



## **PRESS RELEASE**

The suggestion at an April 3<sup>rd</sup> press conference that some Trenton constituents would not support the Board's selection of Dr. Fred McDowell as its educational leader goes against the vast outpouring of support Dr. McDowell at his introduction to the community on March 17, 2017 said Board President Gene Bouie. During the public forum on March 24<sup>th</sup> Dr. McDowell received accolades for his uncompromising view that all students can learn at high levels, given a supportive learning atmosphere that welcomes exploration with a rigorous and engaging curriculum. Dr. McDowell's five year contract was also quickly approved the Commissioner of Education and he was unanimously approved by the Board at its March 27, 2017 meeting. The incoming Superintendent was also publically endorsed by the District's Teacher and Supervisor Employee Associations and viewed with optimism by stakeholders such as SPAG and the Trenton Literacy Movement.

In response to criticism of the search process, Mr. Bouie notes that community members were given ample opportunity for input at each stage of the search process. The Board directed its search consultant Ray and Associates to hold more than a dozen outreach forums to learn what Trenton parents, teachers and other community members want most in the new superintendent," Dr. D.A. Graham, the Board search chair pointed out that "throughout this process, the Board kept those ideal standards in mind so that we can build on the specific successes of the past few years and continue to address the many issues that have plagued public education." Community members also completed online surveys detailing the characteristics wanted to see in the District's education leader. The community and Board criteria then defined the candidates the search firm would move forward. The search firm received nearly 60 applications for the post, each of which was screened to ensure the candidates met the community criteria.

In early February as the Board selected five semifinalists from about 10 candidates moved forward as meeting the community criteria. The Board interviewed the semifinalists and identified the finalists it wanted moved to a community forum. After one finalist voluntarily withdrew, the March 24<sup>th</sup> community forum allowed the public to present questions that the lone remaining Superintendent candidate would be asked to respond to. In fact, the Trenton NAACP President Jonette Smart specifically asked a series of questions that Dr. McDowell responded to at the forum. Mr. Billie Hayes, who was also critical of the search process, was also in attendance at the community forum and had every opportunity to present questions to Dr. McDowell.

In response to budget concerns raised at the press conference, it should be noted that in September 2016, Ms. Joyce Kersey approached the District and sought to serve as chairperson of a Citizen Budget Oversight Committee to compliment the Board's finance committee and provide transparency for residents. After considering the request, Board President declined to implement Ms. Kersey's proposal after explaining that the current Board could fulfill its budget oversight role and provide the needed transparency. Mr. Bouie noted that the Trenton School District has received a certificate of excellence award for five consecutive years and the current Board members possessed the financial and business acumen to plan for the District's budget needs and effectively communicate those plans. It should be noted that the Board's Budget Hearing was held on March 24th and community members were allowed to question the School Business Administrator and Superintendent about the 2017-18 budget. Ms. Kersey chose not to raise any concerns about the proposed budget in that forum.

Mr. Bouie also questions the accuracy of the reporting of April 3, 2017 press conference for several reasons. Initially, the Board President received no calls or requests for comments from the Trentonian and he further understands that the NAACP has asked the Trentonian for a retraction of the article's misleading headline. Mr. Bouie has become increasingly concerned about the media failure to report achievements by Trenton students. "The focus always seems to be on misleading and negative headlines coupled with a refusal to highlight the qualifications of District staff members who work each day to positively impact students." The Board of Education would like to highlight and reiterate that the District continues to improve and promote higher education with successful programs, such as the new robotic programs and amazing literacy programs in several elementary schools. In fact, the Luis Munoz Rivera Community Middle School is one of the many examples of how the District continues to achieve a safe and successful learning environment for the Trenton students. The Trenton School District is embracing the Community Schools format wherein public schools function as neighborhood centers, around which local partnerships can be developed to provide programs and services to students and their families. Trenton joins a growing number of school districts implementing community schools as a way to improve student and family success. Board President Bouie also notes that the District has a \$155,000,000 new high school under construction.

Mr. Bouie takes pride in the inclusive and well-informed process which led to the appointment of Dr. McDowell. The incoming Superintendent has excellent references from former employers and colleagues as someone who works well with community groups, teachers and administrators and is regarded as a knowledgeable leader and an expert on school improvement. Mr. Bouie noted that he has already met with the Trenton NAACP to address their process concerns and he will make himself available to discuss concerns from any member of the Trenton community. The Board President believes that through effective planning, communication, collaboration and flawless execution, the District is poised to accomplish historic success.