

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Local

Rhee to resign as D.C. schools chief

[\[Print\]](#) [\[Email\]](#)[Share](#)

By: [Lisa Gartner](#)
Examiner Staff Writer
October 12, 2010

Michelle Rhee will resign as chancellor of D.C. Public Schools at the end of October.

The reformist schools chief will announce her resignation at a Wednesday morning news conference with presumptive Mayor-elect Vincent Gray and Mayor Adrian Fenty, and Deputy Chancellor Kaya Henderson will be named interim chancellor, according to sources close to Rhee.

Rhee was appointed in 2007 by Fenty, who allowed her freedom to exercise reforms unseen in the District's historically failing public school system. The new contract Rhee negotiated with the Washington Teachers' Union in June

effectively eliminated tenure and allowed her to fire about 241 teachers, including 165 who received poor appraisals under a new evaluation system. She also fired principals and closed chronically underperforming schools.

Her take-no-prisoners approach earned Rhee the respect of many fed up with the system and a title line in Paramount Pictures' documentary "Waiting for 'Superman,'" which explores broken school systems and paints Rhee as a heroine of reform. Her efforts also bore the first enrollment increase for D.C. Public Schools since the 1970s.

But her actions incensed the teachers union, whose national union threw \$1 million at D.C. Council Chairman Vincent Gray's campaign, and the Democratic mayoral primary became a referendum on Rhee's reforms, with many voting against Fenty because they sided with the teachers.

Washington Teachers' Union President George Parker said Henderson was his chief liaison during the contract negotiations. "Michelle clearly had somewhat of an abrasive, somewhat cold personality, but Kaya is more collaborative and maybe takes a humanistic approach," Parker said.

Rhee "had a critical approach of the unions that I think was overkill," he said.

Henderson was appointed alongside Rhee three years ago and has cooperated in her reform efforts. But sources say there are important differences between the two: Henderson is a friend to the union and is African-American. Critics often called out Fenty for appointing mostly white and Asian officials to his top

posts.

Neal McCluskey, associate director of the Cato Institute's Center for Education Freedom, said that if Gray decided to keep Henderson on, residents could expect "a significant change in the tenor of education reform."

"If she's closer to the unions, then that suggests there's going to be a pretty significant change of policy," he said.

Robert Bobb, former president of the D.C. school board and former city administrator, said Henderson is "very smart, knows her way around the District, and understands education reform."

Before being named deputy chancellor, Henderson was vice president for strategic partnerships at the New Teacher Project, which Rhee established in 1997. She also created the D.C. Teaching Fellows program and worked in executive positions with Teach for America.

"She's tough-minded, and from what I've seen she's capable of holding people accountable without crushing them," Bobb said.

The description runs contrary to Gray's criticisms of Rhee while he served as D.C. Council chairman, famously saying education reform "has to be about more than one person" and depicting Rhee as uncollaborative and autocratic.

For her part, Rhee campaigned for Fenty as a private citizen and called his loss to Gray "devastating" for D.C.'s schoolchildren.

Rhee and Gray met in a closed-door meeting Sept. 23, but said they did not discuss whether Rhee would stay. Political consultant Chuck Thies said Henderson's appointment is an expected "passing of the torch," but viewed her appointment as a temporary solution because Gray is unable to begin an official search until after the Nov. 2 general election.

"That doesn't mean Henderson doesn't have a shot at this job," Thies said, "but I think we'll see a search for a new chancellor."

lgartner@washingtonexaminer.com

More from Lisa Gartner

- [Ever wanted to name a school? You can in Prince William](#)
- [College dropouts cost taxpayers millions](#)
- [MontCo schools expecting enrollment to jump by 10,000](#)
- [Rhee leaving as D.C. schools chancellor](#)
- [Rhee to resign as D.C. schools chief](#)

Topics

[Lisa Gartner](#)

