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### **Justin Murphy**

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

The Rochester school board announced Terry Dade as the district's new superintendent Tuesday afternoon, citing his experience turning around underachieving, high-poverty schools in his current job in Virginia.

Dade, 42, is assistant superintendent in Fairfax County Public Schools in the Washington, D.C., area, and has spent his entire career in that region. He fits the profile of the leader that the Rochester school board was seeking, particularly in having led a turnaround effort for some of Fairfax County's lowest-performing schools.

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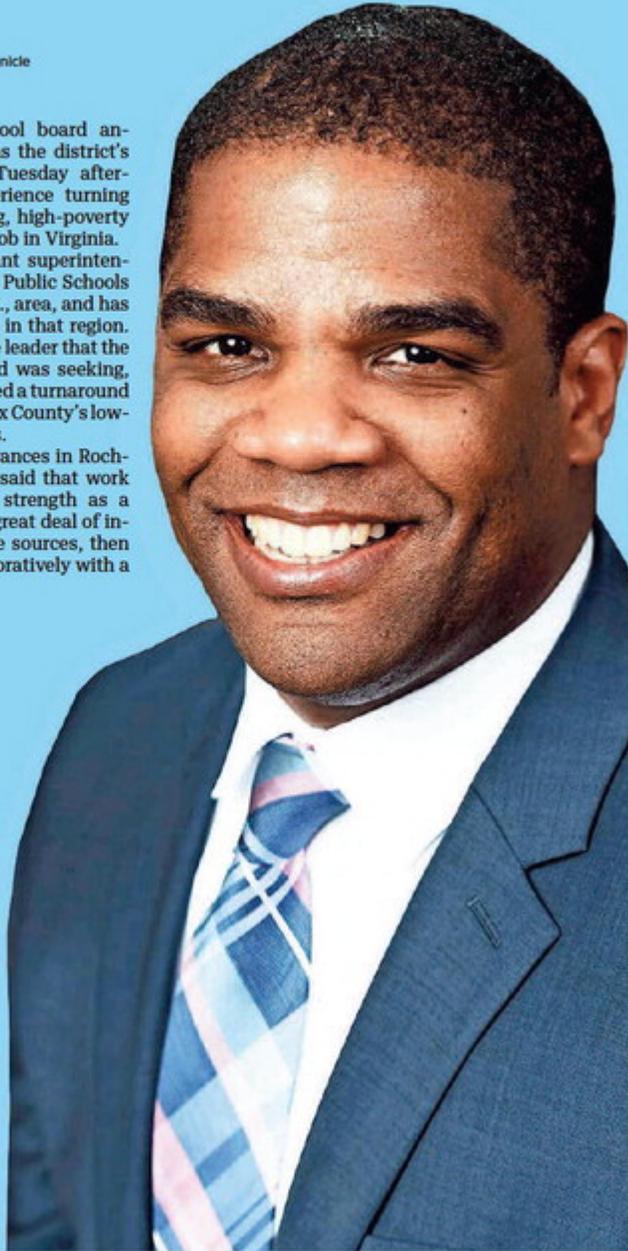
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The Brighton Central School District is asking residents to override the state property tax cap in its annual spending plan, saying state funding levels have left it no choice. 2A

Terry Dade.  
PROVIDED PHOTO



**Terry Dade.** PROVIDED PHOTO

He took 13 schools in his purview that were under state scrutiny and restored 12 of them to good standing within three years, he said. The district did not hold a press conference to introduce Dade, who begins July 1. He has not yet signed a contract. In a phone interview Tuesday afternoon, Dade said the uncertainty over the district's

future, including a critical school board election and the specter of state action, made the position more appealing, not less. “It’s really thinking about the leadership necessary to move the district forward,” he said. “If there are additional layers of support or oversight, all I can control is what we do with my leadership.”

Like the other three finalists — Devon Horton, Sito Narcisse and George Eric Thomas — Dade has never served as a superintendent.

The region of Fairfax County that Dade oversees, though, is larger than RCSD. He will replace Interim Superintendent Dan Lowengard, who in turn replaced Barbara Deane-Williams after she stepped down at the end of January. In his public appearances in Rochester earlier this month, Dade expressed support for a number of district initiatives, including restorative practices, a common district-wide curriculum, and increasing the use of data in decision-making. An important step in increasing the graduation rate, he said, is adding more support to keep students on track in ninth grade, and even before that, to ensure they’re reading at grade level in third grade. Speaking to a mostly empty room at his community forum, he said parent engagement must take place at the school level, and that school leaders must ask whether their buildings are truly welcoming to families.

School Board Vice President Cynthia Elliott said she was impressed with Dade’s professionalism in his visit here.

“He has this calming demeanor that can really, I believe, be powerful in helping to work with different groups,” she said. “While I’m hopeful, I’m also realistic; we’ll have to wait it out.”

Dade got his start as a principal in Washington, D.C., under the controversial reform leader Michelle Rhee. He learned from her to focus intently on the problem and challenge fearlessly the status quo, he said.

He also said his goal is to improve the district to draw students back from charter schools rather than deepen collaboration with them.

To do so, he said, RCSD should seek to replicate some of what they offer, including programs with a focus on the arts, STEM or leadership. Dade himself is a former charter school teacher and board member.

When asked about whether he intended to stay in Rochester beyond a single contract, he said: “The work here in Rochester is not going to be a two-year journey; it just is not. It’s going to be five to 10 years and I would be absolutely committed to seeing that through.”

Dade, who was raised by his father and grandmother in Washington, said he chose to apply to Rochester because he’s drawn to districts with diverse student bodies and challenges with poverty.

“Once you’ve found your purpose you can’t do anything else,” he said. “My purpose here is to make sure we have educational outcomes for all students regardless of zip code, background, or any implicit bias that the nation might put on our students who look like me.”