

Search begins for new superintendent

Written by SARAH McCRAW
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Pechura's decision to retire in June prompts hiring of firm to find potential successors

After 10 years as superintendent, Jeff Pechura said he is ready to graduate to a new place in his life by retiring from the Grafton School District at the end of the school year.

"It's one of those decisions that was the exact right thing to do," said Pechura, who noted he had been thinking about stepping down from the position "for a while."

A crowd applauded Pechura, 57, after the Grafton School Board "regretfully approved" his retirement during a meeting Monday.

"The Grafton School District is a wonderful place to work and place to be," Pechura said at the meeting. "It is really in amazing shape to continue to build and bring things to the next level. I think that's what the next superintendent will do."

Board members agreed to expedite the search for Pechura's successor.

"We're getting off to a little bit of a slow start, but we're doing OK. We want to find a new superintendent as soon as possible," Board President Terry Ziegler said.

"It's always hard to replace a key person. When they leave, it creates a big void in the administration. We're hoping the next person steps in and is able to do the job as well as Jeff has."

The board unanimously agreed to hire BWP & Associates to lead the search for a new superintendent.

Grafton's need to fill the position comes at a time when two other area school districts — Cedarburg and Nicolet — are also searching for new superintendents.

"We'll be competing for the top people, so it's unfortunate timing," Ziegler said. "But we have a great school district, so I think people looking for a superintendent position will be impressed with what we have. I think we'll be able to attract people to come here."

Pechura, whose annual salary as superintendent is \$158,749, has worked in education for more than 35 years.

He came to the Grafton School District in 2003 after serving as the principal of Jefferson Elementary School in Wauwatosa.

There were several factors in his decision to retire, Pechura said, including the level of stress with the job, family and health issues.

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The deadly Dec. 14 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., — where 20 students and six educators were killed — also influenced his decision, he said.

“I think what happened in Connecticut was really the last thing I thought about. It really made me say, ‘Man, you really better enjoy life and make it what you can,’” Pechura said.

After a decade as superintendent, Pechura said the contribution he is most proud of is spreading the word about the district’s accomplishments.

“I honestly think I’ve helped put Grafton on the map, bringing up the level of expectations and our student performance and raising that bar. ACT scores have gone up or stayed at the same level each year,” Pechura said.

Ziegler said Pechura’s emphasis on having open meetings with the community and staff — to share ideas and updates about the work being done in classrooms — has helped strengthen the district.

“He really threw the doors wide open on how to communicate across hallways and buildings in the school district,” Ziegler said.

Pechura said he has several projects to work on before stepping down.

“I’m working on strategic compensation plan for the school district, and we’re seeing what we can do to boost safety and security at all of our buildings,” he said.

Pechura noted that the district has asked Plunkett-Raysich Architects to include designs for buzzer-lock entrances in building upgrades.

The board plans to meet with BWP & Associates in the near future to discuss what they’d like to see in a new superintendent, Ziegler said.

Pechura said he has received offers to work with other school districts to help develop education leaders.

“I also want to do some volunteering with childhood-cancer programs, whether that be St. Jude’s, the MACC Fund or the Ronald McDonald House,” he said.

Despite all the factors that contributed to his retirement decision, Pechura said it came down to one question.

“I had to ask myself, ‘Is there anything else I really can offer to the school district or give?’ and my answer was no,” he said.

“I’m feeling good about the decision I’ve made.”

Pechura’s last day with the district will be June 30.

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