



Bret Uptmor



Stephen Phillips



Vince Swagerty

School superintendent selection narrowed to three

Committee passes \$17.8 million budget on to board

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

The selection for a new Grant School District 3 superintendent was narrowed down to three finalists, the school board announced May 21.

The district received 18 applications since advertising began in mid-April. Following the advice of a consultant assisting in the hiring process, a screening committee composed of teachers, staff, administration and two parents met May 8 and whittled the applications down to six, school board chairwoman Chris Cronin told the Eagle.

There was no discussion among the committee members about the selections. Each member read each application and scored each applicant in confidence. The consultant tabulated the results and found significant agreement among committee members.

"The cream rose to the top," Cronin said.

The school board met in executive session May 17 to conduct interviews in person or by video conference and narrowed the selection down to three. The finalists will travel to Grant County to visit the district schools and meet with staff and students.

The community is invited to meet the candidates in person from 5:30-7 p.m. Wednesday, May 23, at the Grant Union Junior-Senior High School library.

Their candidates include:
• Stephen W. Phillips was formerly deputy superintendent at Beaverton School District from 2016-2018, serving 41,000 students. Before that, he was superintendent at Malheur Education Service District in Vale for four years, where he also spent four years as director of career technical education, alternative education, youth transition and technology.

Phillips served as assistant middle school principal in the Nyssa School District for five years and worked for five years as a math teacher and coach for various athletic teams. He has a Ph.D. in educational leadership from the University of Idaho and

a master's in educational administration from Idaho State University.

• Vince R. Swagerty served as principal for Reedspport Charter School in the Reedspport School District, serving 335 students. He also served as principal at Open Bible Christian School/C.S. Lewis Academy for four years, as well as other Oregon school districts for eight years.

Swagerty served as the professional technical education coordinator for Douglas Education Service District from 1998 to 2002. He has a master's in policy, foundations and administration from Portland State University and a bachelor's in curriculum and instruction from the University of Oregon.

• Bret A. Uptmor has been superintendent at Wallowa School District since 2011, serving 180 students. Before that, he was an assistant principal and a principal in the Ontario School District for six years.

Before entering school administration, Uptmor was an industrial technology teacher for about 15 years. He has a master's and a bachelor's in industrial technology education from the University of Idaho.

The school board has begun thorough background and reference checks for the finalists. The board will conduct a second interview with each finalist in executive session and expects to hire a new superintendent at the June 6 board meeting.

In other school board news:

• The district budget committee approved a \$17.8 million budget for fiscal year 2018-2019 at the May 16 meeting. The school board will finalize approval of the budget during a June 6 public hearing.

The budget increased by 18 percent over last year's adopted budget, which reflects \$236,906 in federal Secure Rural Schools funding not

available last year, a grant for the seismic upgrade to Humbolt Elementary School and increased funding from the state.

The state's economy has done well so more money is being made available per student, Shelley said. Locally, the district has been facing declining population and lower median income. Projected enrollment for the next fiscal year is 605 students, three more than in March 2018.

Over the past 10 years, district enrollment has declined by 170 students, which equates to a loss of \$1.3 million in revenue to the district from the State School Fund Grant during 2018-19, according to the budget message.

"What this has meant to the district during this time frame has been an aggressive move to downsize while maintaining quality programs," the budget message states. "A large portion of the reduction has included the consolidation of schools and reduction of positions districtwide."

More than 70 percent of the general fund budget goes to salaries and associated payroll costs of 88 school district employees. The new budget will reflect the last year of a four-year contract with licensed staff and the first year of a two-year contract with classified staff. Cronin called it a good budget.

"We didn't have to make any cuts," she said.

• Shelley reported some good news about the Grant Union Junior-Senior High School gym floor. The southeast corner of the floor buckled as a result of water from an ice machine.

The buckled floor boards have been coming down, Shelley said, and enough wood might exist to allow them to be sanded rather than completely replaced.

"We will monitor the gym floor and make repairs as needed in July," Shelley told the Eagle.

Superintendent leaving for Tillamook

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

Changes at Grant School District 3 are on the horizon as Superintendent Curt Shelley resigns at the end of the school year, and several other positions at the school district open up.

Shelley has accepted a position as assistant superintendent at Tillamook School District. He expects to step into the superintendent position in one year, after the current superintendent, who has been at the job for 17 years, retires.

Shelley's wife, Elizabeth, who is the career coordinator and advanced English teacher at Grant Union, was recently hired at Tillamook as their career coordinator.

"It is a new opportunity for us," Curt said. "It's a good school district with lots of opportunities."

The Shelleys have two children, Reagan, who will graduate from Grant Union next month, and Kellen, a sophomore. Kellen has been involved in agriculture classes and FFA.

"They have a great ag program and lots of opportunities for college credits," Elizabeth said. "It's a very similar atmosphere to our community here."

The Shelleys moved to John Day in 2007, when Curt became the principal of Grant Union, with Elizabeth hired as a teacher and career coordinator.

He has also been an OSAA executive board member for six years as a 3A and then a 2A representative. In Tillamook, he will be back as a 4A representative for Tillamook School District.

In 2015, Curt became the superintendent of Grant School District 3.

"This is my third school district I've worked for, and I think it's been the best school district I've been in," Curt said. "It's been a good opportunity for my children, and us."

"I agree," Elizabeth said. "Our kids have both thrived in their environment with the great connections they've had and made. We have very supportive administrators and staff to work toward common goals."

As an English teacher, Elizabeth has helped students earn dual credits in writing and literature through Eastern Oregon University in La Grande. She also teaches leadership class for student body and class officers.

"All the kids have been great to work with," she said. "It's been rewarding to see the students move on, and achieve the goals they have set for themselves."



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

Elizabeth and Curt Shelley submitted their letters of resignation at the March 21 meeting of the Grant School District 3 board of directors. Both have accepted jobs with the Tillamook School District.

Humbolt Elementary teachers and staff were approved for hire at the May 16 school board meeting, including Sharon Fritsch for sixth grade, Julie Hamilton for fifth grade, Kelli LaFranboise for second grade and Shanley Cobb as librarian, and special education assistant. The board also approved Kristi Moore, a Grant Union English teacher, to take on the additional positions of dean of students and career coordinator.

Casey Hallgarth, who has taught sixth grade at Humbolt for four years, has accepted the superintendent/principal position at Prairie City School District. Curt Shelley said other openings in the district include Humbolt principal, district music teacher and high school math teacher. Humbolt prin-

icipal Kim Smith has accepted a position with Baker Charter Schools. She has been with the district for 20 years.

Matt Jones, who has taught middle school and high school math, as well as calculus and physics, is retiring after 32 years with the district. He previously taught in Ontario. Jones was voted Grant Union's Teacher of the Year multiple times.

Music teacher Lori Hart has also resigned and accepted a position in Arizona.

Curt said he's enjoyed living in John Day and working at the district.

"We're not leaving this community because of anything here," he said. "We're looking for new opportunities."

"This is a great place," Elizabeth added.



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