

Re-1J Foundation, grading pilot, random drug testing audit highlight board reports

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Several significant updates highlighted the superintendent's report at the Feb. 8 meeting of Holyoke School District Re-1J Board of Education.

Re-1J Foundation, grading pilot and random drug testing semester audit were key reports given by Supt. Bret Miles.

Michelle Van Overbeke and Miles provided some information about the funds established for fund raising by the Re-1J Education Foundation.

Kim Killin praised the effort of Van Overbeke in her effort on the brochures, website and mailer that went out for the Foundation.

Grading pilot updates showed eligibility is still showing a stark difference. For the week of Jan. 30 this year, there were 11 ineligible students in 16 classes. A year ago, 101 students were ineligible in 195 classes.

Teacher survey results on the grading pilot show initial reaction is supportive of people directly involved in the program. Students are doing higher quality work and are doing better on classroom assessments.

Even with disagreement in some areas and need for more time together, the survey indicated 76 percent readiness to move forward. There are some concerns on procedures/consistency and concern about putting this grading pilot into policy.

Linda Jelden said she was glad to see so many comments from people, as there's a big difference between procedure and philosophy.

Staff will be surveyed again this month and students, parents and staff will be surveyed the first

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week in March. Leadership team members will continue to solicit feedback on what is working or not working well.

It is anticipated the leadership team will have a recommendation March 20. It was pointed out policy is a necessary component because that's what provides clear expectations/communication.

Miles reported he had conducted the biannual audit of the random drug testing program and there were no variations in the operating procedures. All paperwork was complete, matched and met the requirements.

Spring of 2011 showed one positive test reported, but it was due to medication being taken by the student. No positive tests were reported for the fall of 2011.

Last fall, 86 percent of junior high students and 84 percent of high school students were enrolled in random drug testing.

Last semester results showed 57 students were tested, with eight being selected twice and one being selected three times.

As part of the BEST construction projects and other capital improvements with mill levy override dollars, the district issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for financing.

Miles explained the mill levy override covered roof repairs, but spans nine years, and the contractors need paid this year.

He is currently working with First Pioneer National Bank for this financing, as they met more quality indicators than the other bid. He said he believes the contract can be finished and ready for approval by the next board meeting.

Board member visit guidelines approved

Guidelines for board member visits to the schools were approved at last week's meeting. Over several months the board has had an ongoing conversation on visiting schools and the potential issues that can be raised by staff during the process.

To communicate their intent and to ease anxiety, the board developed guidelines to use to make the visits productive.

Part of gaining insight into the district is being able to visit buildings, but not to create anxiety among staff members. The guidelines were established to create a more comfortable environment for the visits.

Personnel approved

Several personnel items were voted on at last week's school board meeting.

The board unanimously supported a two-year contract renewal for Supt. Miles, from July 2012 through June 2014. Kim Killin commended Miles' responsiveness to issues of the board; and Jeff Tharp praised his calm demeanor and ability to step back and look at situations at an effective pace.

Kellie Race was approved for contracted services for website design and maintenance, and Karen Crocker was hired as long-term substitute for the maternity leave of Heather Bieber in the HHS language arts department.

Additionally, Cindi Beavers was hired as JH track assistant coach and Michelle Gregg as one-on-one teacher aide at the elementary school.

Board members acknowledged the career of elementary special education teacher Lynette Harms as they accepted her retirement effective at the end of the current school year.

The resignation of elementary library aide Barb Neugebauer was accepted, effective Feb. 7.

Other business

In other business at the Feb. 8 meeting, the Re-1J board:

—noted the next regular meeting will be changed from Feb. 21 to Monday, Feb. 27 at 7 p.m.

—approved first reading of 32 Section J policies related to students.

—heard and voted favorably on first reading of Policy BE on school board meetings. The policy revision cites all board meetings during the school year will begin at 7 p.m. and meetings in the summer will start at 8 p.m.

—approved a fiscal year 2013 budget development timeline which is designed as a communication tool so staff and community can understand the process and where there are opportunities for input.

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—noted Colorado was awarded \$17 million from the Race to the Top III process, half of which will go directly to the school districts involved. Based on preliminary allocations, Holyoke would receive \$5,945. Supt. Miles said there will be a conversation of the BOCES board for pooling these funds. He will have a recommendation Feb. 27.

—heard the quarterly financial report, noting revenue and expenditures are tracking as expected for this point in the year. At midyear, the district is sitting with \$1,604,196 cash on hand. These reports are available on the district website under the Board of Education tab and in the financials section.

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