Charlotte-Mecklenburg School board says investigation into superintendent needs more time

Board chair says ‘there is still work to be done’ as costs mount

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. (WBTV) - The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Board of education said Wednesday it needs a few more weeks to wrap up its investigation into Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill, who has been on paid administrative leave for more than a month.

Board members received an update on the investigation during a closed session that lasted more than three hours on Wednesday, July 22. Afterward, board chair Stephanie Sneed wrote that “there is still work to be done.”

Investigation costs

The investigation is costing the district $275 an hour. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is also paying two people $450 and $350 an hour, respectively, for public relations counsel.

The district has not yet provided a total cost of the investigation or identified which budget line the expenses are drawn from, following a request for that information.

Could Hill return?

If no wrongdoing is found, the question of whether Hill would return to her position remains open. The executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, Ray Hart, said outcomes vary.

“How districts and their individual superintendents work through that varies,” Hart said.

Hart said he has seen superintendents return to their positions following a suspension.

The Council of the Great City Schools is made up of about 80 urban school districts, including CMS, and works to help those districts succeed.

Leadership and school year preparations

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has experienced leadership changes and interruptions roughly every three years. Board members said they received multiple complaints against Hill and determined the time was right to investigate.

With school starting Aug. 25 for the majority of students, Deputy Superintendent Dr. Melissa Balknight has assumed Hill's responsibilities and is leading preparations for the new school year. Staff inside Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools said operations are continuing as usual.

Hart said strong support staff is critical during periods of uncertainty at the top.

"One of the things we try to do is to make sure that we shore up the support system for both superintendents and cabinet members, connecting them to each other to really strengthen their skill set so that across the board the leadership in the district - both from the operational standpoint as well as academic standpoint," Hart said.

What comes next

Depending on the outcome of the investigation, Hill's options include returning to work, resigning, or being terminated for convenience or for just cause. Hill has said she welcomes the review and that, to her knowledge, she has not done anything that falls short of the standard.

The next update from the board is expected in a few weeks.