



MORTON

UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 709

May 26, 2021

Craig Smock chosen to be the next leader of Morton schools

Craig Smock will be the next superintendent of Morton District 709 Schools, pending School Board approval on June 1.



Dr. Craig Smock, superintendent-elect

Dr. Smock, 52, is a familiar name and face in Morton schools, of course, as he has been employed by the district for the last 14 years as assistant superintendent with a variety of responsibilities, from general educational oversight of six facilities to human resources, payroll, enrollment and residency, legal compliance, teacher mentoring and professional development. This past year, he was the hands-on coordinator regarding the district's COVID-19 response.

In short, he's been a go-to guy almost across the board.

Prior to arriving in Morton in 2007, he was principal at Pekin Community High School, at Peoria Heights High School and at Bradford High School. He began his career as a math teacher at Ottawa Township High School. The Tremont native earned bachelor's and master's degrees at Illinois State University and his doctorate at Western Illinois University.

Dr. Smock will succeed Dr. Jeff Hill at the end of the 2021-22 school year.

“As a result of Dr. Hill’s retirement, we are pleased to announce that Dr. Craig Smock has accepted the position as superintendent for District 709,” said Morton School Board President Jeff Schmidgall. “Dr. Smock brings tremendous experience over the course of his career as a teacher and administrator. He is a proven leader within District 709 as assistant superintendent, which will enable him to hit the ground running in the superintendent role.

“As a resident of Morton for many years, Dr. Smock knows and understands our community, and he is well-positioned to take District 709 to the next level.”

“He has great skills and knowledge to lead the district well,” added Hill.

“I think he’ll do a fantastic job.”



Dr. Smock addresses teachers on the last day of school

Indeed, Smock chose Morton as a place to live and raise his family 21 years ago. He is married to Peggy and has three adult children, Cassie, Ryan and Kayla, the latter three all graduates of District 709.

“I’m looking forward to it,” said Smock of the promotion. “It’s just very humbling to even think about leading a great district like Morton ... I wanted my kids to be a part of that long before I started working here.”

Smock has a year to think about his agenda for the district, but “Morton schools have functioned and always will at a very high level,” he said. “The big challenge is to not rest on your laurels and always look for opportunities to improve.”

That means preparing students for college, to be sure – an area where Morton has long excelled -- but also for the workplace and for high-quality careers, said Smock, adding that an enhanced vocational curriculum and apprenticeship programs likely will be a priority for him. With soaring tuition costs and student debt weighing heavily on young people, many families are “seeking other

avenues,” and it’s the district’s responsibility to “make sure we’ve really pulled out all the stops in terms of opportunities for kids.”

Regarding his management style, he is a big believer in teamwork, and is especially proud of the collaboration that was displayed over the past year in contending with the pandemic while keeping classrooms open with in-person instruction.

While he values directness, he’s learned over the years of working in every kind of district with very different kinds of challenges – from a small, rural one such as Bradford to the largest high school in the region in Pekin -- that “you can also lead by listening, not just talking,” Smock said.

When he’s not working, you can find Smock puttering around his Morton home with improvement projects, or sharing a pickleball court with wife Peggy.

Morton’s superintendency “has always been kind of my dream job,” he said. “I have been well prepared. I feel like I’m a good fit from the perspective the board has and the community has. I’ve never worked with a more cohesive board of education. We have a high-integrity, top-notch administrative team and a faculty and staff who are second to none. It will be an honor to lead what I feel is the best school district in the area.”

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