

Dist. 15 hopefuls talk job retention

Candidates agree too many administrators leaving

By Ashok Selvam

Daily Herald Staff Writer

Posted Saturday, March 24, 2007

Over the last five years, an administrative job in Palatine Township Elementary District 15 has looked a lot like resume fodder, say candidates for the school board.

During that time, District 15 has hired or promoted 21 principals, 25 assistant principals and five cabinet-level positions — all the result of turnover.

While some have retired, most of the departing administrators have gone to other school districts — Schaumburg and Wilmette among them.

The revolving door has become a talking point for the six candidates running for three 4-year seats on the District 15 board. Candidates are Rich Bokor, Gerald Chapman, James Ekeberg, Lisa Neal, Susan Quinn and Mary Vanek.

All will be newcomers to the board, as three incumbents aren't running for re-election.

Ekeberg said he's not sure what started the exodus but said past administrators were more inclined to spend their careers in District 15. He, Bokor and Chapman — the three are running as a slate — want the district's interview process to emphasize a long-term commitment to potential hires.

"They've had several young administrators in their late 20s and early 30s who have left our district to take more desirous positions," Ekeberg said.

Neal said the problem could begin with instability within the district.

"I think a majority perhaps comes from inner turmoil," she said.

She noted the district made drastic staff cuts after a tax-hike request failed to pass in 2005, and said that may contribute to a perception the district is in chaos.

Quinn agreed, saying the district needs to better establish a support network through mentoring.

"We have to show them this is a place they want to be," she said.

Quinn also suggested better communication, giving young and talented administrators a better idea how to advance their careers within the district.

"Why are we preparing principals to leave and go somewhere else after a short stay?" Bokor

said. "We have to talk to people and find out why they are leaving."

Chapman said the school district must conduct extensive exit interviews to find out why employees are leaving.

"I think the obligation is to find out why it's occurring," he said. "Until then, to sort of jump to a solution is a little premature."

Vanek agreed.

"Any \$150 million company should at least have an exit interview when somebody high in the chain of command leaves," she said.

School board President Nancy Carlson, whose seat is not up for re-election this year, said District 15 does do exit interviews.

She said they reveal a few reasons for the exodus — including salary, benefits and treatment by the board.

In particular, one former District 15 junior high school principal left because he felt his professionalism was being called into question by various board members, Carlson said.

"Instead of being the leading district in the Northwest suburbs, we have become a training ground," she said.

Vanek said she wants more facts, calling District 15 a rumor mill. She noted labor discussions are held behind closed doors by the board.

The candidates agreed leadership dictates the atmosphere. One of the new board's first duties will be to choose a replacement for departing Superintendent Robert McKanna.

Most candidates said the hire should set a tone for the new hires and provide stability.

The 20 schools in District 15 are located in Palatine Township and nearby — in Palatine, Rolling Meadows, Hoffman Estates, Inverness, South Barrington, Schaumburg and Arlington Heights.

aselvam@dailyherald.com