

DougCo board members argue about how to replace superintendent NewsBreak Original | 2/17/22



By Mike McKibbin/NewsBreak Denver

[DOUGLAS COUNTY, CO.] — The Douglas County School District will advertise for applicants to fill its recently vacated superintendent's position for nine days, the school board decided during a marathon 7-hour online meeting Wednesday night.

A four-member conservative majority elected in 2021 dismissed former Superintendent Corey Wise on Feb.4. That decision drew strong opposition and a lawsuit claiming the majority violated the Colorado Open Records Act when two members met privately with Wise and urged him to resign or be fired.

More than 2,800 viewers watched at least some of Wednesday night's meeting.

A lengthy public comment period included teachers, parents, district staff and students supporting and opposing the board's action to dismiss Wise. Some criticized the short timeline proposed to hire Wise's successor, and a few claimed the majority already planned to hire former interim superintendent, Erin Kane.

Kane is currently executive director of schools for American Academy, a charter institution with campuses in Castle Pines and Parker. She served as interim superintendent in 2018.

After much discussion, Peterson admitted he had contacted Kane before Wise's dismissal to see if she was interested in filling the role on an interim basis.

"I think she would be a good candidate," he said, "given that she came into the situation before."

Peterson added he would expect to see many good candidates apply.

Other board members were critical of Peterson's actions. Elizabeth Hanson said if the four majority members had decided Kane was their choice, a search process would be a "charade" and increase community division.

"I'm not about to put our people through a ringer like that," Peterson responded.

The three other majority board members — Christy Williams, Kaylee Wineger and Becky Myers — all said they did not consider Kane the intended candidate.

Board member Susan Meek called Peterson's action to reach out to Kane unethical, which prompted Peterson to tell members they should refrain from such criticism during meetings.

Description includes salary range

The job description listed an anticipated annual salary range from \$220,000 to \$270,000 with a maximum range of \$220,000 to \$330,000. Amanda Thompson in the district's human resources department said those ranges exist in the district and are comparable to surrounding areas.

According to the description, the district would seek a leader who is an effective communicator, excels in building relationships with varied interests, and "understands the culture, the current climate and the board's ends, mission and vision."

Other required qualifications include experience as either an educator or working closely with educators as a school leader, a master's degree in a related field, and "will ensure that equity and inclusion are provided to all students, teachers, faculty members, staff and administrators."

Several members of the public and other board members felt Peterson's timeline to choose a new superintendent is too rushed.

Peterson agreed to post the job description externally or beyond the county. He initially proposed posting the job only within the district.

The board will consider the rest of the timeline at its Feb. 22 meeting.

CORA request denied

At the start of the meeting, the board entered executive session for about an hour, then emerged to announce it would not release the names of district teachers who participated in a sick-out to protest Wise's dismissal. The board did not identify the person who requested the names through the Colorado Open Records Act. That person reportedly withdrew the request.

Peterson also told board members about reported instances of teachers finding "very upsetting" flyers on their vehicles. District security officials are investigating the reports.