

Meet the RCSD superintendent candidates

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The Rochester school board has narrowed its search for the next superintendent down to four candidates, all of whom share a few things in common.

All are black men. All come from districts and agencies in the South. None has ever been a superintendent before, and all have been very active in the job market recently.

The four finalists will appear this weekend at a pair of district-hosted events, speaking separately to staff and the public: Sito Narcisse and Eric Thomas starting at 12:30 p.m. Saturday, and Terry Dade



Rochester superintendent candidates, clockwise from top left, are Terry Dade, Devon Horton, Eric Thomas and Sito Narcisse. PROVIDED PHOTOS

and Devon Horton starting at 12:30 p.m. Sunday. Both will be at the Freddie Thomas Learning Center, 625 Scio St.

Here is some more information about each of the four candidates.

Terry Dade Assistant superintendent, Fairfax County (Virginia) Public Schools Dade, 42, supervises a portion of the Washington, D.C., area school district, which overall educates nearly 200,000 students. Dade is responsible for a region comprising about 45 schools and 37,000 students.

He is a graduate of the district and has spent his entire career in the D.C. area, including the last four years in his present position.

The district's students are about 39% white, 26% Hispanic, 20% Asian and 10% black. About 27 percent are economically disadvantaged, 14 percent have disabilities, and 18 percent are English language learners.

Dade helped develop a process for Fairfax County to give targeted support to its lowest-performing schools, with a focus on data analysis and collaboration among educators. He now oversees the region of the district with the greatest number of struggling schools.

He described himself earlier in his career as an acolyte of Michelle Rhee, the controversial reform-oriented former chancellor of schools in Washington; she hired him for his first principal job at age 33. He has taught and

served as a board member for charter schools in Washington.

Earlier this month, Dade was passed over for superintendent of schools in Beaufort County, South Carolina; he also applied unsuccessfully last year to become superintendent in Columbus, Ohio.

Devon Horton

Chief of schools, Jefferson County (Kentucky) Public Schools

Horton, 41, is one of the top academic executives in the Louisville area school district, which has about 101,000 students.

He has been in Louisville for only one year. His primary work has been around strengthening career and technical education offerings, and improving test outcomes.

He recently earned a doctorate in education with a dissertation on the topic of school turnaround, particularly the role of effective specialists in that area.

Louisville's students are about 46% white, 37% black and 9% Hispanic; about 60% qualify for free or reduced lunch, 13% have disabilities, and 8% are English language learners.

Most of Horton's experience came in East St. Louis, a small, deeply impoverished Illinois district, and Chicago Public Schools, where he was a principal and where he attended school himself.

He was honored in 2017 by the Illinois State Board of Education for his turnaround work in East St. Louis.

He was a finalist this spring for the superintendent job in Grand Rapids, Michigan, but the board there decided instead to restart its search altogether.

Sito Narcisse

Chief of schools, Metro Nashville Public Schools

Narcisse, 43, is a top administrator in the 86,000-student Nashville school district in Tennessee, where he oversaw growth in reading scores, more students taking advanced courses and a majority of schools being removed from the state sanction list.

The students in Nashville are 42% black, 30% white and 22% Hispanic. About 71% receive free or reduced lunch, 6% have disabilities, and 8% are English language learners.

Narcisse began as a French teacher in a different Tennessee school district in

2002. Since then, he has worked in seven different districts in four different states. Last year, he was a candidate for the superintendent jobs in Duval County, Florida, and Newark, New Jersey.

He was hired in Nashville by Shawn Joseph, who was forced out of office in April over accusations of financial mismanagement and poor handling of sexual harassment claims.

Joseph was accused of cronyism for hiring Narcisse, a former colleague, and Narcisse's wife, Maritza Gonzalez, also a top-ranking administrator in Nashville.

Narcisse also was criticized after another job in Massachusetts, where the Boston Globe summarized: "Standardized test scores rose slightly under Narcisse, but so did the dropout rate, the course failure rate, and the absentee rate — while the experience level and morale of his teachers plummeted."

Eric Thomas

Chief turnaround officer, Georgia Thomas has chief responsibility for Georgia's lowest-performing schools; on his resume, he said they had increased their "annual accountability measure" by an average of 7 percentage points under his watch. Before that, he worked for a school turnaround entity at the University of Virginia; as a consultant for the Ohio Department of Education; and in a series of roles with Cincinnati Public Schools.

"The research is really clear," he said in an interview in 2017. "If you want to move a school, it's high-quality teachers and an effective building principal."

Earlier this year, Thomas was one of five semi-finalists for the state superintendent job in Michigan, as well as superintendent of the Canton City School District in Ohio.

In 2017, he was a finalist for the job in Lorain, Ohio.

RCSD by the numbers

For purposes of comparison, the students in the Rochester City School District are 57% black, 29% Hispanic, 10% white and 4% Asian. About 91% are economically disadvantaged, 21% are students with disabilities, and 15% are English language learners.

State Board of Education