

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Superintendent search continues

Last week, the Pottstown School Board's personnel committee recommended the appointment of Stephen Rodriguez as acting superintendent while the board continues its search for a permanent superintendent.

Jeff Sparagana, our current superintendent, is retiring June 29. Dr. John George, director of the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, is leading our search.

Because of time constraints, we need to appoint an interim now. Mr. Rodriguez, our current director of human resources, has the credentials to be a superintendent, but he wants to stay where he is. He has offered to keep things going until a new superintendent is chosen.

Since we started our search in February, the school board has received applications from 20 candidates. We have interviewed nine and called back four for a second interview. We are still working through the process.

Long term commitment

Hiring a superintendent is a long-term commitment, and we want to do everything possible to ensure the success of the person we hire.

Pennsylvania law gives special protections to superintendents, 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, earlier this year the Manheim Township School District in Lancaster County paid John Nodecker \$160,000 plus medical and retirement benefits to leave just 18 months into a four-year contract.

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

Our greatest challenge is financial. For more than a decade, Pottstown has had among the highest taxes in Pennsylvania — higher than 95 percent of the state's 500 school districts.

Declining tax base

Our tax base has been steadily declining for years. Pottstown has more assessment appeals than any other municipality in Montgomery County. The school district will keep

its current tax rate for 2016-2017. Because our tax base has declined, however, we will receive about \$400,000 less in tax revenues this year than last year.

That's just the school district.

Our borough government, which serves the same residents and taxpayers as the school district, faces an estimated \$1.7 million deficit in 2017.

Finding a superintendent willing and able to deal with our financial challenges is not easy.

The school board has interviewed many candidates who are well versed in curriculum and instruction. We need some-

one with a strong financial background as well.

More time needed

I'm confident that with more time, we can find the right person. Dr. George has done a stellar job of seeking candidates for us, vetting them, and arranging interviews. He is committed to helping us for the duration.

Confident in our staff

While we continue our search, Mr. Rodriguez will have an excellent staff to back him up.

Because we have experienced principals and teachers, daily instruction should not be affected. But everyone will need to work harder than ever.

As the saying goes, the harder thing to do and the right thing to do are usually the same.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

