



Markley resigns from New Hanover County Schools

By **Joey Chandler**

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Superintendent's decade in charge comes to end among bevy of sexual assault claims and convictions

The New Hanover County Schools Board of Education approved the resignation and separation agreement of Superintendent Tim Markley Friday afternoon after a lengthy closed meeting.

Board chairwomen Lisa Estep said Markley's resignation is effective immediately and that the board will pay \$195,000 as severance plus \$32,966.66 in earned benefits and accrued leave as required by the state to end his contract. The full copy of the separation agreement will be sent out publicly once it is signed.

Dr. LaChawn Smith will continue to serve as assistant deputy superintendent and the board said they will meet next week to determine the its steps forward in naming an interim superintendent.

The announcement was made after Roland-Grise Middle School band director Peter Michael Frank was arrested in late January and charged with 12 counts of felony sex crimes -- six for indecent liberties with a child and six for indecent liberties with a student by a teacher.

“The board believes that separating from Dr. Markley is the best solution to move this system forward,” Estep said.

Markley was hired by NHCS in July 2010, and his tenure was marked by both progress and controversy.

Markley was part of the \$160 million school bond in 2014, the largest in county history, that led to multiple renovated schools and a new campus in Porters Neck.

Approval of charter schools came under his watch, including the successful GLOW Academy, and so did the opening of the Marine Sciences program at Ashley. The dropout rate in New Hanover County dropped by more than 3 percent during his tenure, down to 1.32 percent in the 2017-18 academic year. In the most recent statewide assessment, the NHCS graduation rate reached its highest rate to date at 87.6 percent and, for the first time, surpassed the state’s graduation rate.

It has been an honor to serve New Hanover County Schools,” Markley said in a release sent by the school district. “I have been most fortunate to work with some of the finest educators in the state. I wish the Board and everyone the very best.”

Markley also led NHCS through several contentious issues: significant budget issues at the beginning of his tenure, paying for school security and a redistricting process that lasted nearly four years.

But the critical issues piled up:

- The school district had to pay a former assistant principal nearly \$100,000 for an improper firing in 2012.
- The move of the Spanish immersion program from Forest Hills to Gregory elementary schools in 2015, came under fire from multiple sides and resulted in an unprecedented ban of

local author Clyde Edgerton schools. Markley was also suspended for five days without pay in 2019 after threatening Edgerton through his bosses at UNCW.

– The school district’s handling of a Hoggard student’s claim of sexual assault from 2015 led to complaints at the local and federal level. Afterward, claims of sexual assault in the school system then grew; the most recent have resulted the arrest of Frank last week.

– The most prominent of those is that of Former Isaac Bear Early College teacher Michael Kelly, who pleaded guilty to 59 charges related to child sexual abuse on June 25, 2019. Kelly was arrested in February 2018 following a joint investigation by the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office and the FBI. Investigators found that Kelly had abused nearly 20 victims during his tenure.

A lawsuit was filed July 23, 2019, by attorneys from both the Lea/Schultz and Rhine law firms, representing the victims of sexual assaults by Kelly. The class action complaint is against the Board of Education, Kelly, retired assistant superintendent Rick Holliday and Markley, among others. By filing a class action suit, additional plaintiffs can sign on.

Three additional victims, ranging in ages from 17 to 23, joined the lawsuit a week later, bringing the number to six total. They allege Kelly engaged in sexually inappropriate discussions and conduct with them, including one with whom Kelly performed a sexual act while videotaping it.

Markley’s contract included a starting appointment of four years and a salary of \$200,000. The board voted to extend Markley’s contract by two years in 2012, by one year in 2013

and another two years in 2015. In June 2017, the board approved another extension through 2021, along with a salary increase of \$5,000 every July 1 through 2020.

He consistently received high marks in performance reviews, including on his interaction with the board and community members, relationships with staff and leadership. He was twice named the Regional Superintendent of the Year, for the 2015-16 and 2019-20 school years.

Before his arrival at NHCS, Markley was the superintendent of Catawba County's school system since 2005. The first 11 years of his career were spent as an educator and administrator in Cumberland County, N.C. He has also been a high school baseball and soccer coach.