

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Superintendent search won't be easy

In a public forum last week, the Pottstown School Board reviewed the results of an on-line survey about the qualities the public seeks in a new superintendent to replace Jeff Sparagana, who is retiring June 29.

The school district received 16 applications which the school board will study this week with John George, director of the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, who is leading our search.

A first round of interviews will begin next week.

This is the first time in more than two generations that the school board will seek a candidate from outside the district. Going back to 1970, the school board always promoted someone from within.

We feel reassured by the assistance of Dr. George. He has a vast reservoir of experience and considerable knowledge of candidates in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

But nothing is guaranteed. There's always a substantial element of risk in choosing an unfamiliar candidate.

Three years ago, the chief of people operations at Google, perhaps the most analytical company on the planet, told *The New York Times* that interviews are not much better than guesswork:

Years ago, we did a study to determine whether anyone at Google is particularly good at hiring. We looked at tens of thousands of interviews, and everyone who had done the interviews and what they scored the candidate, and how that person ultimately performed in their job. We found zero relationship. It's a complete random mess, except for one guy who was highly predictive because he only interviewed people for a very specialized area, where he happened to be the world's leading expert.

The Google executive described various ways the company is trying to improve interviews and identify leaders, but there is no easy answer.

I've talked to several Pottstown principals about hiring teachers, and they likewise feel that interviews are anything but surefire in predicting classroom success.

A candidate can have outstanding qualifications on paper, and give a great interview, and do an outstanding sample lesson, but still fail in the classroom. As many as a third of the candidates hired don't pan out, I've been told.

One thing is for sure. We're never going to replace Dr. Sparagana. Officially, Jeff has been superintendent for less than four years. Unofficially, as

former director of education and human resources, he has been the glue keeping the district together for the last decade. He knows everyone in the district and had a hand in hiring most of our professional employees.

He's displayed integrity and consistency and won respect with his unflagging work ethic. It's going to take a new person a long time to become acclimated to Pottstown and win the confidence of the staff and the community.

This means we will need to rely more than ever on the people we already have in place — especially our principals and teachers.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

"Google is not just a company, it is an entirely new way of thinking. Jarvis has done something really important: extend that approach to business and culture, revealing just how revolutionary it is."

—CHRIS ANDERSON, author of *The Long Tail*

What
Would
Google
Do?