

Pleasantville superintendent resigns, assistant superintendent retires

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PLEASANTVILLE — The district's top two administrators are leaving.

Pleasantville Board of Education on Tuesday unanimously approved the resignation of Superintendent Clarence Alston on June 28 and retirement of Assistant Superintendent Garnell Bailey on Sept. 30. Board member Hassan Callaway was absent.

The resolutions were not on the published board agenda, but were announced after the public comment portion of Tuesday's monthly school board meeting. Alston's retirement was met with a gasp from the crowd, which then erupted in applause as Bailey's retirement was read aloud.

The resignations come one week after the state Department of Education sent a second state monitor, J. Michael Rush, to oversee the district. In a May 15 memo advising the superintendent of the new monitor, Commissioner of Education Lamont Repollet pointed to the school board's failure to approve a reduction in force that would balance its budget for the second year in a row.

School Business Administrator Elisha Thompkins did not immediately have available copies of the letters of resignation from Bailey and Alston.

Board President Carla Thomas declined to comment on the resignations and referred to board attorney James Carroll, who said that the board is ready to show the state that it can work together.

Bailey has been out of the district since January, after being suspended by Alston according to a lawsuit pending against him. She served as interim superintendent prior to her current role and turned down an offer in 2016 to run the district citing a "lack of respect" by the board.

Alston, a former superintendent in the district who was hired back in July 2017 after coming out of retirement, has been out of the district on leave for over a week. Alston's employment was initially blocked by the current state monitor, Constance Bauer, but overturned by a court that ruled Bauer overstepped her bounds. Alston was hired and then sued the district and won \$215,000 in back pay.

Thompkins said that Alston will be back in the district over the next three weeks and that an interim must be appointed by July 1. He declined to say who the interim may be.

Meanwhile, the board was finally able to approve the reduction of several positions that will balance its budget for the 2019-20 school year. The board had approved a budget in early May, but failed over three meetings to approve the necessary cuts.

During Tuesday's meeting, Carroll said that approving the reduction in force that night was critical to maintain local control.

“The state has made it very clear that if the board fails to vote on it tonight it is likely to be a state takeover,” Carroll said. “ If it doesn’t get approved, a lot more people are going to lose their jobs.”

Carroll addressed concerns by South Main Street School Principal Felicia Hyman-Medly over the reduction and subsequent reassignments that it would result in lawsuits by tenured employees who are bumped from their positions by non-tenured employees.

Hyman-Medly is one of the administrators being mover from her position due to the reduction. She has asked the school board to keep her at South Main Street instead of transferring her to the Middle School to serve as principal.

“There are ways to address it, there are grievance procedures, but it cannot be addressed tonight. We have no option on this,” Carroll said.

After an executive session, the board did approve the reduction in force of two principals on special assignment, two deans of students, director of curriculum and instruction, coordinator of guidance, an elementary school vice principal, a preschool teacher, two preschool relief teachers and three long-term substitutes. They also approved several staff reassignments and the creation of an athletic director position of which Stephen Townsend, the district’s current principal on special assignment of athletics, will fill.

After the meeting, Thomas said she was relieved that the board was able to approve the reduction in force.

“I’m glad that is over with and we can move forward with the district,” she said.