



Akron Public Schools

Sylvester Small Administration Building

March 18, 2021

Dear Dr. James,

The purpose of this letter is to announce my retirement effective June 30, 2021.

Since student teaching at Hotchkiss Elementary in 1989, I found this district to be innovative, inspiring, constantly evolving, and a place where everyone became family. I wouldn't have wanted to spend my 32 year teaching and administration career in any other district. I have particularly been honored to serve under your exemplary leadership. You provided me opportunities to learn, lead, dream and create which fueled my desire to continuously design new learning experiences for our students.

My 13 years as Assistant Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer was certainly elevated by the incredible team of Curriculum and Instruction Directors I was fortunate enough to work with every day, including my exceptional Administrative Assistant, Ruth Rieman. They are the true architects of any success we realized as a district. I have never met a more student-focused and passion-driven team. They tapped talent from across the district to enable our entire Curriculum and Instruction Division to continuously push this district to maintain its place as a trailblazer in the state and region.

Most importantly, my leadership was driven by 32 years of relationships built on trust with teachers, support staff, principals, students, families, board members and community leaders. Every conversation with a teacher shaped my subsequent decision-making. Every listening session with students as they showcased their projects shaped my world-view on how to free students to dream and create. Every breakfast at Akron Family Restaurant with community leaders enabled me to put aside my solitary APS lens and simply listen to find the potential synergy that could exist between organizations for the benefit of our students and families. This deep and long view of leadership built on decades of relationships was a gift given to me by this district that I will forever be grateful for and will continue to use in my future career endeavors.

The district is now positioned as a leader among large urban districts, particularly in the preparation of our youth for success in college and careers. The most important decision every leader needs to make is knowing when it is time to get out of the way to let the next educational revolution flourish. Our top notch principals, central office team and innovative teachers are ready to take this district to this next level of national leadership. Our College and Career Academies of Akron are designed around elevating student voice and student leadership, so I'm confident that if teachers are given the space and freedom to let students soar, our vision for wide ranging inquiry-based learning experiences embedded in the community will explode across the district.

As I make this transition away from my APS home, I pledge to do whatever is necessary to have a smooth transition for my temporary or permanent replacement over the next few months or in the future. District leadership can reach out at any time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ellen McWilliams-Woods', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ellen McWilliams-Woods, Ph.D.
Assistant Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer