

BOARD NOTES
April 26, 2010

The regular meeting of the School Board was held on Monday, April 26, 2010 with Al Williamson, LuAnn Schwingendorf, Bernie Baltes and Dale Groves present. Rich Shail was absent.

Al Williamson reviewed the guidelines for speaking on agenda items.

The Board adopted the agenda as presented.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRESENTATION

- Jim Holifield addressed the board on the Chinese Exchange Program the New Prairie Schools will participate in. New Prairie was successful in having one of 137 teachers from the Chinese Exchange Program for the 2010-2011 school year. Jim said this is an elite program for Chinese instructors. There were 3,700 teachers who applied and 137 were selected. The instructor will teach an Introduction to Mandarin and a Mandarin language class to the Middle School and High School. There is no cost to the corporation. Jim Holifield will provide room and board to the instructor. In addition, we will also host a student Chinese Exchange program in July. Approximately 18 students will visit the New Prairie area for approximately 10 days. We hope to send representatives to China the following year.
- Julie Jerzak highlighted the accomplishments of the FBLA. There were 24 students who participated in state conference. Of the 24, 17 students qualified for an automatic berth to Nationals. Also, Danielle Webb has been elected as the State President. Julie indicated that she has received assistance from Jim Parent, Jeff Suttor and Greg Miller.
- Dr. Bender recognized Spencer Ness who was selected as the Indiana Academic All Star.

CONSENT ITEMS

- The board approved the Consent Items as follows:
 - Minutes – March 22, 2010
 - Financial Reports
 - Claims
 - Payroll
 - Personnel as follows:

CERTIFIED

- Leaves/Resignations
 1. Rachel Chelminiak – Kindergarten Teacher – Olive – Leave of absence for the 2010-2011 school year
 2. Jenna Gensic – Language Arts Teacher – NPHS – Leave of absence for the 2010-2011 school year
- Reduction in Force – Effective for the 2010-2011 school year
 1. Leifschon Walker
 2. Sara Serry
 3. Jemiah Feece
 4. Gabriela Post
 5. Laura Palman
- Employment
 1. Chad Strasser – Vocal Music Teacher – NPHS – Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year
 2. Alexa Winski – Math Teacher – NPHS – Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year

NON-CERTIFIED

- Leaves/Resignations
 1. Nancy DeVore – Health Assistant – Prairie View Elementary School – resignation effective April 26, 2010
- Employment – Extra-Curricular
 1. Randy Curless – Co-Assistant Softball – 2009-2010 school year

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

- Dr. Bender advised that we will be approving the RIF of five teachers. We are in the process of placing teachers now. We are working through some issues at the middle school. We are in the process of having everyone certified in that building.

Once we receive word on the distribution of Title I monies, we hope to bring one more teacher back. We hope to be able to bring the final two positions back.

- We have been addressing outstanding book rental fees throughout the year. We have a current balance of \$56,000 in outstanding fees. Schools have been working hard to reduce these fees. We started the year at \$320,000. We are pleased with the direction we are heading.
- Cash Flow – We are confident that St. Joe will be sending out their tax bills and our corporation receiving those funds. We are not confident with LaPorte. We do not know that that money will be coming in. We will have to see whether we will have to borrow monies. We believe we have made the adjustments for the possible January reductions from the State. Bernie said the Governor cut all agencies in the state with the exception of education.

ACTION ITEMS

- The board approved the cafeteria bids which will be awarded through the NIESC. In the future, the NIESC will be the purchasing agent and it will not be necessary for the board to take action on food bids.
- The board approved the non-renewal of the non-permanent teacher contracts for five teachers. As part of the RIF agreement, the corporation cannot approve employment for a teacher until these teachers are in place. Of the five teachers, we are confident we have requirements for three. Two teachers were hired through federal funding. Those dollars will be used this year to fund all day kindergarten. We want to be sure we have the appropriate numbers and funding before we re-hire any of the teachers.

Bernie said he has a concern with the basic structure of the Title program because it is based on the premise that teachers are employed to work with those students who they feel are not functioning at the appropriate level. Dr. Bender said it has always bothered him because that is why a number of school corporations get such large amounts of monies to work with.

Bernie said another concern is Title I is based on academics and they have not been able to help students that are gifted in other areas other than academics.

Dale asked how our enrollment numbers are looking. Dr. Bender said we are slightly under from last year. We do not have the numbers in kindergarten at this time at Rolling. It could go up – it traditionally does. We are down one teacher at Rolling because of those numbers. We will not be taking any more 6th grade students because we are at the maximum now. We are trying to fill areas at other schools, but will be careful not to push the class sizes in all buildings.

