



FANNIN COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

SUPERINTENDENT
Dr. Michael Gwatney

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2290 East First Street | Blue Ridge, Georgia 30513 | www.fannin.k12.ga.us | Office: 706-632-3771 | Fax: 706-632-7583

August 18, 2020

Dear FCSS Community:

As you may know, FCHS Principal Erik Cioffi submitted a resignation last month. As Mr. Cioffi has stated publicly, he accepted a district-level leadership position with a school system in Massachusetts. I wish him the best as he returns home to New England and begins a new career opportunity there.

Mr. Cioffi's resignation, which was approved by the Board of Education on July 23, is effective later this month. Due to the timing of this, the search for the next FCHS Principal began immediately upon receipt of the resignation with the anticipated vacancy notice I sent on July 17 (attached). In addition to emailing the district, the opening was posted on our website, on Teach Georgia, and on Frontline Education. While the two-week application window was open, Assistant Superintendent Sarah Rigdon met with the FCHS School Governance Team (SGT) during a special called meeting on July 29. Per our school district's Charter, which outlines how a school is involved in finding a new principal, she asked the SGT to describe their desired characteristics of the next FCHS Principal.

Once the application window closed on July 31, each submission was reviewed. In addition to the qualifications set by the district, my leadership team and I used the guidance that Mrs. Rigdon received from the SGT to rank the submissions. From the beginning of this process, there was concern, as there were only 17 applications received by the deadline, and many of the applicants did not meet the criteria suggested by the FCHS SGT. In addition, two applicants dropped out, which left only 15 to consider from those who met the July 31 deadline.

Determined to stay true to the principal selection process established in our Charter, I assembled a panel of district leaders (Assistant Superintendents Robert Ensley and Darren Danner, as well as Sarah Rigdon to represent the FCHS SGT) to join me and conduct interviews with the top applicants who met the deadline and as much of the criteria established by both the FCSS and the FCHS SGT as possible. The goal, as with every other principal application process completed in the FCSS since 2016, has been to send a slate of three viable candidates for the SGT to choose a finalist for me to then recommend to our Board of Education.

Though I had been hopeful that the panel and I would be able to identify three viable, eligible, and highly-qualified candidates to move to the second round of interviews with the FCHS SGT, we made the difficult realization that this is simply not possible at this time. Some applicants did not meet the baseline parameters of the FCSS and/or the FCHS SGT. Some applicants are also currently under contract with another school district, and it is not guaranteed that they could be released at this time. The timing of this opening, combined with the effects of a COVID-19 pandemic, make this anything but an ideal time to find a permanent replacement for Mr. Cioffi. As a result, I am pausing this process until later this school year.

Though the selection process will not move forward now, the district is committed to fulfilling the spirit and intent of the principal selection process outlined in our Charter. To do this with fidelity, the FCSS will re-open the application window and continue to accept submissions until it is determined that a more appropriate number are received. It is my understanding that over 90 applications were received when Mr. Cioffi applied; I am optimistic that revisiting this process next semester, during a more traditional timeframe to find a principal candidate, will yield better results.

In the meantime, I have assigned Mrs. Debby Decubellis to serve as the Interim Principal of Fannin County High School; she will be on campus beginning tomorrow and officially start next week. Mrs. Decubellis is a career educator with more than 23 years of leadership experience at the elementary, middle, high school, and district levels. As the Assistant Principal of West Fannin Elementary, Mrs. Decubellis proved herself as the embodiment of a servant leader: She is committed to the success of everyone around her. Her enthusiasm and positive nature are inspiring and will serve her and FCHS well as she focuses on building relationships among the students, faculty, staff, and the community in preparation for the next principal. I hope you will extend Mrs. Decubellis a warm welcome as she begins at FCHS.

With the assignment of Mrs. Decubellis to FCHS, her position at WFES was left vacant. During a called meeting of the Fannin County Board of Education this afternoon, I recommended Mrs. Milly Rice as an interim administrator to fill that vacancy. The Board has approved Mrs. Rice, and she will begin immediately as the Interim Assistant Principal of West Fannin Elementary. Mrs. Rice has more than 25 years of experience as an educator, and she has proudly served the WFES community for approximately 20 years. Mrs. Rice's determination, competence, and willingness to serve will make her an excellent fit for the leadership team at WFES with Principal Alison Danner.

