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Southard fulfilling childhood aspiration

By Bobbie Hayse Messenger-Inquirer
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Seth Southard, Ohio County Schools superintendent, is passionate about the school system and the district's students, something he has maintained throughout his life in the county.

Photo by Bobbie Hayse, Messenger-Inquirer | bhayse@messenger-inquirer.com

Growing up, Seth Southard always had his sights set on becoming the superintendent for Ohio County Schools.

Both of his parents were educators, and one of his dad's best friends is a former superintendent for Ohio County Schools. So Southard grew up hearing discussions about the profession and the inner workings of the district. When he embarked on his education journey, Southard always had administration on his mind.

"It's something that always intrigued me," he said. "I always wanted to work from the district level and make an impact and a difference in that way. I always had aspirations to be the leader of Ohio County Schools."

He achieved that goal about 10 years into his career, when he was named the assistant superintendent for the district. In 2019, he was hired as the superintendent.



The Ohio County native began his career after graduating from Western Kentucky University in 1997 with degrees in chemistry and teaching.

His first job was teaching chemistry at Apollo High School, a position he held for three years. From there, he was hired as the assistant principal at Beaver Dam Elementary School, then principal at Fordsville Elementary School before being named to a leadership position at the central office.

Southard is passionate about Ohio County Schools and the district's students, something he has maintained throughout his life in the county. As a student in the school system, he excelled in math and chemistry. When he was in college, he worked for the district's central office in its maintenance department.

He married his high school sweetheart, Donna, and they have three kids, Sarah Grace, an Ohio County High School graduate, and twins Isaac and Luke, who are seniors at OCHS.

Cheston Hoover, OCS assistant superintendent, has worked closely with Southard for 12 years and has witnessed his colleague's dedication to his profession.

Hoover said Southard leads by example and is always willing to step in and provide leadership and hands-on assistance if any situation arises. Southard is also thoughtful, calm and steady, even under pressure, Hoover said.

He said Southard has always been "student-centered in all of his decision-making."

"Over the years, I've noticed that he cares about our students and staff as people and leads with a service mindset," Hoover said. "He can see the big picture in situations and stays focused on reaching our district's goals."

Away from work, Southard likes to spend time with his family and friends. He and his family enjoy traveling and hiking. They like visiting the Great Smoky Mountains, and they're planning a return trip to Yellowstone National Park this summer.

He also enjoys hunting and playing golf — when he has the time, he said. He's also an avid sports fan and enjoys attending games or watching them on television.

He is a deacon at Beaver Dam Church of Christ.

Trying to find the key to unlock the potential in every child is something Southard said he finds to be among the most difficult aspects of education.

The potential is there, he said, but it can be a challenge to find out how to help the student get there.

“I wish I knew what buttons to push, or what the magic key was for every kid,” he said.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of his job is seeing the growth that occurs with students. An example is the success experienced the past few years after hiring literacy coaches for each of the district’s elementary schools, he said.

“It’s good to see students growing and learning and narrowing the gap that was in existence with reading,” he said. “That’s what it’s all about, seeing students grow. It’s awesome to watch.”

He said being at the district central office for 15 years, he’s had the opportunity to watch students progress from preschoolers to high school graduates.

“To see them throughout their whole educational journey, see them walk across that stage at graduation and then seeing them start their careers, have jobs and families, is amazing,” he said. “It’s a wonderful thing to see that unfold before your eyes and to know, in some way, you were part of that.”

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