Dartez first black to head St. Landry schools

By Timothy Beacham
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OPELOUSAS — The St. Landry Parish School Board Thursday, in a controversial move, bypassed three applicants and selected someone who chose not to apply as its next school superintendent.

Andrew Dartez, who serves as assistant superintendent, was approved by a slim, 7-6 vote. Dartez, who was nominated by white board member Jerry Domegeaux, will become the parish’s first black superintendent.

District 4 board member Dillard “Butch” Deville, who opposed the motion, felt that the abandonment of the application appointing process sent the wrong message to the community and placed “the credibility of the school system at stake” as well as making it difficult to muster state support.

First-term board member Armand Castille, who represents District 9, said the board’s action was counter-productive since Dartez had indicated he had no interest in the position and did not apply.

Opposition also came from District 12 representative Clifton Clause Jr. who said that this form of choosing the superintendent was a disservice to the community as it was “more important to go through the regular application process.”

Even though he disagreed with the process, Clause admitted after the vote that he was “very comfortable with the decision” to appoint Dartez.

Domegeaux, who said he felt compelled to push for Dartez’s appointment because he “was not comfortable with the three candidates who had applied for the position,” said that “Dartez had shown leadership within the system” and felt positive that he (Dartez) would be able to further lead the school board in a positive direction.

Quincy Richard of District 10 said that he was “happy for the opportunity to take part in this history-making event as he (Dartez) is the first black superintendent in the history of St. Landry Parish.” Richard also said that he was not surprised with the motion to appoint Dartez, but was astonished that it went through.

Dartez, who refused to comment on why he had not applied for the position, is a graduate of the College of Santa Fe, New Mexico. He has spent the last 34 years within the St. Landry Parish school system, teaching and coaching basketball at Holy Ghost, J.S. Clark High School and Opelousas High School, where he served as assistant principal. In 1988, he became the head principal for East Junior High School where he remained until 1994 when he was appointed assistant superintendent.

Of his elevation to the position of superintendent, Dartez said that he was greatly surprised with Domegeaux’s motion to appoint him. Although he considered applying for the position, he was “not totally sold on the idea” as he did not feel he had a chance of getting the job.

Dartez said that in addition to working closely with teachers and board members, he looked forward to the continued implementation of computers and other technological advances within the schools. He also said that he felt he had the support of the community behind him and hoped that the board could come together with him for the good of the system.

Superintendent Raymond Fontenot, who announced his retirement plans in November, could remain in his position until June 30, but said he would turn over responsibilities to Dartez immediately, staying as long as the new superintendent needs him.