My search for the permanent leader at FCHS remains in progress. Qualified individuals who are interested may respond to the updated announcement (attached). In the meantime, I am comforted by the fact that FCHS will be led by an experienced and previously highly successful high school principal, and WFES Principal Alison Danner will be joined by a natural leader who is one of their own.

I appreciate your reading this information and becoming familiar with these changes. Though we continue to face uncertainty and challenging times in the world today, we are blessed to live in a community that values people and believes that the best of times are always in front of us. Working together, we will make these transitions successful as we continue to put our students and their needs first. Always remember that no matter your role, you are a part of the FCSS, and we are in this together.

Sincerely,



Michael Gwatney, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Attachments: 1) July 17 message;
 2) Original anticipated vacancy announcement; and
 3) Updated vacancy announcement.

Michael Gwatney

From: Michael Gwatney
Sent: Friday, July 17, 2020 3:15 PM
To: Entire School System - Admin Use Only
Subject: FYI - Anticipated Vacancy Announcement (Leadership)
Attachments: ANTICIPATED JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT - High School Principal (July 2020)....pdf

Dear Faculty and Staff:

Please refer to the attached document. Qualified individuals who are interested should respond by **4:00 p.m. on Friday, July 31.**

Sincerely,
Michael Gwatney

Michael Gwatney, Ed.D.
Superintendent

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ANTICIPATED VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The Fannin County Board of Education is currently accepting applications from qualified applicants for the following anticipated job opening.

Position:

Principal (High School/Grades 9-12)

Qualifications:

Applicants must hold a current certificate from the Georgia PSC with a renewable leadership field. The principalship is not a first-line (i.e., "entry level") leadership position; therefore, a preferred applicant's portfolio will highlight prior successful teaching- and leadership-related experiences, demonstrate effective communication skills, and prove one's ability to lead. In addition, preference may be given to those applicants with level six (or higher) PSC leadership certification and/or a history of successful personnel leadership, including past experiences evaluating other professionals. Fingerprinting and passing a background check are a mandatory part of the employment process.

Application Procedures:

Interested individuals who qualify should apply online at <https://www.applitrack.com/fannink12/onlineapp>. Please complete the online application process and upload a career portfolio that contains a cover letter and a résumé. Applications that are both complete and received by the deadline will be reviewed and ranked based on a comparison with the qualifications. Only the highest-ranking applicants will be contacted for an interview.

Deadline for Application:

Interested individuals who qualify should ensure that a completed application is entered online (in Frontline) no later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday, July 31. This position will be filled as soon as possible.

The Fannin County Board of Education is an equal opportunity employer. It is the policy of the Fannin County Board of Education not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex (as required by Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments), handicap (as required by the 1973 Rehabilitation Act), religion, creed, national origin, age or disability in its employment policy. Fingerprinting and a criminal background check are required for all employees.

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VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The Fannin County Board of Education is currently accepting applications from qualified applicants for the following anticipated job opening. This information was updated on August 18, 2020.

Position:

Principal (High School/Grades 9-12)

Qualifications:

Applicants must hold a current certificate from the Georgia PSC with a renewable leadership field. The principalship is not a first-line (i.e., "entry level") leadership position; therefore, a preferred applicant's portfolio will highlight prior successful teaching- and leadership-related experiences, demonstrate effective communication skills, and prove one's ability to lead. In addition, preference may be given to those applicants with level six (or higher) PSC leadership certification and/or a history of successful personnel leadership, including past experiences evaluating other professionals. Fingerprinting and passing a background check are a mandatory part of the employment process.

Application Procedures:

Interested individuals who qualify should apply online at <https://www.applitrack.com/fannink12/onlineapp>. Please complete the online application process and upload a career portfolio that contains a cover letter and a résumé. Applications will be reviewed and ranked based on a comparison with the qualifications. Only the highest-ranking applicants will be contacted for an interview.

Deadline for Application:

This position is currently filled by an interim principal; however, it remains open. Interested individuals who qualify should ensure that a completed application is entered online (in Frontline). Applications will be reviewed, and this position will be filled permanently by the end of the 2020-2021 school year.

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