



News Release

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Benton Harbor Schools to Collaborate with MDE to Improve Academic Achievement

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LANSING – The board of education at Benton Harbor Area Schools (BHAS) signed a landmark collaborative agreement Thursday with the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to provide leadership and financial stability to the district, according to Michigan’s Interim State Superintendent Sheila Alles.

BHAS, which has been operating under a Partnership Agreement with MDE to improve its struggling schools, hired former South Haven Superintendent Dr. Robert Herrera as superintendent and was appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Herrera is responsible for setting goals and developing and implementing plans that will bring about necessary improvements in students’ academic success and financial solubility to the district. Under the new agreement, local school board members will take the role as advisors to the CEO, said Alles.

“Over the past 15 years, many factors and circumstances have contributed to Benton Harbor Area Schools struggle to help its students succeed academically,” said Alles. “The Benton Harbor school board’s decision to change to a CEO leadership structure and collaborate more closely with the MDE shows its genuine desire to get its schools back on track as quickly as possible. They are putting their children’s needs first.”

BHAS will have access to state guidance and resources as it carries out its 5-year plan to improve students’ academic performances, stem declining enrollment, and train highly-effective teachers, said Alles.

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

“The new collaborative agreement gives Benton Harbor Area Schools a fresh start for setting and achieving its academic and financial goals, so there no longer is a need for the other agreement,” said 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.”

Herrera will set academic goals during his first 90 days and complete a five-year strategic plan within his first year as he works alongside community partners, according to Alles. He will report to the Michigan Department of Education’s School Reform Officer, while Benton Harbor’s interim Superintendent Patricia Robinson will return to her assistant superintendent role.

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