

WP School District, teachers reach agreement

Written by Wauneta Breeze
Friday, 22 July 2011 15:50 -

By Josh Sumner

The Wauneta Breeze

The Wauneta-Palisade School District has reached bargaining terms with its teachers.

A new master employment contract between the Wauneta-Palisade Board of Education and the Wauneta-Palisade Education Association was ratified at last Tuesday's school board meeting. The regular monthly meeting was held early in the morning on Tuesday, July 12, instead of during the typical Monday evening time slot.

"The negotiations committee put a lot of work into this," said WP School Board President Jon Anderjaska. "I really appreciate your effort and time."

Among the key points in the reworked contract is an increase in base salary for teachers from \$27,400 to \$29,000, for one-year contracts.

"It's important that we compensate our teachers fairly," said Wau-Pal School Board member Allison Sandman, who was a member of the negotiations committee, along with school board members Stuart Bartels and John Jutten. "Our goal is to always be in the middle of the array. When you look at surrounding schools, we're right where we need to be."

An increase from seven to 10 years of previous teaching experience which new teachers can be credited with in determining their initial placement on the salary schedule was another update to the contract.

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Language was also added that increases a first-year teacher's contract year from the standard of 184 teacher days to 186 teacher days. The two additional days will be used to help newcomers familiarize themselves with the district, said Sandman.

Daily school schedule adjusted

A tentative plan to synchronize the school day at the Wauneta and Palisade Attendance Centers was presented by WP Superintendent Stan Sibley and Director of Operations Kenny Lawless. Using the help of teachers, Sibley and Lawless designed a schedule that they felt would reduce lapses in classroom time, while maximizing learning opportunities for students.

The school start and stop times at the Wauneta and Palisade Attendance Centers will mirror each other under the new plan, with route busses arriving at each school at 7 a.m. MT/8 a.m. CT. After breakfast, the shuttle bus will depart each school en route to Hamlet, where the respective drivers will meet and switch vehicles.

Children will arrive at their destination at approximately 7:50 a.m. MT/8:50 a.m. CT to begin the official school day, with the school day ending at 3 p.m. MT/4 p.m. CT.

One of the things looked at by administration and faculty was the best way for students who don't have to ride the shuttle after school to spend their time. The solution, tentatively being called "Kids Club," will provide enrichment opportunities for students in the afternoon. It will run during the window between 3 p.m. MT/4 p.m. CT and 3:30 p.m. MT/4:30 p.m. CT when stationary students wait for their route bus to arrive.

A long discussion between board members about mid-day scheduling, including a conversation about how long breakfast should take, followed the unveiling of the tentative plan. A motion to accept the plan's aforementioned common start and end times was approved, however

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administration will be fine-tuning certain daily aspects of the schedule in the coming weeks.

Lengthy discussion on whether to co-op with Hayes Center

The possibility of joining a co-op agreement with Hayes Center in high school football was a major discussion point between WP School Board members and administrators at Tuesday's meeting.

Sibley and Wau-Pal Principal Troy Holmberg, who recently met with Hayes Center Superintendent Ron Howard and staff to discuss the idea, offered their opinion on the potential agreement. The two administrators outlined several concerns and issues about making such a decision.

Key decisions would include choosing where home games would be played, what the team colors would be and what the team would be named.

"We all know how important letter sweaters are in any community," said Sibley, who mentioned one of the factors prompting discussion is a Nov. 7, 2011, deadline for schools wishing to co-op for fall 2012.

Still, the choice to unite the Broncos and Cardinals on the football field is far from being a given.

"I think there are some questions and concerns from members of that board, and there probably are on this board as well," said Sibley.

Although the idea may not be unanimous among citizens, Holmberg has been analyzing the

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benefits, and he said the move could actually provide WP students with many opportunities.

Strength in the combined numbers of a co-op agreement could give underclassmen the chance to play junior varsity football, which improves players' overall development, said Holmberg. The varsity team wouldn't have to rely on freshmen and sophomores as much as now, and young players would get to play against kids their own size.

Holmberg also noted the benefit of having more players available for practices, saying, "When you have more bodies out there, and a little more competition, it's better for everybody."

When asked about the possibility of using the Palisade football field to host home games for a potential WP-HC team, WP School Board member Bill Bischoff said the idea probably isn't feasible. The lack of lighting at the stadium is among the reasons why. Board members agreed the Palisade field would make a great practice field, however.

Also briefly discussed during the co-op conversation was a possible alternative to joining forces with Hayes Center: 6-man football.

"I think the public needs to know that if this doesn't go through, probably our only option is 6-man," said Bischoff. "That's the kicker for both communities. We're in the same boat. If either plan to keep a football program in the future without co-opping, it's probably going to be 6-man only."

Hayes Center Superintendent Ron Howard is recommending co-op dialogue among his district's school board this month, with board-to-board conversations between WP and HC to follow, said Sibley. Meanwhile, Wau-Pal district leaders will be engaging in public conversation about the possible football union.

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Board approves personnel report

The WP School Board approved the hiring of Patti Holmberg, who will serve in the newly-created Title I teaching position beginning this school year. Holmberg has six years of teaching experience, with background both in Title I and Special Education.

Also during the meeting's personnel report, the board clarified the status of the girls' basketball head coaching position.

According to Sibley, the position remains open, and the school continues to accept applications. It was previously reported that recent retiree, Roger Lauhead, is returning to coach his 21st consecutive season.

Lauhead has made himself available should his services be required, but the final action has not been taken and the job is officially open at the time.

Also at the meeting:

- School board members voted to raise breakfast and lunch prices 5 and 10 cents, respectively, for students. Lunch prices will increase by 40 cents for adults in the coming 2011-12 school year.
- After surveying the average pay rate for substitute teachers in the area, Superintendent Sibley said he didn't think an increase to the \$90 daily wage was necessary. He did, however, suggest that the school board consider raising the amount \$10 per day for those substitute teachers who work extended periods of time. The action item was tabled to the next meeting.

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- Board members voted to approve a \$0.25 per hour raise across the board for classified staff employees in 2011-12, following a recommendation by WP administration. The percentage increase is close to that of certified staff, said Sibley.

- A motion was passed approving revisions to the student/parent handbook.

- Renewal of WP's membership in the NASB Medicaid Consortium was approved.

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- Board members motioned to authorize \$15,000 for the purchase of lockers.

- Wauneta-Palisade Schools entered into a lease agreement with Eakes Office Plus for imagining services.