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UT names assistant superintendent to top post

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By Robin J. Youngblood, ryoungblood@qconline.com

EAST MOLINE -- Jay Morrow, assistant superintendent of business at United Township High School, will become district superintendent Jan. 1.

The school board unanimously voted Monday to promote Mr. Morrow, who has been asst. superintendent of business since 2004. Before that, he was a business teacher and coach at UT since 1994.

His contract for superintendent begins Jan. 1, but his annual salary of \$101,975 plus benefits will continue until July 1 when it will be negotiated with the school board.

UT's current superintendent, Barbara Suelter, who was hired in 2003, will retire effective Jan. 1, but will stay until March 16 to help train Mr. Morrow.



Photo: Mike Itchue
Jay Morrow, UT superintendent

"We had some really great candidates and (choosing him) wasn't easy," board president Brian Mumma said. "He does a great job."

Interviews with the staff cemented the decision to hire Mr. Morrow, Mr. Mumma said. "That's where he really separated himself" from the other six candidates, which included people outside the district.

Mr. Morrow, who earned his doctorate in education from Illinois State University, said his approachability and ability to relate to the staff made him likable and trustworthy among his coworkers.

"I can relate to them very well," he said. "It hasn't been that long since I was a teacher."

Mr. Mumma said Mr. Morrow, who is 35, may be the youngest UT has ever had. However, he has the needed experience.

Mr. Morrow grew up in the Quad-Cities area, graduating from Rockridge High School in 1989 and received a bachelor's in business administration and education from St. Ambrose University. He earned his educational specialist and master's degree in science from Western Illinois University.

He and his wife, Wendy, have two sons, Matthew, 4, and Joshua, 11 months.

A supportive community and a staff who cares about the kids were two main reasons Mr. Morrow said he applied for the superintendent's position. "We're doing a lot of great things here. I think we're on the right track, curriculum-wise."

That's what the Illinois State Board of Education said recently, too. Despite the board saying in February that failing test scores were one of the reasons they didn't want to extend Ms. Suelter's contract, scores on the Prairie State Achievement Exam are on an upward trend.

Mr. Morrow said he plans to stay the course with professional development opportunities, aligning the curriculum to state standards and continuing with the Freshmen Academy that started this fall and is showing promise.

"That is a huge piece of what we're doing to help our kids here," Mr. Morrow said about the academy.

Night tutoring and night classes through Lights on for Learning are two other ways UT has tried to help reach kids falling through the cracks. Funding for the program, however, is ending this summer, but there is hope grant money will come through.

Mr. Morrow said he's thankful for the opportunity to lead UT and "grow as a professional.

"This is a very solid school," he said. "I want to be a big part of it for a long time to come."

Jay Morrow, 35

Superintendent of UTHS as of Jan. 1

Family: wife, Wendy, and two sons

Background: Asst. superintendent of business at UT since 2004; former UT teacher and coach

Education: doctorate in education, Illinois State University; master's, education administration and education specialist degree, Western Illinois University; bachelor's in business administration and education, St. Ambrose University; Rockridge High School, 1989.