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BOURBON SCHOOLS CHIEF TO RESIGN, BE \$133,000 CONSULTANT TO DISTRICT

*Greg Kocher
Central Kentucky Bureau*

Embattled Bourbon County Schools Superintendent Arnold "Woodrow" Carter will resign Dec. 31, but he already has a new job as a \$133,000 independent consultant to the district.

Carter, who had been under criticism from parents for months, resigned early yesterday after a four-hour closed session that ended after midnight. He had no comment yesterday.

The school board voted 3-2 to pay Carter more than \$133,000 plus \$3,000 in moving expenses under a one-year consulting contract. Carter's current base salary is \$92,000 a year, but he also receives health and other benefits.

Board members Dan Short, Geraldine Summay and Thomas "Tuck" Talbot voted to accept the resignation and approve the consultant agreement. Board members Gus Koch and Lonnie Conley opposed the motion.

Carter will, among other tasks, consult with the district's assessment coordinator on test data, meet periodically with the

maintenance director about plans for buildings and grounds, advise the central office staff on the development of administrative regulations, and consult on ways to improve curriculum and instruction, Summay said.

"We have a lot of programs that have just begun that he will be priceless in advising on," she said. "He's wise, he's smart, he knows how to get things done."

Summay and Koch are leaving the board Dec. 31, to be succeeded by Brenda Craig and Gary Linville. Several critics say those imminent changes in the board's composition may have influenced the timing of Carter's resignation.

"I assume Mr. Carter timed his resignation so that this discussion about this consulting contract could happen before we had a new board," said Paris attorney and former state legislator Jim Lovell, an outspoken critic of Carter.

Although he considered Carter a good and capable superintendent, Koch said, he voted against the consulting contract because the board can't afford it.

"We're in the midst of a financial crunch as it is," Koch said. "We're facing more severe cuts from the state next year, and I did not want to strap the new board with the added burden of this package. I thought it was excessive."

School board attorney Bob Chenoweth said the board cannot buy out the 30 months remaining under Carter's contract.

"That is not legal," Chenoweth said. "The (state) Constitution says in essence that public funds, taxpayer money, shall only be expended for services rendered."

Jamie Smith, another Carter critic, found that hard to believe. She noted that Carter and the board have been sued a couple of times in the last month. One suit, in which Smith was the plaintiff, alleges violations of the Open Meetings Law, and another alleges Carter had refused to provide receipts and other documents from a summer trip to New York he took at board expense. The superintendent contended that he was being harassed by a group submitting a flood of document requests.

"It's hard for me to fathom that anybody who has that many lawsuits filed against them in that short a time, that some board wouldn't have power to either suspend them or review their contract or something of that matter," Smith said.

Carter has been a lightning rod for criticism ever since he came to the 3,000-pupil district in the summer of 2001. Whether it was his pink-slipping of classified employees or his proposal to eliminate the district's driver-education program, Carter became the target of parents who thought the administration had strayed from its primary focus.

"We have seen monies spent in ways other than to improve our children's education," Lovell said. "The library in one of our elementary schools is closed half of the time because it has a part-time librarian."

But others found much to praise. Cane Ridge Elementary School Principal Bill Fooks wrote in a statement that Carter had academic coaches paid on par with athletic coaches, took steps to improve teacher training and mentoring, and improved the maintenance of buildings and grounds.

"Mr. Carter showed great vision and leadership. He cared about kids. Everything he did was focused toward improving student achievement," Fooks wrote.

Summay said Carter was tired of the continuous unfavorable publicity and second-guessing.

"There are personal vendettas against this man and they have sworn to get rid of him," Summay said. "I can't tell you those names because I can't get myself in trouble."

Board member Short said Carter, who lives in Bourbon County during the week, plans to move back to Prestonsburg.

Carter, a former Army colonel, was the first superintendent in the state to be alternatively certified under a program that encourages people of non-traditional backgrounds to become educators. Lovell said that might have been part of the problem.

"It's my intention to contact my legislator and ask them to look at that program," Lovell said. "We had a fellow who came in here, retired military, with no education background whatsoever ... and without that experience, tried to run a school system. He wasn't equipped for it."

Summay said she anticipates that the board will name Assistant Superintendent Orin Simmerman as interim superintendent this month.

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Arnold "Woodrow" Carter was hired under a program to bring people with non-traditional backgrounds into education.

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