THE BALTIMORE SUN

# Baltimore Schools CEO Santelises to spend 4 weeks at Yale for new job



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Baltimore City Public Schools CEO Sonja Brookins Santelises is spending four weeks in-person at Yale University this school year, serving in her new position as superintendent-in-residence at The Broad Center at Yale School of Management, according to a university spokesperson.

Santelises will travel to the university in New Haven, Connecticut, for four weeklong modules, with the first module having already begun this week on Monday, and the next modules taking place next year during the weeks of Jan. 25, April 13 and June 22, the spokesperson said.

Some Baltimore residents and educators congratulated Santelises on her new position while others told The Baltimore Sun they believe she's stretching herself too thin.

Santelises is serving in her 10th and final year as the school system's CEO. The board of commissioners is searching for her replacement, who will start in July 2026. In addition to working at City Schools and Yale, Santelises also is serving this year as chair of the board of directors for the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of 81 school systems dedicated to improving education in inner cities.

"The city schools of Baltimore certainly needs a CEO that has 100% of their attention," said Baltimore resident Desmond Stinnie, whose daughters graduated from city schools in 2020 and 2023. "I believe that the City of Baltimore is also paying our CEO enough that we should have 100% of her attention until the day that she's no longer with us."

Stinnie added, "I certainly don't doubt her competence to handle multiple tasks. I think we all can, but I think the focus should be on the task that you're being paid for."

But Kalman "Buzzy" Hettleman, who served on the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners until 2008 and has collaborated with Santelises on education issues — including helping kids who struggle to read and students with disabilities, said he's not concerned about Santelises working in-person at Yale.

"She's worked long and hard, way beyond anything resembling a 40-hour work week," Hettleman said. "And I think she has the ability, as she winds down, to work this in without undue burden on her schedule."

Hettleman added, "So many people work online these days. You can get so much work done remotely, and … I think she simply has too much integrity to divert her attention away from her job here."

Robert Murphy, an education consultant with a background at the Maryland State Department of Education whose daughter graduated from Baltimore City College in 2013, expressed concern about low academic performance in city schools during Santelises' tenure.

"Is she the person that should demonstrate how you run a good school system? I don't know," Murphy said. "When I look at the data for the schools, it's not really all that great. It hasn't been great for a while."

Ori Shabazz, who retired from his job as an adult educator at Baltimore City Community College, offered congratulations to Santelises.

“I’m glad that we’re going to have her until the end of the year,” Shabazz said, giving a “98%” assessment of her performance leading city schools. “We’re talking about a Ph.D. person, and I’m sure she’s able to manage whatever task she undertakes.”

Asked about the in-person component of her Yale position and her ability to manage multiple jobs, City Schools spokesperson Sherry Christian told The Baltimore Sun in an email, “The position’s virtual structure allows Dr. Santelises to fulfill these responsibilities while continuing to guide City Schools.”

Asked for clarity about whether the four modules at Yale will take place virtually or in-person, spokesperson Andre Riley said in an email, “The CEO’s work at Yale, including her work schedule for that role, is a matter between her and the university. Her City Schools contract has a clause that allows her to pursue such opportunities. The response you received from the university on that matter addresses your question.”

City Schools officials referred The Sun to Yale when asked how much Santelises would be paid for the new position, and Yale declined to comment.

As Baltimore City Schools CEO, Santelises earned $350,000 in her previous one-year contract with the school system.

William Hite, Santelises’ predecessor in the Yale position, worked there while also working at Knowledge Works, where he currently serves as president and CEO, the university said. The foundation collaborates with policymakers, educators and business leaders to “promote transformation in their education system,” according to its website.