

NEWS

Hermosa Beach school superintendent retires

ROBB FULCHER | JULY 15, 2011



Retiring school Superintendent Bruce Newlin with former school board member Greg Breen and current member Jack Burns, shortly before the mayor's State of the City address in March. Photo

Hermosa Beach city schools Superintendent Bruce Newlin has announced his resignation, sticking to the plan he made three years ago when he came out of retirement to lead the small, 1,300-student district.

Newlin announced his retirement to the school board on Wednesday, saying his hopes of shepherding the district through the economic downturn has been stymied by the downturn's length and depth.

“When I came out of retirement to help out, I did so with a plan to be here for three years and that hopefully the economic troubles of the district and the state could be overcome during that time,” he said.

“I don’t see that happening in the short or even mid-range future, and it is not my goal to become the oldest sitting superintendent in the United States. At this point, I feel I have contributed all that I can at this point in my career,” Newlin said.

Even if the economy picks up in the near future, the effects on education will last significantly longer, Newlin told the board.

“Even if the economy rebounds in the next couple of years, I don’t think state and district budgets will return to normal for some time because of real estate prices not rebounding as quickly,” he said.

Newlin said officials must focus on “educational sustainability” as new models surface such as online teaching and “blended learning, which combines computer-based teaching with in-person teaching. He said the face of public education will look significantly different in 20 years, or sooner.

“We are in such a ‘red ink’ situation right now that we need to begin to think differently about sustainability,” Newlin explained. “We need to think about educational sustainability.

“Lots of innovation has occurred because we have had to look at different ways of doing things. We have had to do more with less because the accountability movement and the public are not slacking in their demand of what they expect schools to be about.

“Another factor to consider is the upcoming teacher shortage. As we look at the number of baby boomers retiring over the next 10 to 20 years, plus the current situation in schools now with layoffs, etcetera, it is easy to see the teacher shortage around the corner.

“What I am proposing is that we stop worrying so much about the inputs and what school has to look like, and instead focus on outcomes. I see education looking very different over the next years. On-line education, blended learning or whatever is coming down the road, I don’t see schools looking the same in 20 years, or sooner.”

Newlin stressed that the big problem now is that schools of education are using a model to train teachers for jobs that won’t exist for much longer. “They’re still preparing teachers for what they have always done,” he said. “I see the role of teachers being very different in the future. Some will be great mentors and motivators while others are great content experts.

“We need to get all of these players to come together to think a lot more expansively about what this future could look like and not be trapped by today’s conventions, because for this to really work, human capital is vital. Getting teachers to perform in these new roles that look very different is absolutely critical to success.”

He told the board his career in education will end when his resignation becomes effective Dec. 31.

“As a retiree myself, I understand,” School board member Ray Waters said. “It’s great.”

Board members praised Newlin for his leadership, saying he brought to the district a more cooperative form of labor negotiations called “interest-based bargaining,” and helped spearhead a comprehensive ongoing study of the district’s financial future.

Newlin also steered the district during “Project Forward,” a push for greater financial accountability and clearer communication with the public, which followed a failed parcel-tax measure under his predecessor.

Board member Jack Burns said in an interview that Newlin’s resignation date leaves plenty of time to find a permanent or interim replacement.

Newlin had served as interim superintendent when he signed on in Hermosa, and then was named superintendent by the school board following a nationwide search. He replaced Sharon McClain, who resigned to take the helm of the larger Del Mar Union School District in coastal San Diego County. At the time, Newlin declared a three-year commitment to the superintendent’s position.