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Amherst middle school principal resigns

By **CATHERINE BAUM**
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AMHERST - After one year on the job, Glenda Cresto resigned Monday as principal of Amherst Regional Middle School because she said she was not a "good fit" for the position, according to schools superintendent Alberto Rodriguez.

"It did catch us off guard a little bit," said Rodriguez, who accepted Cresto's resignation Monday. "She felt she wasn't being as effective as she could be. I sadly accepted her resignation and that's where we are."

Rodriguez, who is himself in his first year on the job, said he hopes to form a search committee and fill the principal position by the end of the school year, with plans to advertise the post in the coming months. In the meantime, high school principal Mark Jackson will take on the additional role of middle school principal. In addition, Michael Hayes, who was interim principal before Cresto's hiring, will put off his work on the mathematics curriculum in the central office to serve as senior assistant principal of the middle school. And teacher Diane Chamberlain will become temporary assistant principal at the high school, while someone else will be assigned to her class, Rodriguez said.

"At this particular time these are the folks that I think need to be in these positions, but this could very well change within a week to two or three weeks," Rodriguez said. "This is not etched in stone."

A 'very challenging year'

Cresto, who was hired in April 2008, had an extraordinary experience in Amherst, according to school officials. She had never been a school principal before, and, upon being hired, she worked with five superintendents in 13 months. She also started the current school year with one assistant principal instead of two due to budget cuts.

"It's been a very challenging year in the Amherst district," said Catherine Sanderson, vice chairwoman of the regional school committee.

Also, since school opened its doors Thursday, seventh- and eighth-grade students have faced glitches in their schedules. Sanderson said the schedule problems would be sorted out "momentarily," possibly by today.

Formerly an educator in Boston, Cresto had numerous bosses in Amherst. Former superintendent Jere Hochman worked with Cresto for a couple of months before he resigned in June 2008. Helen Vivian and Alton Sprague picked up where Hochman left off as interim co- superintendents until the married couple resigned in February 2009. Maria Geryk, who had been director of student services for six years, completed their term ending June 30. Finally, Rodriguez was Cresto's boss July 1 to Aug. 31.

"I think she needed a more consistent mentorship," Sanderson said. Sanderson added she is "regretful" the district didn't provide her more support and guidance during her time here.

She "was a good hire," Sanderson said. "I have a lot of respect for Glenda and the work she did."

Specifically, Sanderson commended Cresto for her commitment to communication, responsiveness

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and transparency to parents and students. Cresto also aimed to increase English, literacy and writing skills in middle school students, and last year brought in a poet who was well received by students, Sanderson said.

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