

Superintendent finalist speaks

Subheadline: Hayes focuses on experience, individualized student success

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Content

The last finalist for superintendent of Lancaster County School District, Dr. Matthew G. Hayes, spoke to community members at USC Lancaster on Wednesday, Sept. 20, ending the five public sessions.

Now that the interview process is over, the decision lies in the hands of the seven school board members to choose the district's next leader, maybe as early as next week.

Background

Hayes is an educational consultant in Charlotte, according to LCSD public information specialist Michelle Craig. He retired as deputy superintendent of Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, where he directly supervised principals as the learning community superintendent.

Craig said he also served as principal of North Mecklenburg High School and the School of International Studies and Global Economics at Olympic for CMS. He was assistant principal at Quail Hollow Middle and taught math and science at Carmel Middle School. Hayes also coached football, baseball and golf.

He has a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a post baccalaureate degree in elementary education. He also has a master's of school administration from UNC Charlotte, an educational specialist degree and a doctorate in educational leadership from Wingate University.

Wednesday's session

Hayes focused on his career and personal experience, while sharing metrics on rising graduation rates and resources for individualizing student success.

Hayes was the fourth principal in three months at North Mecklenburg High School, which had about 2,000 students. In his time there, the graduation rate rose from 70% to 92% in three years.

“We did that by making sure the students had an individual pathway, and we had personal interest in those students,” Hayes said. “Not just when they were leaving us as juniors or seniors, but when they came in as freshmen.”

Hayes then served as deputy superintendent of Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, where he oversaw 180 schools, 143,000 students and an annual budget of \$1.6 billion.

“During that time, what we noticed was, sometimes in education, we start focusing on students too late,” Hayes said. “We had to work together to do what’s best, not just for the students, but also for our entire community.”

Hayes said he saw engaging learning taking place at the schools he visited Wednesday, and applauded the individualized attention he saw students getting.

“We have to create an inviting classroom for students, where they can be engaged with teachers that are activators of learning,” he said. “What I saw today was some of that activation of learning, and I saw it across all the schools. I saw people passionate about the job that they’re asked to do.”

Hayes also said he’s been watching the local district for the last few years, through multiple boards, even mentioning the fiscal watch and bond referendum proposal.

Before he applied, Hayes said he talked to district teachers, principals, local public officials and the local college. He wanted to “know what their relationship was and what was the focus of this district for students.”

“What I’ve heard from all of those individuals was support in creating a community that meets the individual needs of kids,” he said.

Q&A session

Hayes answered questions from two people on district hiring policies, safety in schools, African American studies courses, student feedback on course material, meeting with individual students and visiting local communities as superintendent.

“Our district has had a history where jobs are given to friends and family,” one said, and asked how Hayes would control that and hire qualified candidates.

Hayes said he “does not focus on the negativity,” but “on the great things that are happening right now,” and “what is the ideal school district that we want for our students.”

In regards to the other questions, Hayes referenced the suspension alternative program he implemented in CMS, which aims to get students back on track to graduate, instead of sending them home. Hayes said he would create behavioral contracts with students, parents, guidance counselors and teachers.

Hayes also said he would love to see three superintendent advisory boards in the district — for teachers, students and principals. Hayes said he has operated all three, comprised of elected individuals, chosen by their peers, to troubleshoot and celebrate successes.

Hayes graduated from West Charlotte High School — the most diverse high school on the East Coast. Hayes said he saw the importance of local community visits and would continue that as superintendent.

“I went and visited with students, and I went and sat with parents (in Charlotte), because at the end of the day, I’m an educator,” Hayes said. “Doesn’t matter what ZIP code you come from, doesn’t matter what your family believes or who you are. I focus on you as an individual, and I’ll be there.”

Regarding safety, Hayes referenced the recent UNC campus shooting, where his daughter is a freshman. Hayes said he trusted she was safe, because UNC had the policies and procedures in place to best ensure a safe environment, and those policies and procedures had been practiced to become second nature.

Child images

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