



News Release

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State Superintendent Brian Whiston Passes Away Following Battle with Cancer

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LANSING – State Superintendent Brian J. Whiston passed away Monday evening, the Michigan Department of Education has reported. He was 56 years old.

Appointed State Superintendent by the State Board of Education in April 2015, Whiston had been receiving medical treatments since his cancer diagnosis last fall and went on Long-Term Disability Leave on May 4.

“We are deeply saddened by the passing of Brian,” said State Board of Education Co-Presidents Casandra Ulbrich and Richard Zeile. “Brian was a wonderful person who devoted his life to serving others. He was always focused on doing what is best for the children of Michigan. The vision he set forth to make Michigan a Top 10 education state in 10 years will endure. His leadership and talent established the dynamic strategies that will help all children in Michigan have the opportunity to learn and be prepared for success.”

As State Superintendent, Whiston set a priority to make Michigan a Top 10 education state in 10 years, working collaboratively with educators, students, parents, businesses, and policy leaders in Michigan to forge the goals and strategies that will drive achievement and success in the 21st Century.

Whiston previously served as Superintendent of Dearborn Public Schools – the state’s third largest school district – since 2008. His involvement in education started long before his time in Dearborn. During his 11 years as Director of Government and Community Services for the Oakland County ISD, Whiston consistently demonstrated his ability to work with state government to bring financial resources to schools, lead his department to improved student achievement, and help make all schools in the county successful. He also served as a local school board member for 17 years, and held the position of Treasurer and President-Elect of the Michigan Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA). He was elected President of the PTSA before having to step down when he was appointed as the Superintendent at Dearborn.

While at Dearborn, Whiston's collaborative model led to a primary focus on math, reading, and writing in the elementary grades to raise student achievement and provide an environment for students in grades six through 12 that kept pace with technology, prepared them for a post-secondary education or training, and met the state's graduation requirements. Whiston worked to offer students a variety of options at the secondary level to break down the barriers of a typical high school classroom. He established the Collegiate Academy, a five-year program at each of Dearborn's three high schools, which offers students the opportunity to graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate degree in five years, with all costs covered by the district.

His successful innovation efforts in Dearborn were recognized by the Michigan Association of School Administrators when it awarded him Superintendent of the Year honors in 2014. In addition, district programs, created under Whiston's leadership, won several awards including recognition from the Michigan Association of School Boards, Michigan Association of School Administrators, Dearborn Chamber of Commerce, and Best of MichBusiness.

In 2007, while working on behalf of public school districts in Oakland County, Whiston was named a Top Ten Lobbyist of the Year. He was also awarded the Gold Child Advocate award and named Michigan PTA Board Member of the Year and is an honorary life member of the Michigan PTSA.

Whiston also has taught classes at Wayne State University, where he received a bachelor's and a master's degree, and for the Michigan Association of School Boards. He served on several boards and was a member of several community organizations.

Funeral details will be forthcoming.

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