

Highland Park superintendent leaving for Union Township post

HIGHLAND PARK – Borough Superintendent of Schools Scott Taylor is hopping on the administrator merry-go-round and getting off in Union Township.

Taylor, who has been Highland Park's schools chief since October 2015, is leaving approximately 1,500 students, 290 personnel and four schools for the larger Township of Union Public Schools of more than 7,100 students, 1,150 personnel and 10 schools.

In a letter sent Saturday, Taylor said the community would be receiving "detailed information about his temporary replacement soon."

"The Board of Education has been actively working with me to make sure the transition of leadership takes place promptly and carefully so that there is little intrusion on continuity of programs for your children and the operation of the district," he said.

Taylor's appointment and employment contract are set to be approved at Union Township's Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, according to the agenda. Once approved, Taylor's Union Township contract will begin July 1 and run thru June 30, 2026, subject to the approval of the Executive County Superintendent.

According to the unsigned contract attached to the agenda, Taylor's initial salary will be \$197,000. His salary will increase, subject to satisfactory performance evaluations, as follows: \$200,940 for July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024; and \$204,959 for July 1, 2025 through June 20, 2026.

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While some superintendents are leaving districts due to the pandemic, stress and personal issues, Taylor said neither are why he is leaving.

"I'm not burnt out, I'm kind of lucky," he said. "I have been blessed here. I love Highland Park. I have great relationships with the Board, the community, the personnel, but I saw this come up and it's a much bigger district, it's very diverse and that's a new challenge I want to tackle."

Taylor also is excited because he felt an instant rapport with the Union Board of Education.

"You have to have that," Taylor said. "Here, we have had a trusting mutually respectful relationship throughout my tenure. And now as much as any time ever in recent history, school boards and superintendents have to have strong relationships because getting through the pandemic and now transitioning to a post-pandemic is going to take a lot of hard work. You do need boards and superintendents to be in sync."

In the letter, Taylor said his leaving "does not come without some hesitation." He considers himself a "townie," having lived in the borough for 26 years with his wife and daughters.

"It's not easy to step away from a place to which I've been so committed," he said. "I leave our district in about a month and a half in a very stable and thriving place."

Highland Park parents on social media said they are sorry to see Taylor go.

"Scott has been a strong and thoughtful leader," said Karen Kanter.

"Sad to see him leave, it's been a tough time to get through for all of us and

he did his best to stay strong for our kids and families," said Michael May.

As Taylor leaves the district he see his greatest challenge as "fostering equity among the different groups of students."

"Highland Park is extremely diverse," he said. "One of the highlights of my time here has been to build a greater sense of student-school connection — so kids feel more a part of their school community than they may have before. That's part of the equity push and there is a lot more work to be done, but that is one top thing I am proud of.

"Also, before, this community was in a bad place. Now it has been boosted and I think there is more pride in the school district than there may have been previously."

At Union, Taylor plans to "create and implement a strategic plan that the entire district community has a stake in building," similar to the approach he took when he arrived at Highland Park.

"This was a great experience for many people — it rallied people together and gave the district a clear focus based on certain goals," Taylor said. "It looks like in Union, based on what I can see and what I have heard, there needs to be a new strategic plan put in place. I plan to take what our community has taught me since 2015 and turnkey the best of what Highland Park offers its kids to those I'll guide in my new professional home."

Taylor came to Highland Park after serving as superintendent of Kenilworth Public Schools.

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