

READING EAGLE

Opinion

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George's biggest impact was helping city school district

The Issue: The executive director of the Berks County Intermediate Unit accepts a similar post in Montgomery County.

Our Opinion: We're sorry to see him go, but we appreciate the job he did here.

CONGRATULATIONS TO Dr. John J. George, executive director of the Berks County Intermediate Unit, who will be leaving that post next month for a similar position in Montgomery County. His gain, and that of the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, is our loss.

George quietly and effectively headed the intermediate unit for six years, following stints as assistant superintendent and then superintendent for the Warwick

School District, Lititz, Lancaster County.

Throughout his career in Berks County, George was viewed as a quiet but effective leader who was well-spoken and well-respected in the education and business communities.

There's little doubt that he made his biggest impact on the area earlier this year when he accepted the post of acting superintendent of the Reading School District, which appeared to be on the verge of a state

takeover following four reports that questioned the district's ability to manage its finances, the quality of its academic program and its overall leadership.

At the time that leadership included school board members who seemed to squabble with each other and district administrators at every opportunity and then attempt to micromanage district operations.

George and his staff offered to help the school district get its house in order following the firing of Superintendent Dr. Carlinda Purcell and the appointment of Karen B. Gokay to the post of acting superintendent. Gokay was the seventh person since 2000 to hold that position on either a full-time or fill-in basis, which clearly is not the way to run a school district.

In offering assistance, George told

the school board: "It is not BCIU's interest or desire to run the Reading School District. Ultimately it is your school district, and you have to run it."

But he and his staff helped bring order where chaos has been and guided the district to a budget for the 2014-2015 school year without the drama that had permeated budget negotiations for years prior.

He and his staff also helped the district in its nationwide search for a new superintendent. That search resulted in the hiring of Dr. Khalid N. Mumin. When he took the reins in July, he inherited a district that still faced its share of financial hurdles but no longer was teetering on the edge of a state takeover.

George and his staff at the BCIU have helped other school districts in Berks County search for new

superintendents, but nowhere was that search more important than Reading.

Although executive director of the Berks County Intermediate Unit is an important position, few who have filled that post have had the impact that George has had.

"Leaving BCIU will be very difficult for me," George said. "It will only be made easier because of knowing that Dr. Jill Hackman, who will be appointed as the next executive director of BCIU, will be an exemplary leader who will only strengthen and enhance the Berks County community."

That's high praise for Hackman, who filled in as executive director when George was acting superintendent at Reading and who is expected to be named as his successor tonight. She'll have a tough act to follow.