There is no longer a void at the helm of the Northern Ozaukee School District.

Mequon resident Joe Gassert took over as interim superintendent of the school district on Monday, after being extended a contract by the School Board last week.

According to the contract, Gassert will hold the post until a permanent superintendent is hired, which officials said will be no later than the end of September.

Board members acknowledged Gassert's services are a little more expensive than anticipated, agreeing to pay him $625 a day.

A preliminary estimate projected the interim administrator would cost $500 a day, but part of the difference will be made up by not having to pay Gassert benefits.

Surveying the pay rates for administrators in the Central Lakeshore Conference, Board President Paul Krause said the average cost of a superintendent is $150,000 a year for salary and benefits.

The district has budgeted $130,000 plus benefits for the superintendent's position.

"For a district of 750 students, that is pretty much paying through the nose," said board member Kendall Thistle.

Although Gassert's appointment will be for two months at the most, he comes with considerable name recognition.

Most prominently, he was superintendent of the Random Lake School District from 1997 to 2007. Prior to that, he was the district's director of instruction.

Gassert was also the director of special education for the Ozaukee County Special Education Department from 1985 to 1989 and the county program's assistant director from 1975 to 1985.

He also held principal positions in Kenosha and Oak Creek, and taught in Grafton and Milwaukee.

Most recently, Gassert has turned his attention to grooming future administrators at the college level.

He is an administrative mentor for Alverno College in Milwaukee, working with new administrators in the Milwaukee Public Schools.

Gassert is also an ad hoc instructor at Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, leading graduate-level courses in special-education law and educational leadership.

He said he would put his college responsibilities on hold while filling the Northern Ozaukee position.

Gassert's presence will be welcomed by the district staff. The superintendent's position has been vacant since Bill Harbron left at the end of the school year.

"We need somebody here to make the hard calls and see to it that all the necessary paperwork is signed, but a temporary person's roll is to keep us afloat," said
Barb Peterka, director of pupil services and acting administrator, during last week's School Board workshop.