- The board approved the financial advisor/underwriting services with Hilliard Lyons. They would underwrite the issuance and selling of bonds if we do a bond issue. The cost would be 1% of the par value of the issue. Their fees would come from the bond issue. If there are no bonds issued, there is no fee.
- The board agreed not to approve the revised Joint Agreement with the South LaPorte Cooperative. They revision asked the local corporations to pay interest charges if we do not pay our quarterly bills on time. Dr. Bender said the schools are checking to see whether this is legal. We currently pay the LEA 7% for them to handle our money. We want to pay them on time, but if we are in a position where we can't make our payroll by paying the co-op, we will meet our payroll commitments. The other three corporations will be making this same recommendation. We believe this 7% we currently pay them should cover this. We are just an advisory board. We can make a recommendation, but the LEA can do what they want.
- The board approved the Qualified School Construction Bond Counsel agreement with Ice Miller. This would be a separate agreement for a \$2 million and under bond project. This would also be paid from the bond issue if we would proceed.
- The board approved the out-of-state transportation of the Chinese exchange students to and from Chicago Airport. Lloyd has agreed to cover this expense from the Transportation Fund.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- The board discussion Board Policy 7510 – Community Use of Facilities and establishing rates for the use of the facilities. As part of the financial reduction recommendation, we established \$25,000 could be saved in the budget.

Dr. Bender discussed this with the administrators. They have expressed some concern with groups like the PTO who use the facilities and return monies back to the school. Dr. Bender said these are public facilities supported by tax dollars. However, we have many facilities that charge fees like zoos, etc. that are also public facilities. We need to look at our facilities and the dollar figures we have and see what adjustments should be made. Many groups charge a fee to be on a team. Then you have Scouts, 4-H, etc. We do not want to discourage those activities, but we need to look at it. We also looked at fees for folding tables and chairs for rental. Dale asked where the money would go when collected. Keith said it would go in the corporation General Fund.

Bernie said he is interested in identifying who fits in the specific categories. Keith said travel teams would be a Category "C" as well as summer camps. He said there are a lot of gray areas. If you charge, it is considered an outside event and has to be off our books. This is the law. Column "B" is the cost of the custodian. We did not address the outside facilities that are used by Little League and Rocket Football, but it should be addressed. The corporation can no longer afford to absorb these fees. We will have principals list everything the buildings are used for and see what we have. Bernie said he can see 4-H and Scouts are run by volunteers. He feels they should qualify more than these travel teams.

Al would suggest we put a committee together. We could look at it. As for baseball and football clubs, they use these facilities every day. Keith said they do make improvements to the facilities. Dr. Bender said we need to make these groups have an understanding of where we are coming from.

- The board introduced Board Policy 2261.01 – Title I Parenting Participation for first reading. Dr. Bender said the state has required this policy revision.
- School Facilities – Dr. Bender said we have had a series of meetings with a broad based planning team suggested by this board, principals and PTO groups. We have had community members attend and now we are getting nay sayers who do not understand the process or the project. The final meeting is scheduled for Wednesday night. People who do not understand what is going on believe it is being driven by the board. We want the group to determine whether it is something that the board wants to pursue. In order to do any project over \$2 million, it requires a public vote. The goal was to see whether we could get support from the community to carry the momentum through a fall election. We have not seen that support. The board has to be careful not to let 4-5 community people drive the situation. We do not want to get like Michigan where we have deteriorating facilities. When schools decay, towns will die.

We will need to go after the \$2 million interest free bonds. That will have to be a board decision. The grant is due by June 1st. At the May meeting, we hope we can make some determination whether we will do this. Keith said you can do a bond, but it is limited by the circuit breaker. You have to do a referendum if you do a \$2 million project. This is a one-time offer because it is part of the stimulus project. This is decided at the DOE level.

BOARD COMMENTS

- Dale said Arne Duncan ties things to tests. The Michigan state superintendent is doing the same thing. Tying so many things like teacher retention, hiring, firing, etc. decided by ISTEP is ridiculous. He said he does not mind being held responsible for what students are doing, but it has to be fair. He said he would never support something like that. Dr. Bender said it is not just the test itself, it is how it is scored. The issues are bench marks. You work hard to reach the bench mark, but the bench mark changes all the time. There is no determination if learning is taking place.

Bernie said he has the same concerns. There is a lot of learning that takes place outside the classroom for many students.