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Brandywine names new superintendent

Concord High principal was student and teacher at school

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The Brandywine School Board announced Tuesday it selected Concord High School Principal Mark Holodick as the lone finalist to be district superintendent.

"I'm excited and privileged to be the superintendent of a great school district, and one I'm very proud of," said Holodick, whose school is in the district. "This is home."

At age 39, Holodick is a district old-timer. He was a student at Concord High School and graduated in 1989, well before teaching there and becoming an assistant principal. He took over as principal four years ago.

"We were impressed with his level of experience, his commitment to the district and his communication skills. That was what set him apart," board President Debra Heffernan said, adding that he was selected from a field of nine candidates.

"I think it's a good choice," Interim Superintendent Dane Andy Brandenberger said. "Mark's a hard worker. He's really organized. He's committed to the Brandywine School District."

Brandenberger became the interim superintendent July 1, following the resignation of Jim Scanlon, who left to take a superintendent job in Pennsylvania after heading Brandywine for less than three years.

"They were really interested in getting somebody who knows the community and could connect to being here on a long-term basis, and Mark fits that bill," Brandenberger said.

Heffernan concurred. She has been involved in two superintendent searches since she joined the board about four years ago, and wanted someone who calls Brandywine home "so we don't need to do it again any time soon," she said.

The search for a new superintendent began shortly before Scanlon's departure, and Heffernan said at the time that the board would look to make a quick turnaround.

The search included an online survey to solicit feedback from residents on what characteristics they wanted to see in a new superintendent, as well as public meetings designed for the same purpose. The Institute for Public Administration at the University of Delaware helped guide the search and served as facilitator.

The key minimum qualifications in the search stipulated that the candidates who would be considered had to have taught in Delaware for at least three years and served as an administrator in the state for at least the same amount of time.

"It narrowed the candidate pool to Delaware folks," said Brandenberger, who was not involved in the selection process. "The board was interested in someone who knew the Delaware system, so [the person selected] didn't have to go through a learning curve early on."

He said the district wanted a local person who could understand the state's educational finance system, which he described as one of the most complex in the country. Heffernan said the finalist has a "high

level of experience" working within that system.

Holodick, who served as principal of Delmar Middle School and Delmar High School for three years before coming to Concord High, also served for seven years at the state level on the Interscholastic Athletic Association board of directors, and he is a member of the Brandywine School District Labor Negotiations Team.

Holodick said he believes he has the kind of leadership skills that will serve him well as a superintendent.

"I am a strong communicator," he said. "I look forward to listening -- spending a lot of time listening -- to the many different voices in our district, from all of the communities we serve. I will be getting feedback from face-to-face conversations and will be spending a long time in the buildings. I think that's very important, for the superintendent to have the pulse of the district."

Uche Amudipe, an accounting and business teacher at Concord High who started there around the same time Holodick became principal, said she has seen firsthand his ability to lead.

"I think the thing about his leadership style is he actually is a leader, not just a manager," she said. "He treats us as professionals and expects us to treat each other as professionals. He's inclusive in his decision-making. He tries to get teachers, students and administrators together in decision-making whenever possible. The inclusiveness comes from the fact that he is a humble leader. He's open to correction. He can admit when he's wrong, which is huge for a leader.

"It's a great gain for the district," she said of Holodick's selection. "But it's a huge loss for us."

Holodick's final approval should come at the Sept. 21 board meeting, following contract negotiations and the opportunity for community members to talk with him. Heffernan said she anticipates he will take office in October.

The district has not yet set his salary.
