



HFCC President Gail Mee

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DEARBORN — As the search gears up for replacing Henry Ford Community College President Gail Mee, her current contract guarantees she will receive an extra year's pay after she finishes her work at the school.

The board approved the new contract on May 21 knowing it would be looking for a new president. Earlier contracts did not include a severance.

The latest contract has Mee staying until Dec. 31, although the board can then ask to extend the contract. In that case, Mee would need to be paid at least through the end of March and would need 60 days notice before the end of her employment. Both sides would have to agree if she is going to stay past next June.

She is being paid \$181,438 this year as her base salary and will get that amount as a severance.

"Within three months after her employment terminates, the college will pay Dr. Mee the gross sum of \$181,438," the contract reads.

Board President Mary Lane said the severance ensures Dr. Mee will stay until her replacement is ready.

"We did not know how long we were going to need her. We thought the process would take time to get a new national candidate," Lane said. Five months after Mee announced she was leaving the board has hired a search firm but has yet to finalize the search committee.

The board did not want to appoint interim presidents, if possible, but also did not want to rush the hunt for Mee's replacement, Lane said.

"We knew it was one of our most important responsibilities," Lane said of hiring a new president.

Mee announced she would be leaving the school the night the board approved her new contract. The agreement, which was retroactive to January of this year and will continue through December, says the college will seek a new president during that time.

Mee said she is ready for a change.

"It's very intense and very demanding, and I think perhaps it's time I did some other things," she said.

Before the May contract, the board had not approved a new contract for Mee since 2008. That contract said it would run until June 30, 2011.

Trustee James Schoolmaster, also an attorney, said the contract renewed on its own every year.

"If you take no action on it, it automatically renews," he said.

Still, the board had approved similar contracts in 2006, when Mee came, and again in 2007 and 2008.

Lane said she could not remember why the board had not updated the contract in almost four years until the severance agreement was approved.

Schoolmaster said because the contract renewed automatically, there was no need to approve a new one unless something needed to be changed, typically salary.

"Because of the fact there's been no money we've not changed the contract," he said.

HFCC Vice President and Controller Marjorie Swan said the previous president received a similar severance amount and vice presidents that left under that president received about half that amount.

Faculty that retired last summer received a severance of \$65,000, Swan said.

Reviews not available

For Mee, her first three contracts were all for three years and said she would annually receive the same percentage increase in salary that was granted that year to exempt full-time administrators, assuming she had a favorable

performance review.

Mee's personnel file does not include any performance reviews for her six years at the HFCC.

"We don't do written reviews because they are FOIAable," Schoolmaster said.

Any reviews would have been a public record under the Freedom of Information Act.

Lane was not able to recall if the board did written or oral reviews.

"Her performance review has always been publicly revealed. There's always pros and cons with a performance review," Lane said, although later she said she could not recall if the board had issued any statements about Mee's evaluation. Mee's earlier contracts called for reviews before June 30 of each year.

Other contract provisions include the college putting \$10,000 in an annuity, contributing to the state retirement fund for her, allotting \$700 a month in expenses, and providing a leased car, cell phone and laptop. The 2007 and

2008 contracts also gave her an annual bonus of at least \$5,000. The first contract in 2006 agreed to pay moving expenses up to that amount.

This May's contract with her severance also says she will be paid \$10,630 for unused vacation days through the end of last year and will get \$212.50 per unused sick day when she leaves. She had 59 days saved (\$12,538 worth) when the contract was signed.

The final contract also includes a severance agreement that Mee will not "bring any lawsuit, charge, complaint or grievance" against the college.

Search continues

Trustees are working with consultants R.H. Perry & Associates on the search.

Faculty, staff, trustees and community members will be part of the search committee. Community members who would like to participate can go the college's Web site and find a form to ask to join the committee at http://www.hfcc.edu/documents/committee_nomination_form_for_2012_prez_search.pdf. Forms should be returned by Friday, Oct. 19, at 4:30 p.m. The board will pick names the following Monday.

Then on Tuesday, Oct. 23, a day of informational forums will be held at the Administrative Services and Conference Center on the main campus. Different groups have been assigned different times as the college works to get input from various stakeholders.

Community members may attend from 7:30 to 9 a.m. or from 7 to 9 p.m.; faculty from 9:30 to 11:30; support and exempt staff from 11:30 to 1 p.m., cabinet members from 2 to 3, students from 3:30 to 5 and administrators from 5:30 to 7 p.m. For more information, people are encouraged to contact Cynthia Eschenburg at the college at 313-845-9821.

A press release from the college said Dr. Mee plans to retire on Dec. 31, but Lane said the board will likely ask to have that extended before the Nov. 1 deadline.

During Mee's time there, HFCC has seen dramatic growth, climbing to 18,000 students. The college has also created a

second campus with a new building for the nursing school, acquired the adjoining Society of Manufacturing Engineers building, and will soon reveal a revamped science building.

Mee started her career in 1969 as an adjunct math instructor at Ladycliff College in Highland Falls, NY. From 1976 to 1992, she worked at Orange County Community College in Middletown, NY. In 1996, she received her doctorate in education from Columbia University. She spent 14 years at Mesa Community College in Arizona, the last nine as vice president of academic affairs, before she came to HFCC.

For now, the board is working on the timeline to get a new president in place.

“We are looking forward to the process and are hoping it’s going to go smoothly,” Lane said.

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mdalbano3701

This high severance pay is typical of special treatment that should be ended in the future. Dearborn Public School taxpayers fund HFCC, and our DPS Board oversees HFCC. With DPS and the City of Dearborn bleeding red ink every year for quite some time, and cutting services,, these sweetheart deals MUST end!!! City and school taxpayers should be outraged, as I am.

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