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Benton Harbor Area Schools Announces Collaboration with Michigan Department of Education to Improve Academic Achievement

Dr. Robert Herrera signs on as Superintendent and CEO

BENTON HARBOR, Mich. (June 28, 2018) – The Board of Education of Benton Harbor Area Schools (BHAS) signed a landmark collaborative agreement today with the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to provide leadership and financial stability to the district, according to School Board President Marletta Seats.

“The School Board has the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the students of Benton Harbor are properly educated, and this was a decision we simply had to make for their best interest,” said Seats. “Rather than shy away from the academic and financial realities we face, this Board is focused on doing the right thing for the children. This agreement, without question, is the right thing to do for our children today, tomorrow and into the future.”

BHAS, which is performing in the bottom five percent (5%) of public schools in Michigan, hired former South Haven Superintendent Dr. Robert Herrera today as superintendent and chief executive officer (CEO). Dr. Herrera is responsible for setting goals and developing and implementing plans that will bring about necessary improvements in students’ academic success. He is also responsible for ensuring the financial stability of the district. Under the new agreement, school board members will take the role as advisors to the CEO, said Seats.

“Serving the Benton Harbor Area Schools will be professionally and personally one of the greatest opportunities in my education career,” said Herrera. “In the first 90 days, we will listen to district parents, teachers and community partners to create a shared vision for what the environment in our schools will look like and what the learning experiences for our children will be. We are committed to making holistic improvements that will benefit all of our students, not just reaching the academic outcomes we need to achieve.”

Seats said that the School Board is grateful for Dr. Traci Teasley, the MDE-assigned Partnership District Liaison, who encouraged them to collaborate with MDE and to consider a new possibility for our students.

Michigan’s interim State Superintendent Sheila Alles praised BHAS board’s decision to reach out to MDE. “The Benton Harbor School Board’s courageous decision to ask us to collaborate more closely with them and to establish an innovative CEO leadership structure shows its genuine desire to get its schools back on track as quickly as possible. We are going to do all we can to help Benton Harbor build stronger schools and academically stronger students.”

Alles said BHAS will have access to MDE's breadth of expertise, experience and resources as it carries out its 5-year plan to improve students' academic performances, stem declining enrollment and train highly effective teachers.

In addition to signing the new collaborative agreement with the MDE and hiring Dr. Herrera, Seats said the BHAS board amended its 2014 Consent Agreement with the State Treasury to address a financial emergency. She said the BHAS board also terminated its 2017 Partnership Agreement with the MDE, which set three-year goals to improve the academic performance of the district's lowest-achieving schools.

"The new collaborative agreement with MDE and the amended agreement with the Treasury give Benton Harbor Area Schools a fresh start for setting and achieving its academic and financial goals," explained Dr. Dedrick Martin, the state school reform officer (SRO). "This is an exciting opportunity to make sure what parents, teachers and community partners want to see happen in Benton Harbor schools, happens. This district is going to roar again."

Seats said the SRO will work directly with Dr. Herrera and the district.

Seats said that the School Board appreciates Patricia Robinson for assuming the Interim Superintendent role; given Dr. Herrera's appointment, Mrs. Robinson will return to her assistant superintendent role.

For more information about the collaborative plan, visit www.RestoreTheRoar.today.