

## No contract extension for Ortiz

### Windham superintendent to leave by October 2014

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WILLIMANTIC/ WINDHAM — A table of grave-faced school board members voted 6-3 Wednesday not to renew Windham Public Schools Superintendent Ana Ortiz's contract.

Now Ortiz, whose evaluation rubric showed a score of 55 out of 100, has exactly a year left until her position in the district ends.

"They made the decision and they made it on scores alone," Ortiz said after the board meeting, having hugged several tearful board members as they left the room.

She said she had tried to serve the children as well as she could and intended to spend her last year continuing to fight for them.

"I'll still represent the district with pride and integrity," Ortiz said.

Prior to the board's executive session deliberations, several district teachers spoke during a public dialogue period to praise Ortiz and encourage renewal of her contract, which officially expires in June 2014.

"She's an extreme, true asset to our school community," said Windham High School STEM Academy Headmaster Dorothy Potter.

High school history teacher Mike Lessard presented a 165-signature petition from teachers encouraging the board to continue Ortiz's contract.

"She has stability. She has grown. She cares a lot," Lessard said.

"The teachers love her because, when you want to come to her with a problem, she will tell you the truth," said Windham Middle School art teacher Kim Begin.

In a district with constant change, Begin said, Ortiz has provided teachers and students with a constant.

"If you get rid of her, I have a feeling you're going to lose a lot of teachers," said Begin, who warned that holding Ortiz accountable for test scores was unfair without also making state-appointed Special Master Steven Adamowski answerable for the test scores resulting from initiatives he has brought to the district.

Windham Board of Education Chairman Murphy Sewall, speaking after the meeting, said the board's decision, which arose out of an hour-long executive session, was **(No contract extension, Page 4)**



*The Windham Board of Education voted Wednesday not to renew the contract of school Superintendent Ana Ortiz.*

*File photo*

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## No contract extension for school chief

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based on test scores and turnaround strategy efforts, but also teacher feedback, almost four years of working with Ortiz and more.

The motion not to extend Ortiz's contract passed with Sewall and fellow members Daniel Switchenko, Luz Osuba, Nancy Tinker, Michael Desaulniers and John French in favor.

Members Tracy Lambert, Susan Collins and John Adamo voted against the motion to not renew the contract.

Ortiz currently earns \$150,000 a year.

Sewall clarified afterwards that Adamowski was not present in the executive session and did not have input in the decision.

Because the board gave Ortiz notice Wednesday, Ortiz explained, they are legally obligated to give her a year until she must leave her position, so she may remain in Windham until Oct. 9, 2014.

Meanwhile, board members voted 7-1, with Lambert against and Sewall abstaining, to enter Ortiz's evaluation rubric into her file.

This numeric evaluation, a new procedure for the district this year, evaluated Ortiz based on improvement, or lack thereof, in performance targets including test scores, school performance index numbers and high school graduation rates.

The evaluation also measured how many strategic operating plan (SOP) strategies Ortiz was able to accomplish during the past year.

The performance target portion could have awarded Ortiz up to 70 points, but she earned only 25.

However, she was awarded all 30 points for the 30-point SOP strategy portion.

Thus her total score was entered as 55 points out of 100.

Speaking after the meeting, Sewall said the decision not to renew Ortiz's contract was not due to some sort of personal antagonism.

"I like her," he said. "She works very hard."

However, Sewall said, "This is a challenging district to be superintendent of," and "the problems were here before she ever arrived."

Sewall said, looking back, Ortiz probably did not have adequate district central office experience in December 2010 when she was made superintendent after serving as interim superintendent since July 2010 and assistant superintendent since 2008. It will be a challenge now to find a leader strong and capable enough to turn the school district around, Sewall said, although the board will try hard, with the state commissioner of education's help, to find that leader.

"I'd love to have somebody who's had success at turning around a district," he said, although he admitted such people are hard to find.

"We're going to have a challenge to find someone who can really come in here and do what needs to be done," Sewall said.

American Federation of Teachers Connecticut communications co-ordinator Matt O'Connor, speaking this morning, said the local teachers recognized the decision whether to renew Ortiz's contract belonged to the board of education.

However, O'Connor added, the decision regarding who will become the next superintendent ought to be community-led, including board of education members, teachers and community members as well as Adamowski, the education commissioner or some other state official.

"The concern is that the special master would make a unilateral appointment without valued and meaningful input from either the board of education or teachers and parents," he explained.

" Hopefully it will be a collaborative effort where the town and the teachers and everyone has some input on the selection process," said Windham Federation of Teachers President Randall Prose. "That's our biggest concern at this point — that it's a real superintendent search, not just an appointment."

Although progress must march on, Prose also said he was sad to see Ortiz go.

"She's a great woman and I'm going to miss her," he said. "It's tough."