. These implications have been weighing heavily on me throughout this decision making process. I care deeply

for the people my decision will effect. I work with an amazing staff of district and site based personnel who sacrifice daily to ensure that students' needs are our priority.

Just four short years ago, our district faced one of the worst financial crises in its history, 17 schools were rated "F" and our graduation rates were declining, resulting in wavering trust from our community stakeholders. Now, four years later, our financial picture is much stronger, the number of "F" schools has been reduced significantly and our graduation rate increase over the past four years is one of the highest in the state. In November, our community validated the fact that trust has been restored by approving a 1.3 billion dollar sales tax referendum—the first in our district's history. None of this would have been possible without the effort of the dedicated leaders, staff and community partners with whom it has been my privilege to work. Although there are still many challenges ahead of us, there is no doubt that this team will be able to overcome them. I look forward to the upcoming year as we continue to focus on literacy, early childhood, graduation rates, workforce preparation and ensuring each student has the supports needed to level their playing field.

I also am fortunate to work for a Board that has clear priorities around what's best for our students and employees. Thank you for providing the support needed as we continue to work to overcome the financial challenges that existed when I became Superintendent in 2015. I appreciate that, with your support, we have been able to create the conditions to address key academic issues through the district's strategic plan. As a Board, you can be proud of the work of our teachers, leaders and support staff as we celebrate student successes everyday. You can also be proud of those same teachers, leaders and support staff for addressing head-on the very challenging issues of literacy, equity and mental health. As a district, we have called out these issues, among others, to address as a system and a community.

Out of respect to the Board and this district, I am notifying you of my decision to retire at the conclusion of my current contract now, to allow the Board to create the proper timeline to ensure a smooth transition to the next Superintendent. A smooth transition is important for every stakeholder in order to maintain momentum and culture. I will do all I can to assist with this process. For a district and a community that means so much to Peggy and me, it will be important to us to make sure the next leader feels supported and embraced.

Thank you again for your support and leadership. I look forward to continuing to serve this district to ensure a successful 2019-20 school year.

With Much Respect,



Jeff Eakins
Superintendent