

School safety is at the forefront

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

School safety can't be emphasized enough, and local safety updates were reviewed at the Jan. 15 meeting of Holyoke School District Re-1J Board of Education.

The Dec. 14 school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Connecticut brought school safety to the forefront, making safety measures in the local district timely.

Superintendent Bret Miles noted Crisis Response Plan revisions were made this past fall and were sent to the printer in December. Staff reviewed the revised plan at the Jan. 4 inservice.

With safety discussion already in place, the holiday break provided good timing to implement some changes. Administrators shared details of those changes at last week's board meeting.

Once the tardy bell has rung at both Holyoke Elementary and Holyoke JR/SR High, the doors are locked. A buzzing-in system is in place, whereby the school secretaries can release the lock to admit visitors.

Employees now wear ID badges, visitor sign-in is required (including walkers at the JR/SR High track) and the elementary lobby area has new criteria.

The second set of double doors at the elementary are closed, and it is requested that parents not go through those doors unless they have a pass. Additionally, visitors are not allowed inside the lobby area at the end of the day, but instead parents are asked to wait outside for their children.

Principals Susan Ortner and Kyle Stumpf said parents have been supportive. Miles added the community has been very receptive to the changes—willing to waive some inconvenience for advanced security.

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Miles said they're reviewing camera locations. He also noted the district will resubmit the 2010 BEST grant on security improvements in March.

PC Telcom voices concerns

PC Telcom manager Vince Kropp, along with Mark Smith and Jessica Cumming, voiced concern at a work session just prior to last Tuesday's board meeting.

Kropp highlighted a Nov. 29 Holyoke Enterprise article regarding school board discussion on the EAGLE-Net agreement. His concern is that readers could infer that everything is OK in the relationship with the school district, PC Telcom and EAGLE-Net. He emphasized that it is not OK.

The three entities are six months into a three-year contract for Internet services.

Kropp and Cumming voiced concern for EAGLE-Net overbuilding PC Telcom's and other broadband providers' existing fiber-optic deployments with federal dollars and concern for following the "collaboration" component in the agreement.

Cumming pointed to the financial impact for PC Telcom. She noted EAGLE-Net pays no taxes, while PC Telcom pays substantial taxes, particularly property tax.

She also cited information on the EAGLE-Net website, which states they're bringing middle-mile infrastructure to places that have had insufficient or nonexistent broadband connectivity.

However, Cumming said that isn't true, as PC Telcom has been serving 11 school districts in

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the past five years.

Kropp cited a letter recently sent to PC Telcom customers, which summarizes reasons they believe EAGLE-Net has strayed from the purpose of their National Telecommunications & Information Administration Broadband Technology Opportunities Program.

Kropp said PC Telcom has had very good support from legislators at both the state and national levels.

Kropp said there are other areas of Colorado where EAGLE-Net has overbuilt the existing fiber-optic installations. He noted they've been stopped in southeast Colorado because the communities said, "No."

Kropp said it's not too late for the community's message of concern to get out there. He suggested consideration from the school board for a letter expressing support for the intent of collaboration in the agreement.

Bus routes reviewed

Pickup times and amount of time students spend on route buses covered another work session topic last week.

Acknowledging it's not a simple problem due to budget constraints and priorities, board members said they want to learn more about what can be done to lessen time on buses for students. Miles will assemble some dollar ratios regarding costs for different numbers of regular bus routes.

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It was noted that a couple of bus routes have been eliminated in recent years, which has drastically changed pickup times. Kids are now getting on buses as early as 6:45 a.m.

While there are fewer bus riders, it doesn't change the locations of the homes on the far ends of the routes.

Paperless board meetings was another work session topic. Miles presented two online tools for organizing all school board information in one place. He said the archiving potential is the biggest piece for him.

Board members expressed interest in learning more about costs and cost-savings with these tools.

Random drug test audit reported for first semester

In the first-semester random drug test audit report, Miles said the program was completed with no variations from the standard operating procedures.

Ortner shared data from the first-semester report, noting there were no positive tests.

Participation in the random drug testing, which is required for all 7-12 students involved in extra-curricular activities, included 82 percent of seventh- and eighth-grade students and 87 percent of students in grades 9-12.

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Board retreat debriefed

Board members debriefed the Jan. 10 retreat at last week's regular meeting.

Reviewing lists created by the district accountability committee and standard of excellence committee, the board found the expectations of the community are evident in the school today.

The board noticed two themes: providing diverse opportunities for students in school is valued, and most comments revolved around intangible assets such as feeling safe, acceptance and developing enthusiasm for learning.

Potential use of a student advisory committee was discussed at the retreat. However, the board decided to utilize existing structures such as student council and the focus groups.

Athletic director Sandra Rahe told the board about establishing an advisory committee, and they shared thoughts about the potential benefits of this group.

Miles gave the board an update on a collaborative effort of 11 school districts in northeast Colorado working together to implement the optional curriculum resource, which is ready to be distributed by the Colorado Dept. of Education.

Board development was also addressed at the retreat. The board focused on its role when it comes to instructional changes implemented in the district and how a board best supports innovation while maintaining expectations of the local community.

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Other business

In other business Jan. 15, the Re-1J board:

—approved renewal of a two-year contract for Miles as superintendent from July 1, 2013-June 30, 2015. During the Jan. 10 retreat, the board had reviewed Miles' evaluation and the deliverables set for October 2013.

—accepted resignations for JR/SR High ESL instructor Desiree Mosenteen and elementary paraprofessional Christene Strecker, effective Jan. 25; and for elementary paraprofessional Brittany Clevenger, effective Jan. 10.

—hired Allie Billings as JR/SR High ESL instructor; Stephanie Mitchell, second-grade teacher; Charles Bruce, long-term substitute for business teacher Kristie Ham; and Wendy Weatherly, Amy Deaver and Brittany Daniel as elementary paraprofessionals for the remainder of the 2012-13 school year.

Miles commended principals Ortner and Stumpf for a great job of hiring mid-year when it typically can be tough to find people.

—approved nonresident student Caitlynn Deaver from the Haxtun School District.

—acknowledged a gift from Sharon Burt, who set up a scholarship for a senior, in memory of her brother, former HHS student Larry Burt. The \$1,000 scholarship will be for a student attending a vocational or technical school.

—designated the administration office as the place for official posting of meetings.

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