

# Acting Mass. education commissioner selected as superintendent for Penn. district

By [Christopher Huffaker](#) Globe Staff, Updated February 21, 2025, 9:02 p.m.



EVERETT,, MA - 2/27/2024:RussellJohnston..... New interim Massachusetts State Education Commissioner, Russell Johnston got a round of applause on his appointment. (David L Ryan/Globe Staff ) SECTION: METRO DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

The acting chief of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary

Education has been selected as the new superintendent of a Pennsylvania school district, the district announced Friday.

[Interim Commissioner Russell Johnston](#), who has led the department for most of a year, was picked to lead the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District, in the Philadelphia suburbs.

The district's school board is expected to vote Monday to award him a five-year contract beginning May 1, [according to a news release](#).

Johnston was [named acting chief](#) of Massachusetts public schools last February after Jeffrey Riley announced he was [stepping down from the post](#). Johnston, a longtime special education official, has been with the state government for a decade, including a stint as the interim receiver for Southbridge Public Schools, where he was temporarily charged with turning around the struggling district.

The state school board is in the midst of a search for a new permanent commissioner, but Johnston said publicly he was [not applying for the role](#).

Previously, Johnston also served as superintendent of West Springfield Public Schools and worked as a special education teacher and director.

“It is my great honor to join the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District, and I am energized to join a school community that is so committed to excellent and equitable learning opportunities for all students,” Johnston said in a statement. “I am particularly drawn to the District’s strong focus on academic excellence, as well as an emphasis on fine arts and co-curricular activities. I am also eager to support the District’s work in ensuring every student, without exception, is

provided the opportunities and support needed to succeed.”

Johnston was selected following a six-month national search, according to the news release.

In a statement, Wallingford-Swarthmore School Board President Kevin Henry said the board believes Johnston is “a strong listener who values feedback and transparency, and who understands the importance of considering multiple viewpoints.”

“Dr. Johnston is known by colleagues as a genuine and very capable leader who is deeply committed to education for all students,” Henry said. “Dr. Johnston has a demonstrated history of compassionate and responsive leadership, combined with a sophisticated understanding of educational systems that we believe will greatly benefit our school district.”

The Massachusetts board of education is due to hear an update on the state’s commissioner search at [its meeting Monday](#).

Alana Davidson, communications director for the state Executive Office of Education, said in email Friday night that state officials will have “more information to share” about the commissioner search at Monday’s meeting.

*Correspondent Adam Sennott contributed to this report.*

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Christopher Huffaker can be reached at [christopher.huffaker@globe.com](mailto:christopher.huffaker@globe.com). Follow him [@huffakingit](#).



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