

School board votes to raise teachers' base pay by \$500

Written by Wauneta Breeze
Thursday, 13 February 2014 00:00 -

By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

School board members reached an agreement with the Wauneta-Palisade teacher's union at their regular February meeting held Monday night at the Wauneta Attendance Center. The school board approved a contract which will raise the teachers' base pay for the 2014-2015 school year by \$500.

The increase will cost the district an additional \$85,130.92 in yearly payroll expenses, according to WP Superintendent Randy Geier.

School board members have been in negotiations with members of the union for several months. At the board retreat held Jan. 23 board members expressed they felt the teachers deserved the increase and that they made a reasonable request.

At this week's meeting school board members expressed that the raise is in the "middle ground" of what other area teachers have negotiated for base pay increases.

Some board members questioned if the raise would fit well with the schools' budget. A budget committee member stated, "Budget [committee] has looked at it many times, we think we have a plan that we can afford it." Specifics about the possible cuts to staff positions were not discussed at the meeting. Another stated, "There are some things we are definitely looking at cutting, not just because of this."

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Changes in teachers' health insurance options were also included in the negotiated agreement. Teachers will now have the option of enrolling in a new high-deductible health insurance plan with a Health Savings Account partially funded by the district. The school will offer teachers a choice in health insurance plans for the next three years. Board members noted the high-deductible option would provide the district a small cost savings of approximately half a percent in FICA taxes.

Other business at the February meeting included yearly housekeeping. School board members accepted the school's audit report, which was given to board members last fall. Discussion of the audit spurred a preliminary discussion of the next year's budget where Geier noted the projected state aid funding for next year is estimated at under \$30,000. He also noted the district projects over 200 students to be enrolled in Kindergarten through 12th grade next year.

The board also approved a contract with Educational Service Unit No. 15. The ESU provides the district a variety of programs and services including special education and distance learning courses.

The final housekeeping item to be discussed was to approve the district's official depository as Valley Bank and Trust, the official news publication as the Wauneta Breeze and the official legal counsel as Perry Law Firm.

Superintendent's report

Geier informed the board of a \$15,000 grant the school received this week from the Albert G. and Bernice F. Hansen Charitable Foundation. The grant is slotted to be applied toward the district's purchase of a new boiler at the Palisade Attendance Center.

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The superintendent also provided board members with an update on LB682, a bill that would require schools to follow a common schedule and school calendar if they have a census under a certain amount.

Through discussion board members stated they felt the bill had no educational benefits and closely resembled "forced consolidation." Geier stated the common schedule and calendar would cause substantial issues for the WP school district, as it operates in both the Central and Mountain time zones. Board members were urged to contact their representatives regarding the bill.

Geier told the board the school is getting close to completing their teacher technology committee, which they were instructed to do at the recent board planning retreat.

He also reported the students in the fourth, eighth and 11th grades have completed the NeSA writing assessments.

Geier also told the board of a \$3,500 bid he received to refinish the Waunta gym floor. After discussion the board instructed Geier to call to make an appointment for early in the summer to have the floor refinished.

Principal's report

Roger Reikofski shared preliminary information concerning the Nebraska Department of Education's visit to the WP preschool at Monday's meeting. One outcome he reported is that the school is required to have an advisory committee for the preschool, which will be established.

He did not share specifics about the report, stating he would like to wait until he gets through

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the entire report. However, he did say the evaluator commented that it is obvious the district is committed to the preschool and that the scores received were all mid-range.

Reikofski also provided the board with an update on the boiler. He said a representative from Snell, who installed the boiler, is ready to come down to the Palisade Attendance Center to discuss final steps and repairs needed.

He also provided an update on the way the district plans to request special education reimbursements. He also noted the district is still waiting on a \$50,000 reimbursement for Title 1 purchases.

Reikofski told board members of a new diagnostic tool called AimsWeb that will allow the school to assess each student and compare growth for each student, instead of to the aggregate. He stated the tool provides a good tool to measure individual student learning. Geier noted, "It's probably the most accurate way to measure progress."

The school board closed the public meeting and went into executive session at approximately 6:30 p.m. MT. The purpose of the executive session was stated to discuss personnel issues.

The WP school board meets on the second Monday of each month. The next meeting is currently scheduled for Monday, March 10 at 5 p.m. MT/6 p.m. CT. The public is welcome to attend school board meetings.