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## Culver takes pride in job he's done

Wed, 04/27/2011 - 8:00am | Jodi Heckel

CHAMPAIGN -- An emotional Arthur Culver talked about the successes of the Champaign school district at a press conference announcing his resignation Tuesday afternoon.

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"I stand before you today with my head held high," he said. "We accomplished so much. ..." Culver paused for a minute, overcome by emotion, before continuing, "... in nine years.

"I was getting a little emotional because I have nothing but great pride and satisfaction in what we've done," he said a few minutes later. "This district is not in the place it was nine years ago. It's much better."

Culver has resigned as Champaign superintendent, effective June 30. He was a candidate for a superintendent job in the DeKalb County school system in metropolitan Atlanta, but he has withdrawn from that job search.

Culver said that while he has had other job opportunities in the past few years, he stayed on to fulfill his promise to see the district through the federal consent decree that was in place when he was hired in 2002 and that ended in 2009.

But, he said, he felt he had accomplished all he could here and he intended to continue looking for another job. He didn't want to stay on if he didn't have the same excitement for the job here. Culver said he likes a challenge and problems to fix, not maintaining a district in good shape.

He would have faced many challenges in DeKalb County if he'd been hired there, as the district's last superintendent is under indictment for racketeering and theft, the school system is \$100 million in debt, and it recently went through a controversial redistricting.

Culver said the dramatic events surrounding the DeKalb County job search in the past week -- the board was negotiating with another finalist, who withdrew last weekend after details of the negotiation become public -- convinced him it was best to withdraw.

"As bad as I want to take those challenges on, it didn't feel right," he said.

Culver and the school board have talked about his leaving the job.

"We have been talking for some time about this," Champaign school board President Dave Tomlinson said. "We wanted to do this at the right time."

Tomlinson said Culver wanted to give the board time to conduct a search for another superintendent.

Tomlinson also noted that nine years is a long time for a superintendent to stay in one district, "especially a district as difficult to work in as Champaign is. We as a board expect a lot."

He talked Tuesday about how the board will go about replacing Culver, by naming an interim superintendent and conducting a national search for a permanent superintendent.

Tomlinson also enumerated the accomplishments of the district during Culver's tenure, including

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transforming Stratton Elementary School from an underperforming, underchosen school to an Illinois Spotlight School with a waiting list for entry; improving the high school graduation rate from 89.6 percent to 95.7 percent, the latter number well above the state average; improving math and reading scores for African-American students by 30 percent and 23 percent respectively since 2005; Bottenfield and Barkstall elementary schools earning Academic Excellence awards for having more than 90 percent of students meet state learning standards; several national recognitions for Jefferson and Franklin middle schools; and improving the district's financial status so its financial rating is the highest possible.

"There was a lot of hard work by a lot of people the entire staff, all 1,500 employees worked side by side," Culver said. "It's not what I did, it's what the team did."

"We accomplished tremendous things in a nine-year period. I think the future is bright for the district."

And, he added, he believes it's bright for himself as well.

"I'll land on my feet."

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