

Job caught in numbers game

Written by Mark Jaeger
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Staff shuffling proposal raises pay question

A sudden resignation left the Northern Ozaukee School District's on-line school, Wisconsin Virtual Learning, scrambling to fill the vacancy.

It also posed an opportunity to save some money, or so Information Technology Director Mike Skurek thought.

Last week, Skurek presented a plan to the School Board that would replace David Dich as the virtual program's primary IT technician with Dave Malueg.

Dich left the \$60,000-a-year job with the school district for a position in the private sector several weeks ago.

With the new responsibilities, Skurek asked that Malueg's annual salary be increased from \$32,000 to \$50,000. The pay would be pro-rated to reflect the number of days during the current school year Malueg would be handling the new duties.

The cost savings would come because Malueg would continue to handle both jobs, Skurek said.

According to the planned promotion, Malueg's new salary would be frozen until July 2011.

In conjunction with the promotion, Tom Panzenhagen would be promoted to the position of secondary IT technician, at a pay rate of \$13 an hour with no benefits. Panzenhagen has been manning the district's on-line help desk, troubleshooting technical problems encountered by virtual school parents and staff.

According to Skurek's calculations, the personnel moves would save the district about \$23,000 for the remainder of the school year.

But, it was the raw numbers of the Malueg move that drew the attention of several board members as the promotion was discussed.

School Board member Tim Burmesch said he was shocked at the suggestion that a district employee be given such a substantial pay increase.

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“It is incredible, especially considering the current health of the economy, that we be considering giving someone a \$28,000 raise,” Burmesch said.

“I do have concerns. Someone getting a 56% raise, even in prosperous times, is incredible.”

He said a wage survey of the region showed that the average IT specialist is paid \$41,800 in the Milwaukee market, and \$38,000 in the Fredonia market.

School Board President Paul Krause said the reaction is not a criticism of the job Malueg has been doing.

“I think Dave is great, but I am not sure how to rationalize the raise,” Krause said.

“If Mr. Dich hadn’t left, would we be looking at giving him this kind of raise? He is probably worth more than the \$32,000 we were paying him, but a 56% raise is hard to justify.”

Skurek was surprised by the negative reaction, especially considering the plan would result in a net savings for the district.

He said it is critical for the virtual program to have a capable IT specialist on staff, especially during the start of a new school year when technical problems surface in great numbers.

“I was taken aback because I thought I was saving the district money. This was not the reaction I was expecting,” Skurek said.

He said the pay rate was probably set too high when Dich was hired, but noted that technology specialists are in great demand.

“I know a network administrator in Milwaukee who is paid \$96,000 a year, but I knew that was far beyond what we felt was possible here,” Skurek said.

Still, he said, Malueg has already received job offers that pay more than he proposed for the school position.

“He grew up in our schools and I know Dave (Malueg) wants to stay with the district for a long time, but it comes down to how much do we need to keep him,”

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Skurek said.

Malueg's father is former Ozaukee High School Principal Gerald Malueg.

Although the board approved the new pay rate for Panzenhagen, it tabled Malueg's promotion until the pay raise is justified.

Officials agreed that whatever the new pay rate is, it will be retroactive to when Malueg took over the added responsibilities.