

Herald News: Evans' renewal means stability

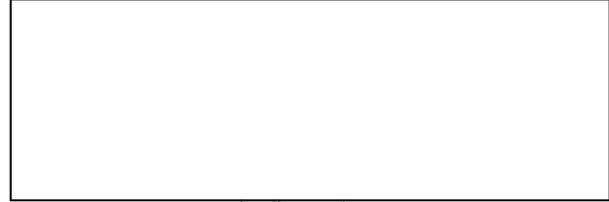
Sunday, July 22, 2012

THE [Paterson](#) school system is long on hardship and short on success.

Two decades of state control and five schools superintendents in nine years have yielded only a 64 percent graduation rate and six of the lowest-performing schools in the state.

The most recent upset looked to be the revolving-door exit of Donnie Evans, the current superintendent, before his school reforms could bear any fruit. Evans got the news last September that rather than being told whether his three-year contract would expire or be renewed this summer, he was being offered an interim one-year contract with distinct benchmarks. It was a measured approach, better than firing Evans, but heavy with the possibility of future disappointment.

Those in Evans' corner, including this page,



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held our breaths. Evans has been accessible, accountable and, from all appearances, committed to providing the children of [Paterson](#) with a better education than they currently receive. In a smart move, the state Department of Education announced last week that it would extend the superintendent's contract for another three years. Good news, indeed.

The district desperately needs stability. And enough time to find out if Evans can steer the ship in the right direction.

It takes five to eight years of consistent implementation for educational strategies to work. Students in [Paterson](#) have not had that kind of stability since 2004, when then-Schools Superintendent Edwin Duroy resigned amid the Schools Construction Corps scandal, in which millions of dollars earmarked for building schools went missing. Duroy's tenure lasted six years. But that was not the kind of stability the students needed.

Evans has been busy since he came to town.

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He carved up Eastside and John F. Kennedy high schools into smaller academies. He has suggested closing some schools and reopening them with new teachers and administrators. He has worked to put the right people in the right jobs. For the first time, elementary school students are attending summer school in an effort to stamp out social promotion. And Evans is instituting a system to evaluate teachers and take them out of the classroom if necessary.

That's a lot. And there is a lot more to do to pull the system up from the lower ranks.

The [Paterson](#) Education Fund, a non-profit school advocacy group, backed Evans' reappointment, and President Irene Sterling has a list of things she thinks the superintendent has done right. But smoothing out the disparity in school resources – from technology to supplies — needs to happen sooner rather than later. Top on that list this time of year is air conditioning. Some elementary school students attending summer classes have the luxury of spending their days in air-conditioned buildings, others don't. So much for concentration, if a child has to sit in 90-degree heat hours on end. And so much for well-functioning computers.

The state has wisely entrusted the welfare of



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[Paterson](#) students to Evans for another three years. Now Evans needs to deliver.