Written by Bill Schanen IV
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Duane Woelfel

Port High principal will resign to become district's director of special services

Port Washington High School Principal Duane Woelfel will resign his position at the end of June, but he's not going far. He will become the Port Washington-Saukville School District's director of special services.

The School Board on Monday accepted the unanimous recommendation of a hiring committee and approved a two-year contract for Woelfel, who will assume the special education position on July 1.

"Working with special-needs students is a passion of mine," he said. "I'm very excited about this opportunity."

Woelfel, 44, who was hired as Port High principal in 2002, will replace longtime Special Services Director Gary Myrah, who is retiring after 26 years in the position to become executive director of the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services.

"Filling Gary's shoes will definitely be a challenge," Woelfel said.

In Woelfel, the School Board found a proven administrator familiar with the workings of the school system who is capable of jumping into the role of one the district's top three administrators, Supt. Michael Weber said.

"Duane knows the district, he knows the students and he knows the community," Weber said. "And he has a very strong desire to help students who are struggling."

But the hiring of Woelfel, who was the only candidate for the job, creates a challenge — filling

his position at the high school.

The revolving door to the high school principal's office was halted nearly nine years ago when Woelfel was hired. He has brought stability to a position that before was plagued by turnover and filled on several occasions by interim principals.

Weber said the district would begin advertising for Woelfel's replacement at the high school later this week.

With signs that Woelfel was growing restless in his principal's position, his internal promotion serves as a way to retain a highly regarded administrator.

Woelfel gave school officials a scare early last year when he told them he had applied for the job of Sheboygan Falls High School principal. On paper, it would have been a curious career move, leaving a well-respected school of 838 students to take
the same position at a school of 540 students. But Woelfel, who grew up and still lives in Sheboygan Falls, said he felt an emotional attachment to the community and his alma mater.

He was offered the job but declined it, saying he couldn't walk away from the Port-Saukville School District.

"We have a mantra, and that is that we have a very special place here, one you don't find elsewhere," he said.

Woelfel came to the district via the Northern Ozaukee School District in Fredonia, where he was the middle school principal and director of special education. Before that, he was a vocal music teacher in that district.

His new job in the Port Washington-Saukville School District will make Woelfel one of the top administrators in the district charged with duties beyond their area of primary responsibility. Weber, Director of Business Services Jim Froemming and the director of special services are responsible for human resources, technology coordination and curriculum oversight.

"Duane will become the third leg of our three-legged stool in the district," Weber said. "We have the smallest administrative team of any district our size."

Woelfel will be paid $113,589 annually, the same as Froemming. He earns $112,645 as principal.