DIFFERENT DIRECTION
Outsourcing IT works for KC

Pittsburgh company manages technology

By Kate Malongowski
Eagle Staff Writer

KARNS CITY — It's not often that a school district can provide more services to teachers and students without increasing costs.

But that's exactly what the Karns City School District has done by hiring Pittsburgh-based Questeq late last year to take over technological services for the district.

"We manage the entire IT department from top to bottom," said Jeff Main, CEO of Questeq.

Questeq employees assist all three of Karns City's schools in buying equipment and maintaining computers and technological systems.

Since hiring Questeq, the district has been able to expand its technological staff from three to four people. Two of those staff members were employed by the district, and a third IT staffer worked in the district through the Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV.

Now because the payroll comes from Questeq and not the school district, there is a significant savings in health care and retirement costs.

"It is costly for districts," Main

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said. "Our cost to employ people is much cheaper."

There were no layoffs as a result of the transition from a district-based IT department to an outsourced IT department, said Superintendent Eric Ritzert.

"We were able to get four people for the cost of three," Ritzert said. "The current additional cost of employees with the PSERS (Public School Employees' Retirement System) ... makes hiring in the district fiscally unattractive."

With the savings on staff, Karns City has established long-term technological goals.

"Karns City is very, very clear on what they want to do going forward with technology," Main said. "They believe in it. They want to integrate it. They want to engage students.

"When they had the conversations with us about how they support and manage that technology, I think they understood that we were on the same page."

What makes Karns City stand out among others, he added, is district leaders understanding that implementing a technology plan takes time. It goes beyond simply buying gadgets for students, especially for a district.

"They're incrementally initiating a one-to-one initiative, which is their long term goal," Main said. "They're truly planning out to go to a point where they are doing great things.

"It's tougher to incrementally do it in an order that it takes time. I think that's the success."

It's a win-win from both sides, Ritzert said, because there's not only a financial benefit, but a technological benefit, too.

"I feel like we tapped into a company whose background is education," he said. "I do think having them as a tech partner is helping us make better, more informed technological decisions."

Questeq works with 28 other school districts in Pennsylvania, including the Butler School District.

Demonstration slated Friday

KARNS CITY — At 3 p.m. Friday, the Karns City School District IT team will host a demonstration at the high school of how a Promethean ActivPanel Touch board can engage students in the classroom. While the event is geared toward educators, the public is welcome.

Those interested can contact Joseph Boltz, Karns City technology manager, at jboltz@karnscity.k12.pa.us.