

Retiring educator committed to excellence

BY JOHN HAUER

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PIQUA It is gratifying to a longtime educator to be successful in a school system, but for someone to be successful and make major contributions to two different school systems is very special. Such is the case for veteran educator Neil Long who helped build a strong math program for Vandalia-Butler Schools and is finishing seven years of developing a unified sys-



tem measuring student academic progress for Piqua City Schools.

Long was born in Piqua, but grew up as a typical Darke County farm boy and graduated in a class of 25 from Gettysburg School, now a part of Greenville Schools. "It was a two-story school with grades K-6 on the first floor, and grades 7-12 on the second floor," he said. "My high school math teacher Mr. Maurer was also the district superintendent."

After high school, Long

enrolled at Wright State University to major in math education. "I became interested in math when Mr. Maurer helped me understand challenging math concepts," Long said. "He really prepared us for college-level math." Long earned his bachelor's degree and began teaching in 1971. "I had a temporary position at Morton Junior High in Vandalia," he said. "Enrollment increased and took class sizes to 36 students, so I was hired full-time to teach math and science."

He quickly developed



ISAAC HALE/STAFF PHOTO

Neil Long, curriculum director for Piqua City Schools, sits at his desk last week.

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his teaching skills and was appointed math coordinator for the district in 1978.

Under his leadership, many improvements and changes took place. An honors math program was started with Algebra I at the eighth grade leading to advanced placement calculus during the senior year.

"This was a great time for me," Long said. "I was the coordinator and helped teachers for half the day, but I was still with students and taught classes for half the day." He has always been a strong believer in demonstration teaching and taught classes throughout the district grades K-12.

When Long came to Piqua City Schools in 2006 as a director of curriculum and instruction, he was asked to develop and unify an effective system to monitor the academic progress of each individual student. He used Excel spreadsheets

and pivot tables to show student growth in the core subject areas. Short-cycle assessments were created, and common practices were put in place for all the buildings. "We wanted to make everything uniform throughout the district, and reduce any gap in learning if a student switched buildings during the school year," Long said.

Another responsibility was to increase the offerings in the math department and streamline the honors math sequence. Students start honors math with Pre-Algebra I in the sixth grade, and they can finish with advanced placement calculus BC (second year) their senior year.

"Next year, we will have two years of AP calculus plus AP statistics and an advanced Algebra II class that can be for Ohio Northern University concurrent enrollment credit," he said. STEM education has

also been a focus of work that has enhanced career and college readiness for students in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math.

Long works mainly with the math and science curriculums, and Dwayne Thompson, the other director of curriculum and instruction, works with language arts and social studies.

"I have been very fortunate to have worked with Dwayne for the past five years," Long said. "We work well as a team and provide consistent support services to assist teachers and principals."

Long will retire from Piqua City Schools at the end of July, concluding a 42-year career in education.

"I have been fortunate to work for Piqua City Schools," he said. "There is a strong commitment to excellence from the board of education to superintendent Rick Hanes to the

building administrators and staff. Parents and the community have always supported our efforts."

When he retires, Long is looking forward to being able to travel with a more flexible schedule.

He and his wife Pamela, a nurse for Southview Hospital, have been married for 44 years. "We want to travel to Washington, D.C. and spend more time with the four grandkids," he said. The couple has three sons and a daughter. Julie lives in Vandalia. Jason is in Cincinnati. Justin lives in California, and Jonathan resides in Clayton. Long's mother Lora (Minton)

Long lives in Piqua and was a 1941 graduate of Piqua Central High School. Grandmother Ciara Helen (Munger) Minton taught second grade at North Street School following her graduation from Piqua in 1905. Aunt Wilma Minton taught many years at Springcreek School.