By Sheri Hink

The Wauneta Breeze

The Wauneta-Palisade school board met Monday night for their regular monthly meeting. Agenda items included discussion on the continuous improvement process, purchase of classroom amplification systems, facilities improvements and the 2012-13 school calendar.

Continuous improvement process

W-P staff provided the board an update on the process made on the district's continuous improvement process. In a summary of the continuous improvement plan it was explained that the plan provides a data-driven framework to determine goals and strategies for improving student learning. The target areas for improvement at W-P include reading and writing.

The summary went on to explain that W-P has had a goal of improving reading skills since 2003. National, state and district assessment results indicate the need for reading improvements. The district has implemented several proven curriculum systems and techniques to help accomplish this goal.

The plan summary explains that the district has a writing initiative for all grade levels. Results from state and local writing assessments have confirmed that W-P needs to improve student writing in all content areas. The district has implemented several improvement strategies and professional development opportunities for teachers to help improve student writing.

An external team will be visiting the district on April 10. During their visit they will meet with W-P's reading and writing committees. The external team will work with W-P committees to develop improvement goals and strategies to meet those goals.

Classroom amplification system

Kristina Kerst, the ESU speech pathologist that serves the W-P school district, provided a presentation to the board on classroom amplification systems. These systems are designed to improve students' ability to hear the teacher. She reported that 55-70 percent of classroom learning is done from listening.

Kerst has tested students' hearing in all grade levels and found hearing concerns in all levels. Of note, she found that 33 percent of the pre-kindergarten three-year-old students have hearing concerns and that 36 percent of W-P kindergartners have hearing concerns.

The classroom amplification systems have been piloted in several elementary classrooms at the W-P schools and teachers Marilyn Kunkel (sixth grade) and Sheryl Einspahr (second grade) were in attendance to share their experiences with the amplification system.

Kunkel reported that her students "perked up" and listened better when she was utilizing the system.

Kunkel also discovered that one of her students has no hearing in one ear and that the student told her that the amplification system was a great help.

Einspahr reported that students were more engaged in the classroom presentation when she

was using the system and that she herself felt less tired at the end of the day because the system eliminated the need to strain her voice to be heard in the classroom.

Kerst explained to the board that the amplification system not only amplified the teacher's voice, it also makes the sound more intelligible. The classroom audio system helps accentuate the soft consonants which, Kerst explained, directly ties to better intelligibility of speech. She went on to say that this technology is helpful for all students, not just the hearing impaired. All students benefit from improved hearing in the classroom.

After discussing the benefits to the students, the W-P school board approved the purchase of the unit currently being demonstrated in the schools at a discounted rate, of $924.80. They also approved the purchase of six additional units for a total of $6,378. At this time, the school plans to put a unit in the early-elementary classrooms and have two units available to float between the upper grade classrooms. The school board may choose to purchase additional units in the future so they can be available in every classroom.

Coach buses

The board authorized staff to move forward on a quote of $10,252.59 to paint one of the coach buses recently purchased for activities. Graphic design will be added at a later time.

The second coach bus that was purchased will be painted at a later time after board members work to find less expensive options for needed body repair.

Facilities improvements

The need for a new high jump pad was discussed at the board meeting. The board has a quote for $5,943 from a contractor to pour a cement pad for the high jump. The board chose to research other options such as a movable surface and address this need at a later meeting.

The track was also discussed during the meeting. The board has asked board member Bill Bischoff to request a quote for a double armor coat on the track. The double armor coat would transform the track surface into an asphalt-type surface.

The board determined that they need more information on the facilities improvement projects for the two attendance centers before they can move forward on a possible contract with the consultant company Trane to complete repairs.

The needed facilities improvements were addressed at a special ad hoc school board committee meeting held on March 1. During the meeting the Wauneta-Palisade school board asked area residents to form a volunteer advisory committee to discuss W-P school facilities.

Committee members invited by the board consisted of community members including parents of current students, past students, Wauneta and Palisade residents as well as those new to the community and long-time residents.

The ad hoc committee was established to serve for one day only, March 1, when they met to review findings of a review of the energy efficiency of the two attendance centers as completed by the energy services company Trane.

Trane, one of four energy efficiency companies in Nebraska, was selected by the school board to work with the W-P schools to implement facility improvement projects.

The goal of the projects is to improve the learning environment for students and reduce energy costs at the two locations. The school has been working with Trane for approximately one year.

To this point, Trane has provided three services to W-P schools. They have conducted an energy analysis, building audits and made recommendations to the school board on how to improve the learning environment and energy costs at the two attendance centers.

The board will discuss the needed repairs and upgrades to the two attendance centers and a possible contract with Trane to complete the work at a special meeting on March 19.

2012-13 school calendar

W-P school board members had a preliminary discussion of the 2012-13 school calendar. During the discussion board members asked Superintendant Sibley to prepare draft calendars which include school starting one week earlier, which would be during the week of the Chase County Fair. Starting one week earlier would allow for an earlier summer dismissal.

Discussion included the possibility of having late starts or noon dismissals during fair week.

There was also discussion of changing the current break schedule in the second semester to include two consecutive days instead of several Friday-only breaks. Dr. Sibley will prepare additional calendar scenarios and present them to the board at a future meeting.

Administrative reports

The Junior/Senior High School Principal and Athletic Director Troy Holmberg provided a report on student ACT testing achievement. Two tenth grade students, six eleventh grade students and seven twelfth grade students have taken the ACT.

Two students received scores in the 13-16 range, and four students received scores in the 17-20, 21-24 and 25-27 ranges. One student received a score in the 28-36 range. Holmberg explained that a student with a score of 24 is considered “college ready” as it is expected that he or she could succeed in any college class. Scores of 28 or higher are considered in the 90th percentile.

Holmberg also presented information on the cumulative grade point average (GPA) of the high school students. Six percent of the student body have a GPA of 1.99 or lower, 15 percent have a GPA between 2 and 2.49, 21 percent of the student body have GPAs in either the 2.5 to 2.99 or 3 to 3.49 range. The highest percentage of students, 37 percent, have GPAs in the 3.5 to 4.0 range.

At this time Holmberg is not able to provide information on how ACT scores correlate to GPA achievement.

During his administrative report Dr. Stan Sibley, district superintendant and elementary principal, provided information on the district’s emergency management plan. He reported that the plan has been developed and that the next step is to conduct drills to allow staff to test the plan and make changes where needed.

Another safety issue is the fire slide at Palisade. Dr. Sibley reported that the slide had not been used in a number of years and therefore he will authorize a structural engineer to inspect the slide to assure its safety for students.

Dr. Sibley also mentioned the need to purchase a new reading program for elementary students to replace the dated McGraw Hill program currently in use. He intends to bring more information on the reading program to the March 19 meeting.

Other business

The school board will be interviewing superintendant candidates on March 15. They are hopeful that a decision can be made soon.

The board approved continued membership in the Title III LEP/IE Consortium, a language instruction system for English language learners.

The school board will meet for a special meeting to discuss facilities improvements and other business items on Monday, March 19 at 7:30 p.m. MT at the Wauneta Attendance Center.

They also voted to move the regular meeting for April from April 9 to April 12. The April meeting will be held at the Wauneta Attendance Center. The public is invited to attend school board meetings.