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Palomar College board picks firm to conduct search for new president

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SAN MARCOS — The Palomar Community College District Governing Board has selected a firm to lead the school's search for a new president.

The board voted unanimously last week to pay about \$50,000 to PPL, a search firm that specializes in finding leaders for community colleges.

"Given the obvious place that this board is, I think it's probably a good idea to have the outside firm shepherd us through the whole process and not place additional burden on our staff," Trustee Roberto Rodriguez said before the vote.

The search comes at a time when the school community has struggled with disagreements over diversity-related policies and procedures.

The governing board voted 3-2 last year to eliminate an anti-racism policy and remove land acknowledgments from meetings, moves some school employees and students have criticized.

"We have a governing board majority that is intent on raising the temperature on campus by fighting a culture war," said Lawrence Hamilton Lawson, co-president of the Palomar Faculty Federation and a professor of English as a second language.

Ultimately, the governing board will be responsible for selecting the school's next leader.

The unions that represent classified employees and faculty recently shared resolutions of no-confidence for the board majority of Holly Hamilton-Bleakley, Yvette Marie Acosta and Jacqueline Kaiser. The classified union didn't include Hamil-

ton-Bleakley in their resolution because leaders said she has made efforts to better understand the concerns of their members.

Now that a search firm is in place, the next steps will be for the board to approve a timeline and set the role and responsibilities of the search committee.

The college expects to have the new superintendent and president in place this fall.

Until then, Assistant Superintendent/Vice President of Instruction Tina Recalde will serve as interim superintendent and president. The board approved a contract Tuesday to pay Recalde a rate of \$314,505 a year in the role through June 30.

Two firms shared proposals to lead the search, but the trustees said they preferred PPL's approach. The basic

steps in the process involve forming a search committee, reaching out to the community to identify desired traits for a new leader, nationwide recruitment, application review, interviews and background checks.

PPL's Vice President David Viar told the trustees that the firm would work collaboratively each step of the way with the board, school employees and the broader community.

Palomar College's former superintendent and president, Star Rivera-Lacey left in November to become the Riverside Community College District's first deputy chancellor and provost.

Palomar College is based in San Marcos and has an enrollment of approximately 29,000 students with education centers in Escondido, Fallbrook and Rancho Bernardo.