

Atlantic County superintendent to decide leadership on Hammonton BOE

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HAMMONTON — The school board here will have to wait until at least next week to find out who its leaders will be due to a tied vote during its first meeting of the new year.

The Hammonton Board of Education held its reorganization meeting Jan. 2, swearing in new and returning members, but the vote was split when it came to electing a president and vice president. Per state law, the executive county superintendent must appoint board officers if the board fails to do so.

Nominees were current board President Sam Mento III or former board Vice President John Lyons for president, and current board Vice President Thomas Attanasi or Barbara Berenato for vice president.

Mento said the nominees must submit resumes by Friday to district Superintendent Robin Chieco, who will forward them to Atlantic County Executive Superintendent Robert Bumpus for consideration. They expect a decision before the next board meeting Jan. 17.

“It’s really unfortunate that it has come to this, but now it is in the hands of the county executive superintendent of schools,” Mento said Wednesday. “I will respect the process and his decision.”

Splitting the decision was Waterford Township representative Al Pangia, who voted for Mento and Attanasi. After the meeting, Lyons said he was upset that a board member from a sending district could disrupt the will of the home district.

“The support I have received from my fellow board members and the community has been wonderful. I respect the process that we have to follow and am eagerly awaiting the decision from the county. It’s unfortunate it has to come to this, however with a 10-voting-member board it’s unavoidable,” Lyons said. “For the past 16 years, I’ve worked for our students, staff and parents. I am eager to resolve this issue and remain focused on their needs.”

The 11-member board includes two members from Hammonton’s sending districts of Folsom and Waterford Township. The ability for the Waterford board member to vote is fairly new, thanks to a law enacted by the state Legislature and signed by the governor in 2017 that allows eligible members from sending districts to cast votes on board leadership, among other items.

Board Solicitor Will Donio said he has not seen tied votes before for the leadership of the board mostly because boards usually consist of odd numbers of members. Donio said the reason that Waterford can vote is because it comprises more than 10 percent of the district. Folsom, he said, does not.

In other school board news, Egg Harbor Township is again looking to fill a vacant seat on its Board of Education after a member-elect declined the position.

Yolanda Cooper beat out Michael Price by three votes to win the two-year term on the board vacated over the summer by Michelle CarneyRay-Yoder. Former Margate principal CarneyRay-Yoder resigned after taking a superintendent position in Somers Point.

Cooper said that because she is in school and had to take custody of her great grandson, she felt she wouldn't have the time to dedicate to the board.

"I'm a woman of God, so family comes first," Cooper said when reached by phone Wednesday.

Cooper said that when time allows, she plans to run again for the school board.

"I'm grateful that the people put their trust in to vote for me," she said.

Cooper's challenger Price, who lives in the West Atlantic City section of the township, said he has submitted his resume for the vacant seat. Election Day results showed Price with the lead, but after all mail-in ballots were certified, Cooper inched ahead.

Another board candidate, Stephen Napoli, who sought a three-year term in November, announced on the township's community Facebook group that he had also submitted his resume for consideration.

Board Secretary Chandra Anaya did not respond to a request for more information on how many candidates have submitted resumes.

According to a notice of vacancy, all resumes must be submitted by 4 p.m. Friday to the board secretary and interviews will be conducted Tuesday. The winning candidate will serve through Dec. 31.