



Gregory-Portland Independent School District

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G-PISD Superintendent Dr. Michelle Cavazos named as Lone Finalist for Superintendent of Arlington ISD

During a regular meeting of the Arlington Independent School District Board of Trustees tonight in Arlington, Texas, current Gregory-Portland ISD Superintendent Dr. Michelle Cavazos was declared the district's Lone Finalist for Superintendent by unanimous (7-0) vote from the board. Arlington ISD serves approximately 55,000 students and is 13th largest school district in the State of Texas. AISD Board President Melody Fowler stated during the meeting (as recorded via livestream) that Dr. Cavazos "stood out during interviews because of her outstanding leadership skills ... she is a proven champion for culture and climate and a reflective, innovative leader."

G-PISD Board President Tim Flinn said the news was difficult to hear for the school board, and will be "most difficult" for the community. "G-P struck gold when we hired Dr. Michelle Cavazos, and obviously we are not the only board and community in the state who know that to be true," said Flinn. "We've known for more than a year that she's been getting calls from head hunters frequently – she's highly sought-after as a rising star in Texas and more than that: She's been *our* rising star."

Flinn was on the board when Cavazos was hired as G-PISD Superintendent in July of 2020. He stated that in 8 years serving as a Trustee, he's seen among colleagues across the state that there is a trend with challenges finding highly qualified, innovative, and exceptional leaders to serve as Superintendents.

"Everyone knows about the nation- and state-wide teacher shortages and how it's so hard to find teachers – that's a real dilemma for all school districts. The same is true when looking for Superintendents, in fact it's a much harder role to fill and it will be extremely challenging to find the next leader for G-PISD. She's incredibly unique and visionary, and we knew it when we hired her. What she's done for G-P has set us on a course for incredible success – some that we have already seen, and so much that we still have left to accomplish. We need strong leadership to fulfill and continue the momentum. There is no doubt about that, and we've got important work to do now as a board and community to determine a path forward."

Dr. Cavazos said she was not looking for a new position when contacted to interview for the vacancy at Arlington ISD. "I absolutely love my job here in G-PISD, and all of the people – students, staff, families, and community members – who I've had the joy of knowing and serving," said Cavazos. "I also cannot fully express how much our current G-PISD Board of Trustees has done to advance our district. They know their role and understand how governance works for school districts. They are absolutely one of the hardest-working boards in the state, and they deserve full credit for providing the leadership and support that has allowed our district to flourish in the last several years.

"As a Superintendent, I understand more than most how important the 'Team of 8' (seven board members and one superintendent) is to a school district and community. The ability for this team to work collaboratively and respect one another is vital for long-term success in any organization. Wherever a strong and supportive Team of 8 exists, you're sure to find great things happening. What we've been able to do here has been incredible, and it could not have been accomplished without our seven Trustees. It is my expectation that this district and this school board continues to advance and be a leader in the state. When I was hired, they told me they wanted people to 'once again' remember who G-P is ... today, they do, and I am confident they will not forget."

Flinn mentioned the same intention of the board, saying "G-P is finally G-P once again." He then cited recent initiatives brought forward for board support by administration and credited Dr. Cavazos and her team for recent innovations including the hands-on experiences for Pre-K and Kindergarten students that will "fundamentally transform learning in the best way" at the Early Childhood Center now under construction. He said the board has seen progress in academics for reading and math have been inspiring, and reveal that the district is headed in the right direction to meet academic goals along timelines established through the next five years.

Flinn stated that the district's P-TECH program, which stands for "Pathways in Technology Early College High School," has been established and is expanding at G-P High School, and industry-based certifications earned by G-P students have more than doubled thanks to Dr. Cavazos and her team. He also mentioned the board's advocacy efforts at the state level and the support they've been able to generate for public education state-wide thanks to her leadership, and

a “big project on the horizon, yet unable to be publicly announced” in collaboration with the City of Portland that was made possible because of her.

