

Akron Beacon Journal

EDUCATION

Akron Board of Education places Superintendent Michael Robinson on leave

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Key Points

The school board's attorneys hired an outside law firm in December to investigate unspecified allegations made against Robinson and other administrators.

A recent Beacon Journal investigation included interviews with more than two dozen APS employees who said Robinson routinely yells at staff and talks down to them.

Robinson had remained on the job with the investigation took place.

The Akron Board of Education has placed its embattled superintendent on leave following a [four-month investigation](#) into allegations of bullying, retaliation and creating a hostile work environment.

The board voted 4-1 with two abstentions to place Superintendent Michael Robinson on leave. Robinson was not present for the vote.

Executive Director of Elementary Schools Mary Outley will serve as interim superintendent. She previously served as interim before the board hired Robinson. Outley did not immediately return a phone call seeking comment after the meeting.

Board President Carla Jackson said in a statement after the vote that the board "has developed a plan for swift action regarding his employment status and anticipates a final decision by the next scheduled board meeting," which is April 28. Robinson will remain on paid leave until then.

The board met for two hours behind closed doors before taking a vote to place Robinson on leave. Jackson voted with Barbara Sykes, Rev. Greg Harrison and Rene Molenaur to place Robinson on leave. Diana Autry voted no, with Bruce Alexander and Summer Hall abstaining. The subsequent vote to appoint Outley as interim was unanimous.

The school board's attorneys hired an outside law firm in December [to investigate unspecified allegations](#) made against Robinson and other administrators.

"The report indicated that there were multiple credible accounts of bullying, intimidation and retaliation by Superintendent Robinson against APS employees, including administrators and former APS employees," Jackson said. "The allegations of this behavior were substantiated by interviews with 16 current, former and current APS employees, and supported by information from any witnesses."

Autry, the sole vote against putting Robinson on leave, explained her vote by encouraging the public to read a [transition report](#), made public last year, that reflected strengths and challenges in the district.

"It explains exactly what the culture and climate of this district was less than one short year ago when it was submitted to this board," Autry said, advising to read what it says about "anonymous sources." The report said only that the board needed a policy for how to consistently deal with anonymous complaints.

"I am disappointed that we are at this place in this district, and I am disappointed that we are experiencing this together, but I hope that we can eventually come together," Autry said. "I am very confident that Ms. Outley can continue this important work for our students."

The board voted at the end of the meeting to release the report, waiving attorney-client privilege to make the document a public record. While the Beacon Journal [has acquired a copy of the report](#), the district and the board have yet to publicly release it.

What does the Akron superintendent investigation report say?

The 24-page investigative report — done by Akron law firm Brennan, Manna & Diamond — determined that Robinson "has engaged in threatening, intimidating, and harassing behavior toward media, the board, staff, and even students."

Robinson's actions violated a myriad of policies, codes of ethics and standards of professional conduct, the report said, all of which "subjects him to discipline by the board."

The witnesses are not named in the report due to "the allegations of bullying, harassment, intimidation, retaliation and hostile work environment."

"Dr. Robinson's leadership creates a toxic and fearful working environment where employees are subject to pervasive ridicule, unjustified verbal abuse, and are under a constant threat of losing their jobs," the report concluded. "There are examples of blatant retaliation that Dr. Robinson attempts to justify under the guise of restructuring. But the timing of protected activity with adverse employment action creates a strong presumption that Dr. Robinson is motivated by retaliatory purposes. Dr. Robinson shows a clear disrespect for other professionals, including the media, members of this Board, and to the students."

The report closely mirrors a recent [Beacon Journal investigation](#), which included interviews with more than two dozen APS employees who said Robinson routinely yells at staff, talks down to them, and has used derogatory language to talk about APS students and families.

The board didn't place Robinson on leave while the investigation took place, despite recommendations from the district's directors of human resources and labor relations. Those top APS officials told the Beacon Journal they [subsequently resigned](#) when their advice was ignored.

Akron superintendent's tenure marked with several controversies

Robinson came to the district from Louisiana in July of 2023. His tenure has been marked with several controversies, including nearly 20 grievances, [four Unfair Labor Practice](#) charges and the [threats of additional](#) lawsuits by the Akron Education Association.

In December, it was revealed Robinson, along with his chief of staff Angela Carter, had been using a function of Gmail called "[confidential mode](#)" to send emails to staff regarding district business, an almost certain flaunting of public records law and board policy.

He faced [pushback from parents](#) about moving teachers three weeks into the school year, a practice that had been done before but one parents and teachers said was traumatic for students. Robinson launched a full-day pre-kindergarten program, which many in the community supported, but teachers later raised concern that the roll-out had been botched and low staffing numbers at the beginning of the year left students in unsafe conditions.

Questions about [Robinson's resume also arose](#) after he hired his former mentor to do a transition report at the start of his tenure in Akron. Robinson had listed his mentor's firm on his resume as a place he had worked for nearly three years, but the consultant told the media that Robinson had never worked for him in an official capacity and was never paid.

The board gave Robinson a bare-bones evaluation this summer, but afterward, a [letter surfaced from board member](#) Rene Molenaar saying the superintendent had bullied her, not given her information she asked for and yelled at her during a remote meeting.

In September, the district released a statement defending the roll-out of the pre-K program, [but it included a quote from Robinson](#) saying that teachers with concerns shouldn't go to their union representation. The quote set off a firestorm with the

union and the public. Robinson denied having said the quote, and said he was pro-union.

A further [Beacon Journal investigation showed](#) that Robinson disciplined his communications director, Mark Williamson, accusing him of sending out the release without getting it approved. But Williamson filed a rebuttal in his personnel file, including a draft of the document that contained the quote and what Williamson said was Robinson's handwriting on it.

In December, the head of the facilities department in Akron Public Schools [accused the superintendent of retaliation](#) for raising concerns about the top district leader's treatment of staff.

The facilities director sent a letter to the school board on Dec. 15, saying he had been removed from his current job while on family medical leave and without notice or explanation.

The board opted to launch an independent investigation several days later.

Robinson's tenure has had high moments as well, including the passage of the district's first levy in 12 years. The board [passed a resolution of support](#) for Robinson in October after a board retreat where Robinson told the board, through written answers to questions about his expectations of them, that he did not feel supported.

This story will be updated.

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