

Andy Block

Upper Makefield residents have new School Board representation for the first time in ten years with the election of Andy Block. Citizens For Education recently sat down with Andy Block to learn more about him and his vision for Council Rock. When approached to run for School Director last year, Mr. Block spoke to many people to get a perspective on how his experience and vision might benefit the students and taxpayers in the Council Rock community. After much thought, he decided to run and then won on both the Democratic and Republican tickets in the primary election in May. The General election in November made it official. After he was sworn in, in December Mr. Block was elected Vice President of the Board of School Directors by his fellow board members.

Mr. Block spent most of his youth in Hockessin, Delaware. His family moved to Washington Crossing in 1983, when he was 13 years old. He attended Council Rock High School in grades 9 and 10. At that time, the High School was so overcrowded those grades held their classes in Newtown Junior High School. After those two years, his family moved back to Delaware where he graduated from high school and then went on to Penn State, main campus. He graduated from there with a degree in Economics and a minor in Business.

Mr. Block's professional career started at Ernest & Julio Gallo, spending a few years in South Florida and Memphis. Recruited by Guinness, (now Diageo North America), he was in their employ for 12 1/2 years during which time he lived in Indianapolis; Morris Plains, New Jersey; San Francisco; and Stamford, Connecticut. It was in New Jersey that he met his wife, Claudia. In 2003, their son Jake, now a 5th grader at Sol Feinstone, was born. Given the opportunity to transfer to the wine division of Diageo, he considered it contingent upon being allowed to live where he chose. Having experienced firsthand the quality of a Council Rock education when he was younger, he wanted to settle his family in Washington Crossing. The family relocated there in 2003 and has been there ever since.

In 2007, Mr. Block left Diageo to work for T-Mobile, where he managed multi-million dollar budgets and numerous employees. From there he returned to the wine industry to run the Eastern Region for Rodney Strong Family Wine Estates, a family owned premium wine company based in Sonoma, California, where he is currently employed. When asked about hobbies he stated his son and his activities, and "foodie" experiences. The Food Network is the most popular channel in the Block house, where the entire family typically experiences this hobby.

Wishing to continue to make a difference and have a positive influence in his community, Mr. Block was active in the Patriot FC Soccer Club, serving as a Board Member and eventually President. Becoming a School Board Director seemed like a natural fit, as his mother was a teacher and his wife teaches pre-school. With the knowledge that his predecessor, Dr. Paul Anagnostakos, was not seeking re-election, Mr. Block decided to run for the position, not seeing anyone else with his qualifications and expertise "addressing a 200M+ budget and complex organization" to add value to the School Board. His goals as School Director are to "motivate the front line [staff] for continued educational improvement" by providing the tools needed. His energies will be focused on developing a comprehensive, measurable Strategic Plan that details specific objectives of "where we are, how that stacks up to regional and national benchmarks and where we want to be." If we are not there, he will look to understand why and what will be done? He intends to play an active role in developing an "Academic Scorecard" based on benchmarks that are important to the Council Rock constituencies. Another goal is to provide

visibility to the public regularly, to help the community understand the complexity of a premium school district and proactively demonstrate the value they are getting for their tax dollars.

Mr. Block sees the main challenges ahead being the pension dilemma, the needs of our many facilities, and future leadership. "PSERS, we are stuck with. All we can do is the math." He views CR as planning the best they can for this expenditure in the budget. The only course to alleviate the pension burden is for the School Board and the community to get more engaged with state legislators. Our facilities are in need of improvement and renovations, however, he would like to have a complete plan before approving large expenditures. He is anxious to see the outcomes presented by the Planning Committee. In addressing future leadership, he states that "our biggest asset is our people" and in order to preserve that the School Board needs to ensure that the "path is sustainable" looking into the future. On a lighter note, he jokes that a challenge is the "unbelievable amount of reading necessary in order to be as informed as you need to be."

Steering the "community, administration, and staff through the challenges in front of us while preserving a quality education" is his goal. He intends to form personal relationships with principals and staff throughout the district, not just in his region.

Mr. Block sees his school board colleagues as "a diverse group and he can learn from every single one of them." The School Board should be "governing, not administrating." He intends to regularly go back to the community via PTO meetings, community forums, etc. and see "what the public wants." He is not afraid to make unpopular decisions if they are the right decisions and add value. "It's easier to be a good school director when things are tough, it's a lot harder when things are running smoothly because you have to find ways to continuously improve."

Citizens For Education wishes Andy Block the best of luck as a Council Rock School Director.