

3-18-21

This will be the last regular board meeting before the reorganization after the election. I thought it would be appropriate to look back at where we have been and to review some of the possibilities for the future. In the last nine months we have discussed almost everything allowable in open meetings. If you do everything in the open there is nothing to hide. The meetings now last about an hour longer than meetings previous to the reorganization because of the open discussions.

- We voted to select the lowest bid for our school auditor so we would be in compliance with our own written policy saving the district \$20,000.
- We quickly settled the legal conflict between the bus contractors and the school district.
- We put security cameras on all school buses to help with safety issues and protect the school and drivers from liability issues.
- We increased certified substitute teacher pay from \$75 to \$125 in an effort to encourage retired teachers to sub in order to promote learning and lower discipline problems.
- We gave teachers the opportunity to increase pay from \$52.50 to \$100.00 for unused sick days by reducing allowable sick days from 15 to 10 days annually with a total allowable accumulation of 100 days. Teachers will be able to be paid a lump sum payment of up to \$10,000 at retirement. Teachers will be paid annually for anything over 100 days. With the previous policy sick pay was lost if not used which encouraged absenteeism requiring the school to hire subs and still pay teachers full pay. We also eliminated a paragraph in school policy that would cause a total loss of accumulated sick pay if the teacher left our district before ten years of service. We think this policy will eventually be revenue neutral for the school and be an added benefit for the staff.
- Early in the school year when we were trying to figure out how to deal with Covid, Deana discovered we had some outdated computers in grades K-8. Based on information provided by the administration the board approved either a new laptop or desk computer of the teacher's choice.
- Nearly 90 new Promethean Boards were purchased for our classrooms.
- A \$1000 stipend was given to certified staff and turkeys were given to hourly staff just before Christmas.
- We started a school operated cafeteria program in order to provide better quality food for our students and staff.

It appears daily student lunch participation has increased from about 600 to 900 and the staff are eating more meals in the cafeteria as well. I think we can all agree academics will improve if our students are not hungry.

Looking forward to the 2021-22 school year. These are my personal thoughts and views that may not be shared by all board members. Here is a short list of some things that I think will be discussed.

- The budget in general will be a big issue. We have to figure out how much Covid stimulus money we have, how and what it can be spent on, how soon it has to be spent and spend it in a way that will pay dividends in the future. Things that have been mentioned:
 - \$800,000 for air conditioners
 - I think \$800,000 is mandated for academic recovery
 - \$150,000 to remove the remaining asbestos floor tile

in the Elementary. We have been removing a little at a time and have spent in excess of \$40,000 in each of the last 2 years for removal. A side note for clarification: We are not required and there is no urgency for tile removal. The tile has been there for 60 years and is still in good shape. We can actually cover it up if we choose to do so. The only reason we actually are required to remove it is if we remodel the building or it is damaged in some way, but I think we can all agree if Covid money will pay for it, it would be wise to remove it.

- In round numbers we have about \$2.7 million in debt with about \$400,000 in annual payments until 2027. Last year \$73,000 of that \$400,000 was interest. I would like to find some way to pay off the debt and free up that \$400,000 for staff pay increases. There has been talk of restructuring that debt. I am pretty sure restructuring is another word for borrowing an additional \$2.3 million dollars. Our annual payments will be about the same, but our payoff would be extended to 2036. I assume that money would be used to build the Elementary school storm shelter that would double as classrooms and allow us to move pre-school children into the safer environment of the main building. I would like to see part of that money used to secure the perimeter of our campus. Not to make it a prison, but to make it a little more restraint to intruders during school hours.

- I am optimistic that this might all be possible within the next 2 years with no tax increase. For months there has been talk of a federal infrastructure program. When it was first discussed there was going to be money for school buildings and renewable energy. Probably in the form of grant money. I think we can make a strong case for a storm shelter and hopefully a little money for a modest solar installation. Please remember I did not say this is going to happen, but I am optimistic. Twelve months ago who thought the federal government would be handing out 3 stimulus checks.

- There are many more things to consider. We need to put our heads together and decide where we want to go and work together to get there.

Dan Johnson