



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

File #: 22-2388, Version: 1

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

HONORING THE WORK AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF SUPERINTENDENT ERIC WITHERSPOON

WHEREAS, Eric Witherspoon, superintendent of Evanston Township High School District 202 since July 2006, will retire at the end of the 2021-22 school year; and

WHEREAS, a lifelong educator, Witherspoon has served as a school superintendent for more than 30 years. He began his career as a high school English teacher and was previously a director of a high school gifted education program, assistant principal, acting principal, and assistant superintendent. Prior to coming to Evanston, he was a school superintendent in Iowa and Indiana. He was named Iowa Superintendent of the Year in 2001-02. During his tenure at ETHS, Witherspoon received several contract extensions from the Board of Education; and

WHEREAS, equity and anti-racism were the hallmarks and foundation of his superintendency. Witherspoon led the de-tracking and restructuring of the freshman experience and the acclaimed earned honors model that increased rigor and expectations for all ETHS students. Academic performance increased and enrollment in Advanced Placement courses grew, particularly among students of color. Over the years, the earned honors model, which benefits all students, has been expanded to most courses throughout the school; and

WHEREAS, as part of his push for equity in education, Witherspoon worked alongside ETHS staff and board members to develop and implement the district's equity initiatives. Professional development and training for staff were developed through an equity lens to facilitate conversations about race and identity while re-examining policies, procedures, and practices; and

WHEREAS, ETHS saw an increase in academic achievement and graduation rates under Witherspoon's leadership. During his tenure, ACT results at ETHS reached the highest in the history of ETHS for nine consecutive years. With a focus on career and college readiness, opportunities for students have expanded to prepare them for life after high school. ETHS also invested in alternative school and therapeutic day school programs to increase student success in supportive settings while reducing obstacles to progress; and

WHEREAS, ETHS has been consistently recognized by *U.S. News and World Reports* and *The Washington Post* as ranking in the top 2-3% of all ranked high schools in the nation. The College Board also named ETHS one of the eight Inspiration Schools in America; and

WHEREAS, implementation of strategies led by Witherspoon will help to ensure that ETHS District 202 continues to demonstrate growth in key areas: curricula and academic supports, programs and services that include social/emotional supports, partnerships and collaborations with Northwestern University and Evanston Cradle to Career, and the Joint Achievement Report with the elementary Evanston/Skokie School District 65; and

WHEREAS, Witherspoon led the district through a global pandemic. Focusing on the health and safety of the ETHS community in a rapidly changing environment, he remained vigilant to offer high quality remote instruction during one of the most challenging times in the district's history. Overseeing new and innovative ways to educate students, Witherspoon helped ensure that the stakeholders were informed as the district prioritized the safe reopening of the school; and

WHEREAS, ETHS reached significant milestones under his careful guidance and decision-making, providing consistent

fiscal strength and responsibility during challenging economic times in Illinois. The district achieved a balanced budget every year during his tenure, annually winning the top national budget and accounting awards and receiving the coveted AAA bond rating; and

WHEREAS, striking the balance between preserving the historic architecture of ETHS and creating a 21st-Century learning environment, Witherspoon ensured that facility upgrades and long-term strategic initiatives would benefit students for decades to come. By careful fiscal planning and partnering with the efforts of the ETHS Foundation and Alumni Association, he focused on students having access to unprecedented resources and facility upgrades. These include a Geometry in Construction site, science research center, literacy lab, science labs, planetarium, wellness center, athletics and physical education spaces, Central Library, entrepreneurship center, the Hub student success center, labs for auto technology, advanced manufacturing, and engineering, and auditorium upgrades, along with increased energy efficiency, and other improvements. Developments in technology and communications (Google for Education Reference District, 1:1 Digital Initiative, mobile app, branding and signage, and school website) have also made ETHS a model school district; and

WHEREAS, Witherspoon is widely known for being student-centered. A highly visible leader at ETHS, Witherspoon regularly connected with students, including at the start and end of the school day. Most days, he spoke with students in cafeterias and attended school events. With a steadfast focus on serving the needs of all students, Witherspoon also worked with community leaders and local organizations to increase community involvement and mobilize efforts that amplify student voice; and

WHEREAS, Witherspoon began his daily announcements with “It’s a great day to be a Wildkit!” This was more than just a saying for him as he embraced whole heartedly the special meaning of being part of the ETHS community; and

WHEREAS, Pat Savage-Williams, president of the ETHS District 202 Board observed “ETHS and the Evanston community have been so fortunate to have Dr. Witherspoon as our superintendent for the past 16 years. His leadership, his compassion, and his positive impact on ETHS have set the tone for this amazing school district. It has been an honor for the Board of Education to work alongside Dr. Witherspoon. He is incredibly dedicated to our students, staff, and community.”

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners of Cook County, on behalf of the 5.2 million residents of Cook County, honors the work and contributions of Superintendent Eric Witherspoon, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions he made to the Citizens of Cook County, Illinois; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a suitable copy of this Resolution be spread upon the official proceedings of this Honorable Body and that an official copy of same be tendered to Superintendent Eric Witherspoon and to Evanston Township High School community.