

WP could lose roughly 65 percent of state aid

Written by Wauneta Breeze
Thursday, 14 April 2011 16:16 -

By Josh Sumner

The Wauneta Breeze

Wauneta-Palisade School District officials are still reacting to the legislative bomb that was dropped last Thursday.

State lawmakers gave Legislative Bill 235, which would reduce state aid to schools by a total of about \$128 million in Nebraska, first-round approval by a 41-0 vote last week.

So, how much does Wauneta-Palisade stand to lose in state aid in the coming fiscal year?

“It’s a huge chunk,” said WP Superintendent Stan Sibley at Monday’s regularly-scheduled WP School Board meeting. A huge chunk, indeed.

The Wauneta-Palisade School District is currently scheduled to see its state aid drop from \$493,628 to \$172,239 between the current fiscal year and 2011-2012. That’s a disappearance of \$321,389, or 65.1 percent.

A conversation about the effects of the state aid clamp was the top discussion point among school board members at Monday’s meeting.

“Over the course of the next several weeks, we’ll be doing a lot of work in our office trying to run different scenarios,” said Sibley. “It doesn’t promise to be a whole lot of fun.”

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Nearly all school revenue comes from one of two sources: State aid and property taxes. As one goes down, the other has to come up, said Sibley.

2011-12 school calendar approved

The Wau-Pal School Board approved the new calendar for the coming school year by a unanimous vote Monday after reviewing two different scheduling options.

Option 1 represented a calendar that nearly mirrored the current school year, with all late starts and breaks simply transferring over. Instead, the school board chose Option 2, which includes more late starts and days off for students. The intent is to allow extra professional development time for teachers.

Sibley explained that WP students are currently averaging well above the state's requirement for instructional time. This year's calendar contains 184 teacher days, 182 of which are also student days, which allows only two days of professional development for teachers.

Next year's academic calendar will see the number of student days shrink to 178, while teachers will continue to work 184 days.

Included in next year's calendar are two days of no school for students on Sept. 26 and 27, which will be used as "curriculum days" for Wau-Pal teachers. The two days will include a staff in-service to discuss and implement the new district-wide writing initiative.

Each month of the school year will also have at least one late start built in, in hopes of enhancing school improvement and further increasing professional development among

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teachers.

The first day of school in the 2011 fall semester will be Tuesday, Aug. 23, with teachers arriving to work one day prior to students. The last day of school is slated for Thursday, May 24.

Pair of policy amendments passes through first reading

Amendments to two separate school board policies — Board Policy 4005 and Board Policy 5103 — passed through first reading on Monday.

Board Policy 4005, which deals with the absence of employees, was amended to say that employees may be granted leave without pay, subject to the approval of the superintendent or designee. The purpose of the additional language is to allow employees who are out of sick or vacation leave the ability to take unpaid time off for unforeseen circumstances — pending the approval of the superintendent.

Board Policy 5103, which deals with the grounds for suspension to those students participating in extracurricular activities, was amended to clarify the language which gives school administrators the authority for enforcing disciplinary action.

Courts have said that schools have no authority to discipline students for conduct outside school grounds from an educational standpoint, according to Sibley. However, schools do have the authority to limit students' extracurricular privileges based on how they act outside school.

"A student has a right to an education," said Sibley. "You can't deny that based on conduct off school grounds.

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“However, they don’t have a right to play basketball or participate in speech or go to prom. These are things that are granted to students because they are representatives of the school.”

Differential pay approved for classified staff

Classified workers at Wau-Pal who have gone above their expectations will now be rewarded for the extra effort they exert.

Differential pay in the amount of \$1 per hour will soon take effect for those classified staff members who step into managerial and lead roles due to a long-term absence of a department manager.

“It’s a gesture of appreciation to those who have stepped up and helped the district out during difficult times,” said Sibley.

Also at the meeting

- The school board accepted the resignation of two Wauneta-Palisade teachers: Emily Hudson and Jan McClatchey. McClatchey, who has served the Wauneta-Palisade School District for 36 years, is participating in the district’s new early retirement incentive program.

- School board members motioned to approve a personal services contract for Jessica Barger for the planning and program development of a Title I program to be initiated in the fall of 2011.

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- The contract between the school district and Gaston Lawns and Landscapes was renewed for another year.

- A motion to refurbish the Wauneta Attendance Center gymnasium floor was tabled.