

# Engravalle becomes head of Hamburg schools

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**HAMBURG** - "If you write a great article, you'll win a Pulitzer," says Steven Engravalle in his interview. "Students don't go up to a teacher and say, 'Wow, that was a great test, thanks for making the questions so hard!' The only way you find out you've done well is when kids come back after graduating to say thanks."

Engravalle (pronounced "En-gruh-valley") has gone back to his alma maters of Pascack Hills High School and Fieldstone Middle School to say his thanks many times over. Somehow, though, that didn't seem like enough to the 1996 graduate, so he went into education himself.

To say that he's been successful would be an understatement. To say that his picture is etched under "precocious" in dictionary... that might also be an understatement.

This July, Engravalle will be instated as the superintendent of Hamburg schools in Sussex County. It will take place roughly two months after his 29th birthday.

His success, he says, is a testament to the teachers who taught him.

Steven Engravalle has a lot to say about education. He believes in the power of technology, the vital importance of parent involvement, and the need for teachers to connect with their students on a personal level. He is passionate about helping children, both individually and on a global scale.

Engravalle tells his students that his life is an open book and is frank about his imperfect childhood. A latchkey kid with an abusive father,



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVEN ENGRAVALLE

Steven Engravalle, a graduate of Pascack Hills High School and Fieldstone Middle School will be instated as the superintendent of Hamburg schools in Sussex County this July, two months after his 29th birthday.

he didn't find support at home for much—not for school or for football, not for the myriad teenage quandaries he encountered.

He could have been one of those kids who slips away, who slips through the cracks of a high-pressure school and is forgotten.

Engravalle puts it another way to the kids he speaks to in his office every day: "You're sitting on a fence, and you can fall either way. On one side of the fence is the green pasture. On the other side of the fence is the pigpen. And you know what's in the pigpen..."

Engravalle has no doubts about why he's now sitting pretty in the pasture: the positive influence of the teachers he had at Fieldstone and Pascack Hills. When he was aimless, his teachers pointed him in the right direction. When he was down, they gave him confidence.

One of those down times was Engravalle's senior year in high school when he found himself injured with a broken leg. Engravalle was bound for Indiana University, and had the inkling that he might try out for the football team. The injury, of course, dashed any chances of that happening.

If Jacqueline Borio, his senior English teacher, hadn't walked into his life, Engravalle might have submitted to his misery. Instead, Borio got him to write about his frustration, pushing him to excel. With two masters' degrees and a nearly completed doctorate under his belt, he still maintains that it was one of the best classes he's ever taken.

Engravalle cut his losses and enrolled in Ramapo College in Mahwah—an English major. Upon graduation he fast-tracked it through the New Jersey school system, teaching at schools in Bergenfield and Franklin Borough, as well as adjuncting at Passaic Community College. He moved on to be vice principal in Franklin before becoming the principal of Hamburg School.

Typical Engravalle, he credits his mentors with his rapid ascension—particularly the tutelage of Tom Turner, superintendent of Franklin schools.

Hamburg School, a kindergarten through eighth grade district, has embraced the Engravalle era. He was hired for the job in January, only days after he received the proper accreditation to serve in the position (and, for those who like numbers, less than eight years after he could legally buy alcohol and 11 years since he was able to vote).

Engravalle's take on the quick promotion is "Why not?"

"To me, age is just a number," he said. "It's desire, ability. I'm absolutely ready to be superintendent."

Engravalle's approach to running the 315-student school is to be "omnipresent"—or at least make the kids think he is. Hamburg installed wi-fi video cameras on its 20-acre campus that are monitored by local police. He's working on a total "infusion of technology," including a program that will allow parents to preview their children's grades and attendance records online.

Still, he's a gentle giant (admittedly one who concedes that he looks like a police officer). If a kid has a problem, Engravalle knows about it and he'll talk to the kid about it. They'll try to work something out, because above all, Engravalle's in it to help his students.

"If I can do for one kid what someone did for me, then I'm a success," he said.

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