



July 24, 2009

Elgin set to search for interim superintendent

Hunt for permanent will take several months

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The Marion Star*

MARION - The timing of Superintendent Doug Ute's resignation is putting a bit of a time crunch on the Elgin Local Schools Board of Education, which voted on Wednesday to start the search for an interim superintendent.

The board accepted Ute's resignation effective Aug. 14 as he prepares to fill a position as superintendent of Newark City Schools, where he will succeed Keith Richards, who is resigning Aug. 1.

The Elgin board voted on Wednesday to contract with the North Central Ohio Educational Service Center to help search for an interim superintendent. Treasurer Kim Reynolds said the board has not taken any action yet towards searching for a superintendent.

"To do it right, it will be a several-month process," said Board President John Metcalf.

He said meanwhile preparations have to be made as building principals usually return to work about Aug. 1.

When asked if there's any current administrators who could serve as interim superintendent, Metcalf said the board had not heard of any interest among administrators. He said that the educational service center could take that into consideration if there is.

As far as qualities that would be desired in a new superintendent, Metcalf said the district foremost needs "someone excellent with the kids and the public, a good communicator." A strong understanding of school finances is also desired.

Ute has served as superintendent since 2000 when he succeeded Tim Hamilton, who was superintendent when the board hired Ute as Elgin High School principal in 1996.

At Wednesday's meeting Ute thanked the district's voters as he said "our community stepped up May 5 and passed a levy," a reference to the 0.75 percent income tax levy passed in May.

He also referred to staff cuts made in June, the second round of cuts made in two years, saying that Elgin isn't the only district that has faced cuts, and spoke about the state of school funding and how school districts will likely have to make some changes in the future.

"There are tough times ahead for Elgin," said Ute. "There are tough times ahead for all districts."

Ute's successor will have to help maneuver through changes in how the state funds schools as well

as deal with a declining student enrollment. Elgin, like all school districts in Marion County except for River Valley School District, has faced a declining enrollment as it lost 202 students over the past three years including 78 over the past year. Elgin receives about \$3,350 per student in basic state aid.

The communication skills desired by Metcalf would come in handy as the board may be coming back to voters as it considers partnering with the Ohio School Facilities Commission on a construction project that would consolidate all schools into one building on the current Elgin High School campus.

The state would pay about \$20 million of the \$35 million project and the district would have to pass a bond issue to fund the remaining \$15 million.