



City schools need leadership

Daily Record/Sunday News staff editorial

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The start of a new school year should be a time for hope. And so it is: In the case of the York city school district, let's *hope* it can get its act together -- particularly in the ranks of board leadership but also in the classroom.

It's been a summer of discontent for school leaders, as board members have squabbled amongst themselves and played musical chairs with appointees.

For some reason, the board refuses to fill vacancies with the candidate in the spring primary who demonstrated the most support among voters -- Sandy Walker.

She was passed over to fill the seat of ousted member Hiawatha Powell in favor of two-time mayoral race runnerup Gerry Turner. Then she was overlooked again to fill a seat vacated by the resignation of Elmira Sexton in favor of Margie Orr, who, like Ms. Walker, is likely to win a seat in the fall election but who got fewer votes than Ms. Walker.

Strange.

In any case, whoever gets on the board in the fall election -- after the Democratic Party's comedy of errors in picking a candidate who had spent time in jail on a driving violation -- needs

to get on board with providing some true leadership.

This district cannot afford the petty political squabbling that has marred the last few years.

It can't afford to have board members who are out-of-touch and ill-informed.

A story last Sunday noted that the district needs \$30 million in repairs and upgrades to inadequate buildings.

And the city schools begin the year with the distressing news that not a single one of its schools met No Child Left Behind goals.

Four of its schools are in Corrective Action II status, which means the state could take over the schools or turn them into charters -- if indeed the state were inclined to run schools (which it's not, and that's probably just as well considering the disarray of state government right now).

Speaking of charter schools, the YorkCounts organization has proposed an exciting International Baccalaureate charter school that would follow a program designed to prepare students for selective colleges. It would be the only such program in south-central Pennsylvania, and it would partner the city district with its most academically successful neighbor -- York Suburban -- to bring city and suburban students together, a formula that has been shown elsewhere to foster achievement among low-income students.

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The city school board's reaction:

Huh? What's that all about? We don't have enough information.

If they don't have enough information about the program, it's only for lack of initiative and effort on their part.

YorkCounts has a respected retired superintendent -- Dennis Baughman -- spearheading the effort. He has reportedly said he provided the same information to York Suburban as to the city -- and the board members of that high-achieving district jumped at the opportunity.

Such cluelessness on the part of the city board is disheartening, to say to the least.

And it was downright disturbing to learn that school board members were unaware that Guardian Angels have been "volunteering" in the high school. What exactly they're doing there is not clear. Administration officials say they're not providing security, but are there to be a "presence."

Huh? said some board members.

Our reaction exactly. And how could this controversial group be allowed in as a "presence" in the hallways without board members even knowing?

For our community's sake, we must all hope this board can get its act together this school year.

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