

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Superintendent search begins

For the first time in more than two generations, the Pottstown School Board is seeking a superintendent from outside the district.

We will ask for public input at a special meeting 7 tonight in the Pottstown High School cafeteria (more on that shortly).

Going back to the appointment of Ray Feick in 1970, the school board had always promoted the current assistant superintendent to the top job, which meant the community knew what it was getting.

But no one in Pottstown has expressed interest in succeeding Dr. Jeff Sparagana, who will retire June 29.

The superintendent of schools and the borough manager are by far the two most powerful positions in Pottstown. Each controls a \$57 million budget, most of which comes from local tax dollars.

Legally, of course, the nine-member school board and the seven-member borough council oversee spending, but these people are average citizens, many with full-time jobs, and none has expertise in law, management, or finance. They rely almost completely on the recommendations of their top administrator.

Moreover, Pennsylvania law gives special protections to superinten-

dents, who must be given contracts of three to five years. Asking a superintendent to leave before his term is up is often difficult and expensive. For example, the Manheim Township School District in Lancaster County last month paid John Nodecker \$160,000 plus medical and retirement benefits to leave just 18 months into a four-year contract.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

On the other hand, a superintendent can resign or retire on a day's notice — as former Pottstown superintendent Reed Lindley did in 2012.

Last month, the Pottstown School Board asked the Montgomery County

Intermediate Unit, led by John George, to lead our superintendent search. The IU is doing this at no cost to Pottstown. We hope to interview candidates next month and appoint someone by May.

Dr. George will share the results of an online community survey at tonight's meeting and moderate a discussion in which members of the public can offer their thoughts as to the qualities we should seek in a new superintendent.

As a school board member, I am persuaded Dr. George is uniquely qualified to lead the search. He has a background in educational policy on a national level, served as head of special education for the Lancaster-Lebanon IU, was a superintendent of the Warwick School District in Lancaster County, and led the IU in Berks County before coming to Montgomery County in October 2014.

What is most impressive is his stewardship of the Reading School District as interim superintendent from January to June in 2014.

Reading is the fifth poorest school district in Pennsylvania and perhaps the most dysfunctional.

Reading had already gone through a slew of superintendents when it fired Carlinda Purcell in November 2013, two years into a five-year contract.

As head of the Berks IU, George volunteered to take over the district, where his team stabilized its finances and led a successful search for a new superintendent.

Choosing a superintendent from the outside requires a huge leap of faith — and I believe Dr. George maximizes our chances of finding a good person.



John George, director of the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, will lead our search.