

District 99 leader set to retire after next school year

January 25, 2007

After 35 years, Superintendent David R. Eblen will retire from District 99.

Eblen announced at the Jan. 22 Board of Education meeting that his retirement will be at the end of the 2007-08 school year.

Eblen said Jan. 24 that he plans to focus on life as a husband and community servant.

"I would like to move on to other things at a more personal level," he said.

He is looking forward to trips with his wife, who is also retiring, and books he'd like to read and projects to volunteer for.

"It will be nice to be on a system where we ring the bell instead of the school," Eblen said.

Others are happy for him but sad about his departure.

"I have such mixed feelings about his leaving," board President Julia Beckman said in a district press release. "He's been a visionary, creative leader who always put students and staff first and has a real impact on student achievement. He will be sorely missed."

Although Eblen's retirement is more than a year off, the board will interview three search firms next month to begin selecting his successor. The goal is to name the new superintendent no later than Jan. 1, 2008.

A stellar career

Eblen will retire after 17 years of leading the school district. His public school career spans 35 years in four districts as a teacher and administrator.

Eblen said he is most proud of working in partnership with the Board of Education on a vision focused on students and in a community of residents and teachers who value education and take their roles seriously.

"In District 99, there is a sense of collective responsibility for the success of all students," he said in the press release.

Beckman said Eblen brought stability to the district, which saw four superintendents within 12 years.

"The integrity and respect he engendered, along with the stability, allowed him to move this district forward," Beckman said in the press release.

Eblen has led the school district through the difficult tax-cap era, when revenue growth was at an all-time low even as there were calls for greater student achievement and public accountability. Enrollment also was growing and was the highest since the baby-boom years. Additionally, the district was facing aging, outmoded facilities.

To address those problems, Eblen helped garner community support for a \$50 million referendum to add onto and renovate the two schools.

He led the district through two rounds of major budget cuts, which helped keep finances stable and later allowed for expansion of the program.

He also oversaw a transition in leadership in the district by recruiting and mentoring a new team of administrators. In the past four years, primarily because of retirements, 15 of the district's 22 administrative positions have been filled by a new generation of leaders. He also sought to work in partnership with the community, establishing advisory groups, an Education Foundation and regular communication through the Web and newsletters.

"Many look to him for ideas and leadership," Beckman said.

He has led school accreditation teams, served on the search committee for the president of College of DuPage and guided LEND, the DuPage education lobbying organization, to establish itself as an independent entity from the Illinois Association of School Boards.

Personal life calling

Nevertheless, Eblen also found time for other organizations in the community.

He is a member and past treasurer of the Downers Grove Rotary Club and current chairman of its scholarship committee. He has served on several committees at First Congregational Church of Downers Grove. Both of his children are graduates of District 99.

And he would like to make more time for these endeavors.

"It will be nice to have an opportunity to set my own schedule," Eblen said.