

## Marino: Staus quo not good enough for Dunlap schools

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By DeWayne Bartels

**Dr. Jay Marino will take over Dunlap Schools as superintendent in July.**

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By DeWayne Bartels  
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Dunlap, Ill. -

Dr. Jay Marino, the man hired to take the helm of the Dunlap School District next summer, is a mystery man to the majority of people whose children he will be leading.

So, the Peoria Times-Observer put some questions to Marino hoping a picture of his educational priorities and philosophies would emerge. Marino obliged with direct answers.

Marino said while he is happy to see the money the Dunlap School District receives, he does not see it as the reason the school district is among the best in the state.

Dunlap High School made Adequate Yearly Progress while Richwoods and Peoria Heights high schools did not. Asked if money explained the difference, Marino responded with a direct "No."

"It is never as simple as money. All the money in the world can't buy effective, research-based instructional practices and a collective will to do whatever it takes to ensure every child reaches their educational potential," Marino said.

### **Systems approach**

Marino, 39, has 12 years experience as a school administrator. He spent four years in Stanton, Mich., two of those as elementary assistant principal/special education coordinator and two years as director of instruction and technology. For four years, he served as associate superintendent for instruction and school improvement in Rock Island, and four years as associate superintendent for learning and continuous improvement in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Marino will replace the retiring Jeanne Williamson. Marino's appointment is effective July 1.

Marino said his past experience has prepared him for the top job in the Dunlap School District, especially his current position, he is responsible for, "curriculum, instruction, assessment, school improvement, strategic planning and professional development and driving continuous improvement efforts from the board room to the central office, to the bus driver and cafeteria worker, to the school, to the classroom, to the individual student."

Marino said he uses a systems approach and involves all the stakeholders in the process of continuous improvement.

"Four basic questions drive student achievement. One, what do we want students to know and be able to do? Two, how do we know if they're doing it? Three, how does our school system respond when they aren't doing it? And, four, what do we do for students? How do we provide opportunities for enrichment?" Marino said.

"Effective organizations are able to consistently answer these questions."

In Marino's assessment, raising student achievement is both an art and a science.

"It is an art due to the differentiation of instruction that is needed, and it is science, as educators need to implement research-based best practices in instruction," he said.

### **The four players**

Asked whether the administrator, teacher, parent or student is the most important player in the student achievement equation, Marino did not bite.

"This is a trick question," Marino said.

"There is no most important player. Everyone has a role to play in the education of children."

He did, however, differentiate what those roles are.

The role of the administrator in student achievement, according to Marino, is assisting in the implementation of effective instruction, assessment and parent communication.

"They collaborate with teachers and staff to create an effective school improvement plan and clear mission, vision, core values and goals that creates the culture of the school. They use continuous improvement tools and process to drive change," Marino said.

And, the teacher's role?

"The teacher ensures that all students achieve their potential. They deliver effective instruction and monitor the teaching and learning process. They involve students in the learning process and help instill empowerment, ownership and responsibility for their own learning," he said.

"Essentially, the teacher facilitates a child-centered, differentiated and engaging learning

environment.”

He said the parent is of paramount importance.

“Parents are considered the primary teacher of their children. They spend more time with their children and have greater opportunities to influence their children,” Marino said.

“Parents ensure that students' basic needs are met, including: proper nutrition, health care, moral values and positive self-esteem. They take the initiative to talk with their child's teacher and express concerns when necessary. They assist the child with homework and set high expectations for behavior and student achievement.”

The student, he said, has the responsibility of engaging in his or her learning.

“Effective classroom instruction ensures that students are motivated and have ownership of their learning. Additionally, students are responsible for doing their personal best and are accountable for results based on their efforts,” he said.

He added no one of the four has a harder job than the others.

“Each of the four players contributes to the educational process. Each has a unique role and relies on the other players to do their part in order to obtain maximum potential student learning,” he said.

### **Uphill battle?**

Marino is walking into a school system that is already full of high-performing schools on virtually every testing system used.

Raising student achievement might be viewed as a big challenge, but Marino said he is confident even higher student achievement can be achieved.

According to the state school report cards, Dunlap High School is tied for the rank of No. 13 in the state among schools that performed best on the Prairie State Achievement Exam. Wilder-Waite ranks No. 14 in the state for schools that performed best on the Illinois State Achievement Test. Wilder-Waite ranks No. 10 in the state for schools that performed best on all tests. Ridgeview is ranked at 70.

In addition, Dunlap High School had 80.8 percent of the student body meeting or exceeding standards on all tests, 80.8 percent on PSAE and scored well above the state average in all subjects of the ACT.

Marino said he could not definitively pinpoint what is working in Dunlap schools.

“At first glance, it appears there are high expectations for student learning and a thirst for results. School districts don't accomplish the results Dunlap has achieved without dynamic leadership at all levels and effective classroom instruction,” he said.

“Additionally, there appears to be strong support from parents, the community and the board of education.”

Marino said, however, there is always room for improvement.

“In any system, there are opportunities for improvement ... The best people to determine what needs to be improved are the people doing the work — the teachers, staff and administrators of the Dunlap schools,” Marino said.

“Together, we hope to use quality tools and processes that will help tease out those areas that can be refined.”

Marino said it is not likely people will see huge spikes in student achievement when he takes over.

“The farther the distance needed to improve, the easier it is to get quick results. A high-performing school system doesn’t have much margin of error. Therefore, I would say that it takes a lot more effort to keep a high-performing district high-performing,” Marino said.

“There can be a tendency to relax in intensity in high-performing organizations. I don’t believe this is the case in Dunlap schools. They are committed to doing whatever it takes to stay high-performing.”

But, Marino concedes, the ever-growing school system faces student achievement challenges.

“Given the growing community with an influx of students, staff and community members, it will be critical to establish a common mission, vision, core values and goals that provide consistency and continuity to the district,” he said.

“Through collaboration and participation in a shared process, the Dunlap School District family can establish agreed-upon principles that will guide continuous improvements into the future.”

Marino said the district will work to set what he calls SMART goals — goals which are specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented and time bound.

He said that will not be an easy goal.

“Maintaining a high-achieving organization isn’t easy. The results obtained in Dunlap schools are tremendous,” he said.

“There is a rich tradition of excellence that will require every staff, student, parent and community member to contribute and do their personal best for the betterment of our students.”

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