

towards a student. This led the accused staff member to eventually leave the district. A few years ago, this staff member returned to the district and quickly landed an administrative position at Central Office due to their friendship and connection with admin. Subsequently, a family member of theirs also obtained a high-paying position that was created just for them at Central Office. Time and time again, we continue to lose incredible opportunities to put our District in the competitive playing field. Applicants with several years of experience are being pushed away because a “buddy” has already been promised the position. There are currently two open positions that are rumored to go to yet another staff member with connections. The past rumors have all proven to be correct. When will this nepotism end? While these positions continue to fill the pockets of the buddy system, we have teacher aides making less than \$500 (net) twice a month, and we have teachers who are getting paid the lowest area-wide. The lack of interest in making the pay competitive is discouraging. We will lose several veteran teachers next year, and those shoes will most likely be filled with Option 6 certificates. The culture of our district is at an all-time low. We are begging our school board to make a change, to ask questions, and to listen to our staff.”

contacted about the accusations made in the anonymous letters. The following response was received from current superintendent Patrick Waddell:

“I have not been privy to any communication between the Hart County Board of Education and the Hart County Superintendent Search Committee concerning the vetting of Superintendent Candidates and the upcoming plans for interviewing candidates because it is not under my jurisdiction to be involved in this process. From past experiences, I do know that the process of employing a superintendent to lead Hart County will be one of the toughest decisions the Hart County Board of Education members will have to make. I cannot verify whether the four statements you provided me were part of the submissions of the surveys collected by the superintendent search committee,” Waddell said. “I have not seen and nobody has informed me what was discussed in those meetings. I am aware that the Superintendent Search Committee as well as the Board members wanted feedback from stakeholders from the beginning of this process and wanted clear direct comments and the only way they believed they would receive this information was to stipulate that the surveys would be anonymous and confidential. I personally had a few staff members reach out to me with concerns that

somehow the District could track who responded, and I personally told those individuals that we were not tracking nor attempting to track any responses. Therefore, for this process to work out positivity and productively, I am disappointed that some negative responses have leaked. After reading the four responses provided, it is evident that these four individuals are not pleased with the direction of Hart County Schools, and I will attempt to address some of the ongoing concerns brought out in the responses which you received.”

“It appears there are individuals who are not pleased or disappointed in the individuals that have been employed at the Hart County Central Office. Although I have only been here since February 1 and will continue to be here until April 30, I can honestly say that I have been incredibly pleased with the Central Office staff, their knowledge and work ethic. All of these individuals are concerned with the direction of the District and the growth of students as well as staff,” Waddell continued. “I have witnessed them worry and be concerned about everything involved with Hart County Schools and they do feel that they are part of the Hart County family and are hurt by the accusations that have been said towards the Central Office. Personally, for years, I have been told by people throughout the county that the Central Office is overstaffed and that

there are too many individuals with high-paying jobs, which is negatively impacting the school district. Therefore, without prior knowledge about Hart County Schools, it is my belief that the Central Office is staffed accordingly to other districts of similar size. Whenever there is a change in superintendent leadership, there is always a possibility that roles and duties can be aligned differently. That is a choice made by the superintendent and his or her Board. The Hart County Central Office is a big facility and does house many district-wide programs but those programs and individuals are not specifically Central Office positions. It is also my understanding that every position that has been open in the past was filled by folks going through a rigorous interview process where more than one person was involved before a recommendation was made to fill the position.”

“One letter specifically stated that the current Professional Development model that is being utilized by the district is out of touch and does not address everyone’s needs. I heard complaints with these concerns my very first week. It did not take me long to understand that this current professional development was a

grant that the district was awarded and has been provided to our schools and staff for the past three years.” Waddell added. “When this grant was initially approved, the District was required to have principal and SBDM Council approval from each school in order to move forward. I am sure some of this professional development could have been better, but when utilizing outside agencies that provide the professional development, it is difficult to fully pinpoint everyone’s needs. I do know that this professional development was specifically aligned to combat the in-person instruction which was lost by our students during the COVID shutdown and virtual instruction.”

“Hart County has always had some groups of individuals wanting a district reconfiguration, which would lead to a middle school in Hart County. A state-mandated committee consisting of school staff, community members and community leaders looks at surveys along with local, state and national trend data to make a decision on the direction of Hart County Schools,” Waddell said. “This committee is the Local Planning Committee which develops the District Facility Plan every four years as mandated by the State. This committee met

during the 2022-2023 school year, and its plan was approved in May 2023, which guides how the District should utilize the bonding potential available. The next Local Planning Committee is set to be formed and meet again during the 2026-2027 school year.”

"While here, I have attempted to model what I feel are best practices on community and staff involvement," Waddell continued. "I have had regular administrator meetings with district administrators, regular meetings with central office administrative staff, many meetings with individual classified and certified staff as well as a meeting with our HCEA officers and school liaisons. I have taken input and feedback and have provided that information appropriately."

"Lastly, I have heard comments about competitive pay across the district in the few weeks which I have been here. As interim superintendent, I will be the one who makes a recommendation to the Board at the April Board meeting for any pay adjustments for the 2025-26 school year," Waddell explained. "I have spent many hours reviewing the budget to determine a total dollar amount that

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