

**Meet Rochester's new superintendent****District****Deane-Williams unanimously approved by city's school board****JUSTIN MURPHY @CITIZENMURPHY**

The Rochester City school board unanimously appointed former Greece superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams as the next superintendent of schools on Monday, making her the first permanent female leader in the district's history. Deane-Williams, 59, retired in Greece in May 2015, then quickly signed on as senior deputy superintendent for operations in Boston Public Schools. Before that, she spent several decades as a counselor and administrator in a number of local suburban school districts.

She was first approached about the Rochester job about three weeks ago, she said — after the board's negotiations with Ithaca Superintendent Luvelle Brown fell through.

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Get to know Barbara Deane-Williams

**Age:** 59

**Family:** Married with five grown children **Education:** Graduate of Honeoye Falls-Lima Senior High School; bachelor's degree, Hobart and William Smith Colleges; master's degrees, University of New Hampshire and The College at Brockport; doctoral work, Syracuse University.

**Career:** Special education counselor, Amesbury Public Schools, Amesbury, Massachusetts; middle school counselor, Hilton Central School District; assistant junior high school principal, Wayne Central School District; assistant high school and assistant middle school principal, Gates Chili Central School District; director of student learning and special education, assistant superintendent for instruction, deputy superintendent for student learning and accountability, Churchville-Chili Central School District; superintendent, Lyndonville Central School District; superintendent, Greece Central School District; senior deputy superintendent of operations, Boston Public Schools, Boston, Massachusetts.



**Barbara Deane-Williams shares a laugh with the audience and School Board President Van White on Monday as she is introduced as the new superintendent of the Rochester City School District.**

JAMIE GERMANO/@JGERMANO1/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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"This presents an opportunity for me to join a system that is well on its way to building bridges and ... better schools for each and every child," she said. She signed a three-year contract with an annual salary of \$225,000, formally beginning Aug. 8. Deane-Williams and the school board talked at length Monday about improving relationships, both in the community and at central office. Tension between Bolgen Vargas' administration and the board peaked in 2015 and was a major factor in his departure. Since then, the board slashed the number of employees who answer exclusively to the superintendent, from about 30 to nine. "I think what's happened in the past is, every superintendent has thought they were the elected official, and they are not," Board Vice President Cynthia Elliott said. "We are the elected official(s). ... I think we understand our role and Barbara understands her role, and I look forward to a very harmonious relationship."

For her part, Deane-Williams said she is "very comfortable with the give-and-take required to work with the governance team." Deane-Williams said Monday that she has officially suspended her retirement with New York state, meaning she will not be collecting her \$124,985 pension while serving as superintendent in Rochester. She has six months to establish residency in the district, at which point she will receive up to \$7,500 for moving expenses.

The other two women ever to lead the district did it as placeholders: current Interim Superintendent Linda Cimusz and longtime district administrator Loretta Johnson, who served two years as acting superintendent in 1994 and 1995.

**Leader in Greece**

Besides being the first permanent female leader, Deane-Williams is the second in a row to come from Greece. Vargas had a long career as a counselor there before becoming superintendent in Rochester.

Jeff Henley worked under Deane-Williams for three years as Greece's executive director of instructional technology and strategic initiatives. He called her "one of the most intelligent people I've ever worked for," and pointed in particular to her passion for social justice.

"One of the things she is most strongly geared toward is equity and access for all kids," he said. "The core of her is social justice; that's what she's all about." Even Deane-Williams' supporters acknowledged that she can be abrasive at times; Henley said that "she works people hard."

"Those who work with her long enough see what she's really about," he said. "Even though she may not be nice about it, she's thinking about that kid who might (end up) dead or walking the streets because he didn't get a diploma." Mayor Lovely Warren issued a statement Monday afternoon on the hiring: "I have had the pleasure and honor to work with Barbara Deane-Williams and know she is an outstanding educator who is committed to the success of every child," the statement reads. "I am excited to welcome Barbara back to our community as the first permanent female chief executive of the Rochester City School District and encourage all of our citizens to do the same." Greece school board President Sean McCabe credited her with resolving long-standing disputes among the school board, administration and teachers union and said she surrounded herself with good people. "She totally changed the climate in Greece (and) she put a lot of really good things into place," he said. "She did rub people the wrong way if they weren't playing on her team. She had a goal and vision, and if you weren't working toward that goal and vision, you weren't part of her team."

Deane-Williams' most prominent accomplishment in Greece was the creation in 2012 of "Envision Greece 2017," a strategic five-year plan for the district that leaned on reform principles borrowed from the business world. She also oversaw the closing of several former school buildings.

Four years into the "Envision Greece" timeline, Greece has made significant progress in some areas but faltered in others. Early literacy figures and Regents exam results are not where the district wants them to be.

Suspensions are down significantly, but students with disabilities are suspended disproportionately in Greece, particularly black students who have disabilities.

#### **Uncertainty over?**

The hiring of Deane-Williams ends a period of uncertainty in Rochester dating to at least March 2015, when then-superintendent Vargas threatened to sue the school board as part of a power struggle. The lawsuit never proceeded, but the larger dispute festered until October, when Vargas and school board President Van White announced a brokered resignation. Vargas stepped down at the end of December but remained on the district payroll through June 30, the end of his contract, in an informal advisory position.

The board chose former Syracuse Superintendent Dan Lowengard as an interim leader, but his tenure did not last long. He had a stroke on his fourth day in office and had to step down. He was replaced by Cimusz, his longtime colleague, who most recently had been chief academic officer of Buffalo Public Schools. She focused mostly on guiding the district through the 2016-17 budget process and working on state receivership plans; her contract was extended through July when it became apparent her permanent successor would not be in place by June 30. The search for a new leader was closed to the public. The board in June settled on a different candidate, Brown, but was unable to come to terms with him on a contract.

Rochester Teachers Association President Adam Urbanski praised the final choice and said he had received good reports from unions in other districts where Deane-Williams worked. "My observation is that she's been straightforward, open-minded and collaborative, and that's what I hope she brings here," he said. "I think this probably bodes well for Rochester."

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**Barbara Deane-Williams, right, with school board Vice President Cynthia Elliott, as Deane-Williams is introduced Monday as the new schools superintendent in Rochester.**

JAMIE GERMANO@JGERMANO1/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

## District

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