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## City councilman's sister wins school board seat

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Ask Kimberly Mitchell-Walker what she thinks of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board member she's replacing, and she'll tell you Vilma Leake did great things in her 11-year tenure.

But ask her to describe her own leadership style, and she sketches an approach in sharp contrast to the outspoken, combative brand of advocacy Leake employed on behalf low-income and minority students. Leake, who represented west and southwest Charlotte, won election to the county commission in November's elections. Tuesday night, the school board picked Mitchell-Walker to finish Leake's term.

"I will be assertive, not aggressive. I will be more of a doer, not a talker," she said. The voters in District 2 "want a different approach. Maybe a consensus builder or team player. A fresh new voice, someone young and energetic."

Mitchell-Walker, 40, is no stranger to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools or the political arena. She's a graduate of West Charlotte High and a senior administrative secretary at Plaza Road Pre-kindergarten Center. Her daughter is a freshman in West Charlotte High's International Baccalaureate program.

She is the younger sister of Charlotte City Council member James Mitchell. She has served as his campaign manager, as campaign manager for Eric Douglas of the Black Political Caucus, and as a campaign advisor for N.C. House Rep. Kelly Alexander Jr. She models herself after her brother, whom she described as an passionate public servant who has a "thick skin" when it comes to criticism.

"I know how the political process works," she said. "I realize it's not personal. It's business."

Asked what she sees as the major challenges facing the schools, she said the slumping economy, the achievement gap between middle-class and poor children, and student-assignment policies. She said she'd be open to considering Wake County's assignment system, which buses children to keep each school's percentage of poor children from rising too high.

Mitchell-Walker plans to run for a full term later this year when the seat comes up for reelection. She is resigning her CMS secretarial job, exchanging a \$32,469 annual salary for the \$16,687 a school board member makes. She said her husband, a shift leader at Siemens Westinghouse in South Charlotte, supports her decision.

"I've prayed about it with my family," she said. "Financially, we would have to be conservative, but we would be OK."



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