

School board discusses staff changes, reconfiguring grades

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Wednesday, 25 April 2012 20:20 - Last Updated Wednesday, 25 April 2012 20:22

By Diane Stamm

The Wauneta Breeze

The Wauneta-Palisade school board met for a special meeting Thursday, April 19, to discuss staff changes and the possibility of reconfiguring grades.

The board opened with discussion of Mrs. Joyce Spickelmier. With a low number of students taking business classes, the board decided to reduce Spickelmeier from full-time to half-time. After discussions with Superintendent Dr. Stan Sibley, Spickelmier is open to a separation agreement.

The separation agreement differs from the Early Leave Incentive. Spickelmeier will receive insurance coverage until January 2013 and when figuring the amount she is owed for unused sick days her daily rate of pay will be used rather than a substitute's rate of pay.

The board approved the separation agreement for Spickelmier.

Superintendent Sibley said he and Spickelmeier have had several discussions she understands the hard business decisions the district faces. He said she will take time to make the right decision and that she has 21 days from when the agreement is offered to make her decision.

Discussion then moved to the External Visitation Team's recommendation to reconfigure grade level assignments to pre-kindergarten through fourth grades in Palisade and fifth through 12th in Wauneta.

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While sixth through eighth grades together is a common arrangement at larger schools, the fifth and sixth grade classes work well together at Wauneta-Palisade.

Worries were expressed that if only the sixth grade were moved to Wauneta they would be “sucked in” to the Junior High even though they are not mature enough. Bringing fifth grade at the same time would help keep the sixth grade in a classroom type setting, but the two grades could departmentalize classes like social studies and reading.

Another concern was that fifth grade students would be in too close of contact with eighth graders. The board said that, at present, second graders are in the same hall as eighth graders in Wauneta and it would be good to separate them. Secondary principal Troy Holmberg added that the move would make locker room supervision easier.

Board member Bill Bischoff said he believes the staff is in place to make the move and make it work. Superintendent Sibley said he has “great confidence” that the staff can get the job done.

Teachers Denise Bales, Marilyn Kunkel and Sherri Schoenholz were present to offer comments and opinions.

Kunkel said there would be a “smooth flow educationally” if the lower elementary were together and would make for better staff meetings. Bales added it would be much easier for the teachers to collaborate.

Kunkel said this is a “huge” decision and there will be people who don’t agree with whichever decision is made.

Noting that the move is based on educational needs, not numbers or emotions, Board member Allison Sandman said the move sets kids up to “learn well and perform well.”

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Board President Jon Anderjaska added that when events are held at the high school in Wauneta, K-4 could still have classes in Palisade.

Public meetings will be held at both Palisade and Wauneta the evening of Monday, May 7, to discuss the grade reconfiguration with a regular board meeting to follow.