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Easthampton schools chief announces she'll retire June 30

By **CATHERINE BAUM**
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EASTHAMPTON - After 28 years in education, Easthampton School Superintendent Deborah Carter will retire June 30.

Carter served as Easthampton High School principal from 1998 to 2001 and returned to the district as superintendent in 2004.

An active Girl Scout in her youth and young adult life, Carter, 59, said one of the lessons she learned in camping is always to leave the campsite better than you found it. She said she carried that philosophy with her in Easthampton.

"I believe my legacy here is I will have left the school system better than I found it," she said. "I give the majority of that credit to people I've worked with and the community. The team effort is really what makes a difference. You can't do this stuff by yourself."

The search for a new superintendent will begin next month. A committee of teachers, parents, community members and school administrators will initiate the search, assisted by a hired consultant, according to chairman Thomas Brown. The committee's goal is to identify Carter's successor by April, Brown added.

"I think she leaves the district in a great position to move forward with whatever candidate might be selected to take her place," said Brown, who was a member of the School Committee that voted to hire Carter. "I'm elated for the district that we were able to have her for six years. A lot of people will tell you that in superintendent life that's an eternity."

Carter's three-year contract is up June 30. Her salary is \$121,000.

Included in the contract is a clause in which the School Committee may request Carter accept a one-year extension to her contract. The committee unanimously approved the request - a move Brown calls a "vote of confidence" - but Carter respectfully declined.

"I want to enjoy retirement with my husband while I'm in good health," Carter said. "It's a quality of life thing."

Carter left her principalship at Easthampton High in 2001 to become principal of Hoosac Valley Regional High School in Cheshire. She returned to Easthampton to replace former Superintendent John F. Cullinan, who retired after six years on the job.

"She came when funding was just starting to be squeezed because of the recessions in the early



DEBORAH CARTER



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2000s. Unfortunately she's leaving and we haven't recovered from that," said Mayor Michael A. Tautznik.

Budget woes and meeting increasingly demanding state and federal mandates have been the biggest challenge for Carter, she said, while an interactive and cooperative faculty and staff, student body and parent community have been the highlight in her tenure here.

"I have really enjoyed working in Easthampton," Carter said. "It's a great little community."

Carter's responsibilities shifted quite a bit when she stepped on as superintendent, Tautznik said, but she received it well.

"When you're an administrator you don't really see the city side. There's a whole unique other side to the financing that as a superintendent you have to understand," Tautznik said. "It was a bit of a learning curve, but she picked it up quickly."

In addition to budget work, Carter worked with her administrative team on following the district's strategic plan, improving parent and community involvement and aligning the curriculum to meet state standards and to meet consistency across the district, providing students with smooth transitions when they transfer schools. She has served on the School Building Committee, which is in the process of overseeing an approximate \$40 million school building project at the high school. Brown and Tautznik said one of her strengths is her management style and teamwork.

"She has a very good way of working with the unionized employees," said Tautznik, who sits on the School Committee. "We've been able to use that ability in a way that helped us settle some pretty unique issues during her tenure that can be thorny at times."

Robert Orlando, principal for Pepin and Center Elementary schools, said Carter has helped him since he started three years ago.

"An elementary school principal has no assistants ... the first day of work you have to step in and take it away," Orlando said. "Things can't wait for you to learn how to do them, so it's important to have the support of someone in the district. She's personally given me a lot of support." Carter said she plans to move from her country home in Windsor to spend her retirement in Florida with her husband, John Carter.

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