

Budget planning, graduation, athletics among board topics

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Basic budget planning for next year and the future, graduation requirements and athletics were targeted in detail at the Jan. 3 work session of the Holyoke Re-1J Board of Education.

Additionally, the board debriefed the self-evaluation work with Randy Black from their Dec. 10 meeting, and also discussed the open/closed lunch procedures at the JR/SR High.

At the Jan. 6 school board meeting, Supt. Stephen Bohrer reported on the Jan. 3 work session, which was held in Sterling.

A self-evaluation debriefing set the tone for other topics on the work session agenda.

First up was a new board agenda format, which includes a left-hand column to keep the district's mission, board's purpose, essential roles, core values and crucial questions in front of board members as they deliberate the agenda.

Significant changes were suggested for the Quality Leadership Resolution. The goal is to make a statement that the district is aware of its financial difficulties, but is in a pro-active rather than reactive mode in dealing with the effects of declining enrollment.

A Statement of Board Integrity and Code of Ethics for Educators were also pondered and endorsed.

Priorities identified

Annual priorities (big rocks) will be formulated to receive special attention at the board level as a means to achieve district goals.

"Big rocks" which were identified at the recent work session follow:

- Continue to improve student achievement.
- Maintain a minimum of \$1.2 million in the general fund reserve.
- Build an adequate capital reserve fund to meet future needs.
- Study a mill levy override election.

Some very specific actions to study were identified to help achieve these priorities. Dr. Bohrer emphasized these ideas are simply being studied, not advocated nor implemented.

Suggestions were recorded to:

- Study contracting snow removal and mowing.
- Study contracting food service and custodial services for possible cost savings.
- Study sharing services with the Haxtun School District, including vocational courses and athletic programs.
- Prioritize courses and positions. Bohrer said the suggested order is: 1. core and special classes that are required, 2. the arts, 3. vocational business, consumer science and other electives and 4. sports.

Academic and financial benchmarks for the board and others for the administration were cited. It was noted they'll need to be coordinated to work.

Graduation

requirements evaluated

Too many students don't take enough rigorous courses during their senior and perhaps junior years, according to the board consensus at the Jan. 3 work session.

While sufficient courses are available, too many students are comfortable taking an easy path that may leave them unsatisfactorily prepared for college.

Board members expressed additional graduation requirements would place undue hardship on those students who already struggle and could cause them to become apathetic or drop out.

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It was suggested the district study offering a high school diploma and an honors diploma for those who want to aspire to excellence.

Along the same academic line, members felt the incentives in place to allow students to avoid semester tests are working well.

Dr. Bohrer's printed recap of the Jan. 3 session states, however, "The four percent grade reduction for tardies and trancies is working, but we wonder if there may be a better way to inspire good attendance without the draconian consequence of taking away points already earned."

Athletics reviewed

It was a board consensus that additional budget reductions may result in curtailing athletics, noted Dr. Bohrer. Members would consider removal of newly adopted programs such as softball or team sports such as girls' swimming and boys' golf in the reverse order of their adoption, should the economic circumstances facing the district change.

Citing the resignation letter submitted by head HS football coach George Purnell, it was a continued board consensus there are too many HS football coaches. With six remaining coaches, it was felt they should also take on the duties of the JH football program.

Number of JH games was addressed, as well. Specifically, a request has been made to play more JH football games, with five currently being allowed.

While it was a board consensus the number is sufficient, they noted attention should be given to playing teams which can furnish a JV game in addition to varsity.

In further athletics discussion, board members agreed the present arrangement for Athletic Director is working well.

Lunch procedures working

Current procedures for open/closed lunch at the JR/SR High are working, according to board consensus.

Grade 6 has closed lunch with grades 7-12 having open lunch unless individual students have discipline issues which cause them to lose the open lunch privilege.

Board members learned at the work session that discipline referrals involving seventh and eighth grade students have dropped significantly since lunch was opened for them in November.