

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Ronald Shubert elected president of Williamsville School Board

By Denise Jewell Gee | News Staff Reporter | on July 2, 2015 - 12:49 PM

A divided Williamsville School Board chose a longtime board member as its president Wednesday as it swore in new board members and agreed to resume monthly visits to all of the district's schools.

New President Ronald S. Shubert pledged to focus on improving relationships among district stakeholders as he leads the School Board for the third time in his 15-year stint on the board.

Shubert, a partner with Phillips Lytle, previously served as president of the Williamsville board through a difficult school redistricting period more than a decade ago.

"Although it became very contentious and a difficult time for all nine board members, we made it through," Shubert told the board before the vote. "If elected, I will work hard to improve relations with all stakeholders and my fellow board members so that Williamsville will continue to be a district that we can be proud of."

Board members also selected new board member Shawn Lemay, a local business owner, as vice president.

Shubert and Lemay were elected with a split vote, with two board members, Mark Mecca and Toni Vazquez, voting against them and two other board members, Carrie Kahn and Mohan Devgun, abstaining.

"This past May, our community voted overwhelmingly for change," said Vazquez, who was sworn in to her second term Wednesday and who had also sought to be president. "It is only fitting that we respond to those requests appropriately and not continue with the status quo."

In addition to Vazquez, Lemay and Mecca were sworn in to their first terms on the School Board on Wednesday. All three were elected by voters in May with the help of endorsements from the Williamsville Teachers Association, which has repeatedly expressed concerns about the way the School Board has handled complaints about Superintendent Scott Martzloff's leadership.

"We're hoping that, with the additional two board members, that the board will start to ask some questions and to look critically at what's going on in the district and see if they can find some solutions," Williamsville Teachers Association President Michelle Licht said prior to Wednesday's meeting.

The School Board on Wednesday also took steps toward addressing two complaints about its policies. The board agreed to resume monthly visits with staff at schools and to explore ways to ensure late-night board meetings are recorded. The board has been criticized for failing to broadcast video of late-night votes on controversial issues after lengthy closed-door sessions.

The board, however, was unable to make the change before it met in an executive session closed to the public on Wednesday to discuss an unspecified legal matter.

Board members later returned from the executive session and voted unanimously to continue to pay the district's assistant superintendent for human resources, Kim Kirsch, who has been on paid administrative leave as the district sought to fire her. A hearing on the charges against Kirsch, who is a tenured employee, is on-going.