



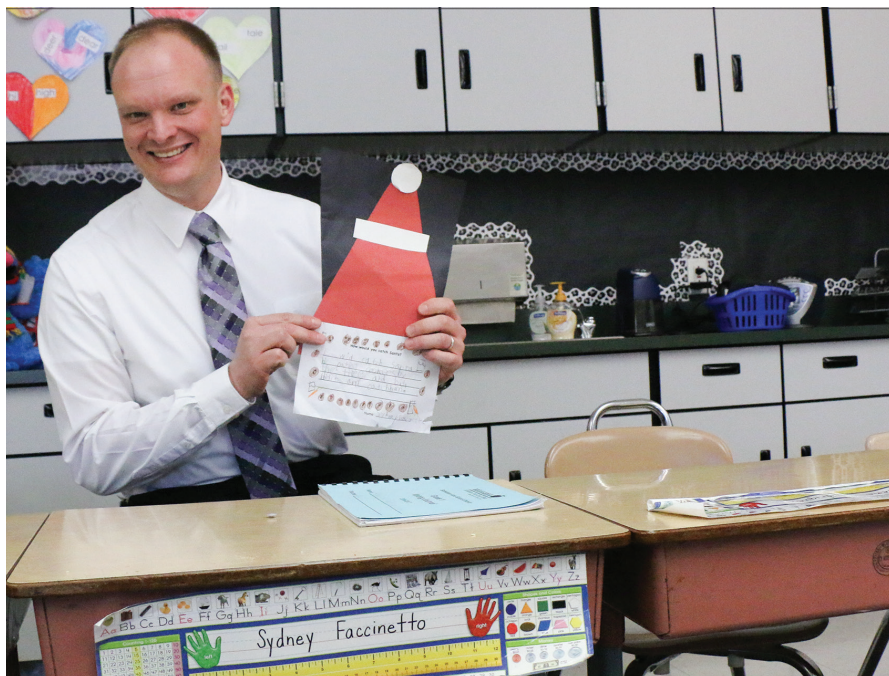
Michael Faccinnetto

takes the reins as
PSBA acting president

By Steve Robinson

If back in 2008 you were told that Bethlehem Area SD today would have a board president who serves as acting president of PSBA or a leader who has been named superintendent of the year, you may have laughed. The turnaround, however, has been nothing but remarkable for a district that was in financial disarray, had little of its curriculum aligned with the state standards, had less than rigorous academics and had a negative fund balance of \$3 million.

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William LaCoff, school board president, Owen J. Roberts SD, and 2015 PSBA president

example, this past December, Spring Garden Elementary in the district was named Pennsylvania’s first Leader in Me Lighthouse School by Franklin Covey Co. and only one of a little more than 200 in the nation. Leader in Me is a whole-school transformation model that empowers students with the leadership and life skills they need to thrive in the 21st century and is based on Stephen Covey’s *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Faccinnetto hopes to bring the same passion and integrity he’s demonstrated in Bethlehem to his role as acting president of PSBA for the remainder of this year and as president in 2018. But like the dramatic change in the district, back in 2008, you may never have predicted the life path Faccinnetto would take from running his family’s insurance agency to becoming a change agent for a struggling school district and leader of a statewide public education association. His interest in the education he helps govern today has grown so strong that he currently is taking classes at Lehigh University to earn his master’s degree in education and hopes to someday become a principal or superintendent.

This path began with a simple conversation with a friend who taught in

Today, with steady dedication from nine school directors under the leadership of Board President Michael Faccinnetto and a new administrative team under the direction of Superintendent Joseph Roy, Bethlehem’s star is certainly on the rise.

Faccinnetto, PSBA’s new acting president, recalls all too well the early days of his tenure when the district’s foray into interest rate swaps landed them on the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* as an example of how not to do swaps. Slowly over time with a new board, new superintendent, new assistant superintendent and new business manager, things began to improve. Dr. Roy and Assistant Superintendent Jack Silva put together a map for educational excellence in the district that Faccinnetto said was “the first time, in a long time that we had a picture of who we are, where we’re going, and how we’re going to get there.”