“Dr. Cavazos is one of a kind,” he said. “She fully deserves our community’s support and at minimum, our respect. Truth be told – she hasn’t always received it. I’ve spoken with so many of our teachers, staff, and community members who have been just as amazed and grateful as I am for the outstanding leadership she has provided for G-PISD. People come up to me all the time commenting on the awesome work being done here including those who live here, and some of my fellow School Board members all over Texas.

“Then on the other hand, at times differences of opinion among some have led to personal insults and misinformation spread in our community that I’ve witnessed myself. There is no place for that in G-P, and I’m sure it contributed to her agreeing to apply for another position. To be clear, there is absolutely no problem with disagreeing and seeing things from different perspectives – that’s what makes our community, and frankly our School Board, a great team. It’s also what we are here to do. We want to hear all voices, though unfortunately we can’t please everyone all of the time. That’s okay, yet when disagreements and differences become something else entirely – and are delivered in a certain way – that’s just not going to move us forward or show support for our hard-working leadership and staff.

“What I have seen her go through, no one should; especially not any leader as dedicated and talented as her, and as devoted to serving every single child and doing what’s right for the whole community even when it’s hard to do. That’s integrity, and you can’t hire for that – you can only get lucky when someone who has it comes along. She does, and here in G-P we have been extremely blessed to have that kind of luck for any amount of time.”

Flinn said the board received a report earlier this week that Dr. Cavazos and her team are working to thoughtfully provide leadership for G-PISD while also eliminating or repurposing six high-ranking leadership positions through attrition for a total annual savings of \$420,000 in the district budget. He said “the best part” about her re-organization plan was that it meant there would be only three Cabinet members compared to the previous five members (four leaders and the Superintendent), with academic roles and departments reporting directly to the Superintendent. “This is exactly the kind of plan that is so incredible for a board to receive,” he said. “She does what is right, and she listens to everyone before making important decisions. She’s considerate of our employees, and she is fair. I am hopeful we can continue with leadership like this in the next chapter for G-PISD.”

Dr. Cavazos confirmed that the purpose of her re-organization plan was to provide savings for taxpayers, address some instances of public perception that the district had too many high-level leaders, and also create an avenue of growth for talented leaders already in the district. She said a new organizational chart would be released next week. “G-PISD has so much to be proud of, starting with our students and staff,” she said. “We have such talented employees, and they are each leaders in their own areas of expertise. Through the re-purposing of some positions we’re also building a pipeline of opportunity for internal candidates – so we can grow and develop leaders from within G-PISD and continue to create a culture of leadership, learning, listening, and caring for our outstanding Wildcats.

“I have no words today to express how deep my commitment is for G-PISD, nor how grateful I’ve been to serve as your Superintendent for the last three years. G-P is not the kind of place anyone would want to leave, so I am hopeful that our students, staff, and community can understand that interviewing with another district was not an easy decision to make. I can assure you that together with our Team of 8 and district administrative team we will spend the next several weeks closing out the school year with as much celebration and success as our students well deserve.

“I invite you to join me in focusing on that all-important need for our Wildcats, and place your faith in our school board and the incredible leaders who are serving you today. They need your support, as do all students and staff serving in public education today. I trust it will be given to them during this time, and in the years ahead as we all anticipate a bright future with much success to follow for the great people of G-PISD. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve you, know you, and become a lifelong Wildcat among generations before and generations to come.”

Cavazos said the opportunity to impact more students in Arlington ISD was among the reasons for her consideration of a new position. “We have so much important work to do in public education, and I originally became a teacher myself because I wanted to impact as many students as possible,” she said. “While it is hard to leave, that is definitely something that I’ve been considering throughout the interview process and now as the board in Arlington ISD has made their public announcement I hope it’s something our own community can also understand.”

Flinn said there is a 21-day waiting period before a Superintendent can be officially hired by law in the State of Texas. “We understand this is an incredible opportunity for Dr. Cavazos. However, if there is anything we might be able to reasonably do to have her consider staying with G-PISD, our current board is committed to doing so as early as next week. We’re asking for support from our community as we go through this process, and will keep everyone informed.”

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