

WP school board holds retreat to make goals, plan budget

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Wednesday, 29 January 2014 18:59 - Last Updated Wednesday, 29 January 2014 19:05

By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

Wauneta-Palisade school board members and administration met last Thursday, Jan. 23 at the Wauneta Senior Center for a board retreat. The day included goal setting and budget planning for the next school year.

Before the planning began Superintendent Randy Geier and Elementary Principal Roger Reikofski presented each board member with a WP coffee cup in honor of school board appreciation week.

Reikofski also let the school board know of an upcoming Nebraska Department of Education visit to the WP preschool done every few years to evaluate the program.

He told board members a representative from NDE would be making a visit to observe the preschool and make suggestions for improvement, if needed. Reikofski said, "NDE is a resource and it's always good to get an outside opinion on what we're doing."

School board members approached their planning and goal setting activities by looking at issues presented by each of the board's committees.

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Building and Grounds

Bill Bischoff provided the board with an overview of utility expenses to start off his Building and Grounds committee report. The analysis included a price breakdown of expenses at each of the district's buildings including, Wauneta Attendance Center, ag shop, bus barn, Scout house, Palisade Attendance Center and bus barn.

Due to the rising cost of propane Bischoff suggested to the board that wrestling practice be moved from the Scout house to the Palisade Attendance Center. He also suggested moving classes currently held in the ag shop to the main building of the Wauneta Attendance Center.

Board members discussed how classes could be moved from the ag shop and the building could then be used as a bus barn, while allowing space for part of the building to be used for ag labs as needed. They felt the change would greatly lesson the fuel expenses for the district.

Other building and grounds issues discussed included a report on school walk throughs done at both attendance centers and the need for a safer bus drop off in Palisade.

School board members plan to discuss the ideas further at the February regular board meeting.

Transportation

The transportation committee reported on their evaluation of the district's buses. They stated that each bus is currently needed, with only one to spare in case of an emergency.

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Committee members said they had asked the Director of Transportation, Kenny Lawless, to review the bus routes for the school to look for more efficient routes that could offer students less time on the bus as well as cost savings. Board members made a goal to revise the routes by next year.

Curriculum

The curriculum committee reported several possible changes to the districts' offered curriculum. They noted that there is a requirement to provide economics classes, which are not currently offered at WP. Allison Sandman also noted that the school does not currently offer students digital citizenship classes, which teaches students how to be responsible online citizens. She referred to online curriculum resources from commonsensemedia.org. Board members discussed how the cyber bullying seminar students attended at Hitchcock County was a good investment, but how the opportunity would not exist each year, thus making it important to offer some sort of online citizenship training within WP's curriculum.

The discussion led to a discussion for the need of having a technology committee for the board. Board members agreed on the need and made plans to form a technology committee and set goals and parameters for the committee by next year. Reikofski asked board members to be cognizant of families who may not have internet service at home as the board moves forward with technology plans. He said as the board moves forward with technology, "We don't want to leave them behind."

The issue of academic eligibility for WP athletes was also brought up during the curriculum committee's report. Board members discussed how the current system of academic eligibility for sports is set up as a punishment system for athletes, while there is no punishment for non athletes who are failing a class.

Board members are interested in revising the policy to be more comprehensive and include more equal treatment for athletes and non athletes. Geier did note that a study hall was

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established in September for students who are failing a core class.

The school board also discussed the elementary curriculum at the board retreat. Reikofski was asked for his opinion of the elementary curriculum and stated there are a lot of very good things happening in the WP elementary grades, but they could do a better job of aligning the curriculum.

He said this is an issue at many small schools. He said the teachers have begun meeting already to move towards a more aligned curriculum, starting with homework expectations. The school will be sending a survey to parents next month to ascertain the amount of time parents see students spending on homework.

Budget, negotiations and personnel

School board members started the discussion on budget and negotiations by mentioning that the previous conversations already had an impact on budget. They feel that any budget cuts will probably have to mean cutting staff.

They mentioned that the teachers' union's request for a \$500 raise to the base salary would add \$85,000 to the 2014-2015 budget. If the board approves the raise it would go into effect in September.

Although all board members seemed to feel the teachers "more than deserve" the raise, they are concerned about how to fund the raise. Board members stated, "We're going to have to look long and hard. It's going to have to cut the number of paychecks we offer."

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Board members discussed streamlining teachers and mentioned that they currently have more than one teacher endorsed in social studies and physical education. They asked Geier to look at the current staff to see if there is a way to make up for money lost last year, roughly \$200,000. Jon Anderjaska stated the board needs to get back to having three months of expenses in the school's general account.

Board members and administrators commented that personnel committee considerations are directly tied to the budget. Geier stated, "I think there's an opportunity, we've already lowered payroll by eight." It was noted the eight positions making up the reduction in payroll consisted of para educators and support staff positions that had not been filled after vacancy.

Geier said he would bring some recommendations to the board at the February meeting. He added, "There are tough decisions we have to make, it is mind boggling."

The board also discussed that WP is currently paying more for food than other neighboring districts. They also want to review transportation for optioned students to see if there are ways to cut costs.

Other budget discussions included looking at if two hours of junior high PE was necessary and a discussion of costs associated with dual credit classes.

Reikofski also asked the board to consider rearranging classrooms so that K-6 would meet in Palisade.

Board members also discussed a desire to know more about students who are optioning in or out of the district.

Board members set a goal of having some financial options prepared for the board to review and possibly act on at the February meeting. The February meeting is currently scheduled for 5 p.m. MT/6 p.m. CT on Monday, Feb. 10 at the Wauneta Attendance Center. School board

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meetings are open to the public.