Faccinnetto, who has three young children in the district, said they “built a board that is here to support kids and schools, and not care about politics, and not care about setting ourselves up to run for something else. No one has an agenda.”

“If I don’t get re-elected because of what I did, that’s fine. I’m proud of what I

did. The work is what’s important and not about how long I sit at the table.”

In Bethlehem, “diversity is our biggest challenge and our biggest opportunity,” he said. “No matter who shows up ... you have to let them in. They come in, and we educate them as best we can. You can’t control the dynamics in that child’s life outside of school, but when they are here we can mitigate those challenges and give them an opportunity.”

The district’s accomplishments over the past nine years have been many. For



Mike Faccinnetto reviews district numbers with Bethlehem Superintendent Joseph Roy, who was recently named Pennsylvania Superintendent of the Year.

Bethlehem Area SD (Northampton Co.) who heard there was an opening on the board and suggested that Faccinnetto apply. He did, but it wasn't until a few days later on one of their evening walks that he even told his wife, a public school teacher in a neighboring district.

During his board interview, he was asked why he wanted to be a school director. He said at the moment, he only had one child so he had a lot of free time on his hands. All the women on the board laughed at him, rightfully so, he said. He had never even attended a board meeting. Faccinnetto was turned down for the position, but several saw something in him and encouraged him to keep coming back. He did, and he attended every school board meeting for the next two years before he decided to run for election. In that hotly contested race, he won after receiving the second most votes next to a hugely popular former principal of the district's Liberty High School, who had a parade held in his honor when he retired. Considering he came in second to an unbeatable candidate, Faccinnetto feels like he came in first place.

Bethlehem's involvement in PSBA also took a 180-degree turn since Faccinnetto's arrival to the board – all the way from no participation to having one of its own serve as president.

"When I came on the board, I had no idea what PSBA was other than someone used to give a report to the board," Faccinnetto said. "The discussion at the time was 'why are we even paying dues considering our finances are so terrible?' Two of the sitting school directors argued that 'we don't have money for training. We don't have money to go to conference, and we don't have money for any professional development, but at least we get the magazine and the *School Leader News*. At least we're getting something and can keep up with things on some level.'"

Dr. Roy came on board and discussions began in earnest about becoming more engaged with the association. As the sixth largest school district in the state, they asked themselves why they weren't involved

in PSBA. Why were they letting other districts determine the path forward? Bethlehem, with its mixture of urban and suburban, wealthy and poor, and huge diversity is a true snapshot of the state and had much to offer PSBA as well.

"The first thing we did is submit a platform item for that year," Faccinnetto said. "We started attending events and went to annual conference for the first time in many years."

Faccinnetto also ran for Region 8 director, but lost. The next year he ran for Eastern At-Large Representative, won and the rest is history.

Today the value of membership is even more obvious, he says, with all the additional services PSBA has included over the past three or four years, including the deal with Eidex, which gives member districts access to this powerful data analytics tool that could cost members several thousands of dollars alone.

His biggest advice to school directors, whether new or veterans, is to get involved and take advantage of the opportunities that are there, either in your home district or through the association.

"What's keeping you from coming out for a meeting? What's keeping you from coming to an upcoming Town Hall or annual conference or webinar?" he said. Even if you just volunteer for a PSBA committee that meets one time a year like the platform committee, you have to get involved," he said.

"You owe it to your organization to have your voice heard, and beyond that you owe it to yourself and those who elected you as school director to take advantage of the tools to better educate yourself on the issues." **B**



"MIKE WILL SERVE PSBA WELL AS PRESIDENT BECAUSE OF HIS MEASURED THINKING AND HIS ABILITY TO VIEW SITUATIONS OBJECTIVELY. HIS EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE AS PRESIDENT OF HIS LOCAL BOARD MAKES HIM WELL-PREPARED TO TAKE ON HIS RESPONSIBILITIES WITH PSBA."

Kathy Swope, school board president, Lewisburg Area SD, and PSBA immediate past president

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