

A new superintendent can ask for little more

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Dunlap, Ill. -

When Jeanne Williamson took over the reigns of Dunlap School District from Bill Collier six years ago, there was a fleeting feeling of letdown.

It had nothing to do with Williamson's abilities. She was more than capable to step into that daunting position.

It was more about personality.

Collier is like an agreeable bull in a china shop. Williamson is the polar opposite of Collier. She is refined and quiet.

So, we can only guess what the feeling will be when Dr. Jay Marino steps in to replace Williamson in July.

Marino strikes us as somewhere in between Collier and Williamson in the personality department.

But, in the ability department, he seems to be on the same plateau as Collier and Williamson.

Both of the most recent Dunlap superintendents have helped their students head toward the pinnacle of educational success. Both have strived to be open with the public about their plans and be inclusive.

We get the same vibe from Marino.

Granted, one can only tell so much from a short visit, but Marino impressed in person and in a recent interview seeking to ferret out his educational philosophies.

There is a lot to like in what Marino had to say in this week's front-page story.

Marino strikes us as a plain talker. He can be forgiven for speaking a little too much in the vernacular of the institutional educator.

Vocabulary aside, Marino impressed us with his answers.

We especially liked his view of tackling student achievement in an already high-performing school district.

“In any system, there are opportunities for improvement ... The best people to determine what needs to be improved are the people doing the work — the teachers, staff and administrators of the Dunlap schools,” Marino said.

“Together, we hope to use quality tools and processes that will help tease out those areas that can be refined.”

What really impresses in that quote is the use of the word “together.”

Marino said he wants to engage all the stakeholders — administrators, teachers, parents and students — in not only sustaining Dunlap’s high performance, but also in seeking ways to improve it.

There is always room for improvement.

Marino says he has no plans to coast. We gather from his answers he wants improved student achievement. We suspect he is going to want increased parental involvement.

Pushing for something is one thing. Having the tools to make that push productive is another.

Our feeling is that Marino has the tools.

Marino has a big job ahead. But, if he stays true to what he has stated, he should expect to find a school board, faculty, student body and parents standing behind him asking how they can get even further engaged.

A superintendent could ask for little more.

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