

NEWS

Bremerton school board votes not to extend superintendent's contract



Kai Uyehara

Kitsap Sun

Published 5:41 p.m. PT June 26, 2024 | Updated 8:53 a.m. PT June 27, 2024

Edit: James Crawford's year of graduation from Bremerton High School was corrected.

The Bremerton School District board of directors on Wednesday afternoon voted to not extend Superintendent James Crawford's contract, just a year after he started on the job leading the district.

The district's board of directors held a special meeting Wednesday, announced just the afternoon prior, to meet in an executive session and then take a vote on extending Crawford's contract, just four days before the typical deadline to add a year to Crawford's initial three-year contract. The board members began the meeting by recessing into an executive session, which is not open to the public, to "review the performance of a public employee," according to the agenda. The five-member board reconvened half an hour later and voted unanimously not to extend Crawford's contract, without discussion.

School superintendent contracts are typically crafted for three-year terms, and are extended year by year each June. The Central Kitsap School District board, for example, is scheduled to vote to extend superintendent Erin Prince's contract Wednesday night at its regular meeting. Crawford, unanimously approved by the board for the position in March 2023, has only served one year so far as the district's superintendent, and his contract now lasts until June 30, 2026.

Bremerton school board president Aly Rotter could not comment further on the board's decision. The board will next consider the Bremerton School District superintendent contract by next February, she said at Wednesday afternoon's meeting.

Crawford, a 1998 Bremerton High School graduate, previously served as the interim senior director of high school academics for Portland Public Schools, assistant

superintendent for Federal Way Public Schools and as a teacher in the Puyallup and Pullman school districts.

As superintendent, Crawford led an effort to pass a 25-year \$150 million bond to fund capital projects at schools across the district last February, in addition to a two-year educational programs and operations levy that also was approved by voters.

On June 12 the school board also held a special meeting, outside of its regular meeting schedule, which consisted of an executive session “to meet with legal counsel,” according to meeting minutes. The next week, at its regular meeting on June 20, the board voted to approve a letter of engagement with Haggard & Ganson LLP, a law firm specializing in municipal law, investigations and neutral services. The board stated in its meeting agenda that “this letter of engagement is necessary to conduct an independent investigation of the conduct of a school district officer on behalf of the Bremerton School District.”

Attorney Jeffrey Ganson of Haggard & Ganson wrote in the letter of engagement, “my objective is to find the facts and determine if any agency policies have been violated or if there are other grounds for concern.”

Rotter could not confirm whether Crawford was the school district officer that would be the subject of the law firm’s investigation.

Crawford could not be reached for comment.