

Board of Education announces three finalists for superintendent

The Wake County Board of Education has announced the names of three finalists for the position of superintendent. All three candidates have extensive backgrounds in the classroom, school administration, and district-level administration. All three finalists are expected to publicly visit Wake County in the near future. They are:

Dr. Dana Tyrone Bedden

Dr. Bedden is the superintendent of the Irving Independent School District in Irving, Texas. The district serves 35,111 students on 38 campuses. His priorities there have included implementing a multi-year district improvement plan and a strategic communications plan. He also initiated improvements in special education and human resources functions, leading the district through its most challenging financial times due to state-level funding reductions.

Prior to his service in Irving, Dr. Bedden served as superintendent in for the Richmond County School System based in Augusta, Georgia. While there, the graduation rate increased nearly 14 percentage points. He has also served as superintendent in Pennsylvania where he launched the system's first cyber academy and its first online summer school. As a principal in Washington, D.C., at the School Without Walls Senior High School, his students maintained a 95% college admission rate.

He began his educational career as a middle school teacher and coach for football, basketball, and track. He earned his doctorate in educational leadership and policy studies from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He earned his master's degree in educational administration from Pennsylvania State University and his bachelor's degree from the University of Florida.

Dr. Bedden has completed post-doctoral courses in school business leadership at Wilkes University and attended the Harvard University Graduate School of Education's Leadership Institute for Superintendents.

Ms. Ann Blakeney Clark

Ms. Clark is the deputy superintendent for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), the second largest school system in North Carolina, and brings more than 25 years experience to the office. She began her career in Charlotte as a teacher of the behaviorally and emotionally handicapped children in 1983 and has held a variety of teaching and administrative positions in CMS. Her extensive background includes serving as principal at elementary, middle, and high schools. She was named National Principal of the Year in 1994.

Prior to her service as CMS's Deputy Superintendent, Ms. Clark served as the associate superintendent of education services. In that role, she oversaw the district's curriculum, professional development, and classroom instruction.

Ms. Clark is involved in the community, serving on boards of Communities in Schools, Children's Theatre, the Davidson College Board of Visitors, Smart Start, and Levine Museum of the New South. Her educational achievements have been widely recognized. In addition to earning the National Principal of the Year honor, Ms. Clark is a Broad Superintendent Fellow, a First Lady of Charlotte, a Thomas Jefferson Distinguished Alumnae from the University of Virginia, and a William Friday Fellow.

Ms. Clark graduated from Davidson College with a bachelor of arts in English. She earned a master's degree in special education from the University of Virginia. She also holds administrator and curriculum and supervision certification from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Dr. James Merrill

Dr. Merrill has served as superintendent of the Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS), the third largest school division in Virginia, since 2006. As superintendent, he has spearheaded the creation and implementation of a strategic plan emphasizing 21st century skills that will define successful students in VBCPS.

Prior to his service in Virginia Beach, Dr. Merrill served six years as superintendent of the Alamance-Burlington School System. Previously, he spent 16 years in the Wake County Public School System, last serving as Associate Superintendent for Administration and Finance. He began his career in 1973 as an English teacher.

Dr. Merrill has earned numerous accolades and awards, including the 2005 North Carolina Superintendent of the Year award and the 2013 Virginia Superintendent of the Year honor. He has also been elected to the Executive Committee of the Governing Board of the American Association of School Administrators. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro School of Education awarded him the Outstanding Achievement Award and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Education honored him with its Distinguished Leadership Award.

Dr. Merrill was a Morehead Scholar at UNC-Chapel Hill earning a bachelor's degree in secondary English. He earned his master's degree in education administration from Appalachian State University and his doctorate from UNC-Greensboro.