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By CATHARINE SCHAIDLE
of the Journal Star

Posted Nov 08, 2008 @ 12:45 AM

A Cedar Rapids, Iowa, administrator with a plan to implement student-centered learning practices will lead the Dunlap School District when Superintendent Jeanne Williamson retires at the end of the school year.

At a news conference Friday, School Board President Bruce Hay introduced Dr. J. Jay Marino, who will assume his new position July 1.

Hay said he is confident "our kids, teachers and the community will be very impressed with Dr. Marino."

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Marino received his bachelor's in elementary education from the University of Northern Iowa, a master's in educational administration from Arizona State University and a doctorate and educational specialist degree from Western Illinois University.

"To take a wonderful district and make it even better" is a challenge, Marino said.

Dunlap has built up a strong academic reputation, and families have been moving there in droves over the past five years. Its main challenge is its rapid growth, which Marino said "is a healthy sign of a good school district."

While the bulk of his experience has been in administration, Marino said he spent five years in the classroom teaching elementary and middle school students in Arizona.

He later took on the roles of elementary school administrator, special education coordinator, director of technology and director of instruction. He is assistant superintendent for learning and continuous improvement in the Cedar Rapids Community School District.

The Cedar Rapids district has 17,340 students, and the district's Web site said Marino worked with his superintendent to implement continuous improvement initiatives, used by businesses, to effect change across the board.

In particular, he referred to the shared-leadership strategy advocated by management training guru Stephen Covey.

"The best organizations are the best because they know they can be even better," Marino said. "I want to bring more people to the table with shared decisions."

Marino also discussed his philosophy of getting students to be actively involved in school by implementing student-centered initiatives.

"In a teacher-centered classroom there is very little input from the students, but when students are encouraged to give input, even on classroom rules, then they become actively engaged," he said.

The approach is effective among gifted students and "has been even more effective with struggling students," he said.

Marino plans to move to Dunlap with his wife, Laura, and their children, Jessica, 15 Joey, 13, Matthew, 2, and Grace, 12 weeks, after he completes his contract with the Cedar Rapids district.

Catharine Schaidle can be reached at 686-3290 or cschaidle@pjstar.com.

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