

# Werden begins second term; *adds new Assistant Regional Superintendent to staff*

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On July 3, Madison County Regional Superintendent of Schools Robert “Rob” Werden was sworn in, officially starting his second term of office. The ceremony was held in the boardroom at the Madison County Administration Building.

Third District Circuit Judge Amy Maher administered Werden’s oath of office as his family stood with him. Madison County Clerk Linda Andreas was also on hand to welcome attendees, make introductions, and to facilitate the ceremony. A student representative from the local Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter led attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

During his remarks after taking his oath, Werden acknowledged a lengthy list of attendees and supporters that have been with him throughout his career. Among them: His wife Nancy, children Bobby and Remington, his three sisters, and his mother, who he noted as turning 90 this year and serving as the grand marshal of the annual Prairietown parade later this year.

Werden grew up in Madison County. He began his first term as the county’s regional superintendent in 2019. His career in education includes teaching agriculture classes in several rural school districts in the region, including Highland, Staunton, and Litchfield. His career culminated in him serving as the director of Madison County’s Career and Technical Education System prior to being elected to lead the Madison County ROE.

Two of his own teachers were also in attendance among the gathered supporters, as were former superintendents, other education and community representatives, and of course, members of the Regional Office of Education’s staff.

“In my first term, I was most proud of how we were able to navigate the COVID 19 pandemic,” Werden later told the Illinois Business Journal. “Our county had a unique perspective where we had different school districts take different approaches to dealing with all the rules and regulations from Springfield and D.C. We were able to see what was working and implement those changes to get students back in school as quickly and safely as possible. It was a difficult time, and we seemed to manage to anger everyone at least once, but we did the best we could with the limited understanding of the disease and mitigation protocols that came with it.

“Other programs of which I am proud that the Madison County Regional Office of Education provided in my first four years include our Give 30 mentoring program that grew to over 100 participants, our improved relations with both Lewis and Clark Community College and Southwestern Illinois Community College, our new addition of Construction Camp and History Camp added to the continuation of Ag Camp and Stem Camp, our work with local business and industry to get to know their needs and implement those needs into our schools’ curriculum, our work to keep PTELL from being implemented in our county, our work to try to bring a large scale athletic complex to our county, and our efforts to work with SIUE and others to try to improve recruitment of new teachers to the profession of educator,” Werden added.

As he moves forward in his second term, Werden says he hopes to continue providing top quality professional development to the county’s educators while also continuing the ROE’s “hugely popular” camps and improving its Youth Council.



Above: Madison County Regional Superintendent Rob Werden is sworn into his second term of office on July 3 by Third District Circuit Judge Amy Maher. His wife Nancy and children Bobby and Remington stand by as Judge Maher administers the oath. (Melissa Crockett Meske/Illinois Business Journal)

Right: Newly sworn-in Assistant Regional Superintendent Dr. Tricia Blackard shares remarks with those in attendance after taking her oath of office on July 3. (Melissa Crockett Meske/Illinois Business Journal)



“My vision for education in Madison County includes building better relations between parents, community members, and our school districts. We have great schools in our county, and they help attract people from across the country to our region to live and work here,” Werden said.

“Our schools need to listen to the community and business leaders who help fund the districts, and the community and business leaders need to listen to and understand all that is required to educate students in our modern society,” he added. “Most folks remember how things were when they graduated and look at education from that perspective, but times are different now and we all need to communicate with each other to better understand each other.”

Werden also noted that one of his main goals is “to facilitate that communication and understanding between all stakeholders in Madison County who play any role in the education of our students, from taxpayer to parent to teacher, and make our county a better place to live.”

Also sworn in at the July 3 ceremony was Dr. Tricia Blackard, who is the most recent addition to the ROE staff as Assistant Regional Superintendent. Previously, the position had been split between two retired administrators from the area, Cindy Gagich and Dave Elson.

Blackard has jumped in with both feet to fill the position that began for her on July 1. “I have been blessed to have spent my entire educational career between two districts in Madison County. Serving at the Regional Office of Education is

another way I can serve my community in a much larger sense,” she noted.

Blackard spent her early years traveling the country as a child of a military family; living in six different states before she turned twelve. After moving to the area, she completed her high school education at Triad High School in Troy. She graduated from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and began her teaching career at Alton High School where she worked in the classroom and administration for twelve years.

She then moved to the Collinsville School District where she was an assistant principal at Collinsville High School. Her most recent time was spent as the director of the Collinsville Area Vocational Center (CAVC).

When asked about her experiences, Blackard stated, “I truly feel the expansion of CAVC is one of my greatest accomplishments. When I took over after the previous director retired, CAVC served three schools and one of those stopped attending after my first year. When I left, we served nine schools.

“For too long we have focused exclusively on college as the only option for students,” she said further. “There are some incredibly bright and talented students who choose to enter the military, trade schools, or the workforce after high school. I am happy the culture is now recognizing the importance of multiple

paths to success. In my opinion, the most important indicator of success is the drive to work hard and never stop learning.”

Working with multiple districts within Madison County through CAVC provided Dr. Blackard with the experience of overseeing the three educational facilities run by the Regional Office of Education.

The Madison County ROE is responsible for the educational programs at the Madison County Detention Center, the educational program at Chestnut Health Systems, as well as the Regional Safe School Program which includes the Center for Educational Opportunities and the Educational Therapy Center.

Each of these programs serves a wide variety of students from across the county and beyond.

“Family is very important to me,” she noted. “I am fortunate enough that in addition to my husband and children, both of my parents, and one of my sisters lives within the Metro East area. My children, Dani and Blake, have been given amazing opportunities through their education in the Collinsville School District as well as CAVC. While I will miss my peers in Collinsville, for me moving to the Regional Office of Education has been like gaining a new family. Everyone who works for the ROE has a common purpose; to support the districts within the county by providing the best educational opportunities for all students.”