

Achievement shared from first half of school year

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Accomplishments and goals for several district-wide committees were shared at the Dec. 15 Re-1J School Board meeting, reflecting achievement for the first half of the 2009-10 school year.

Board members reported on the budget and facilities, standard of excellence, leadership team, superintendent advisory and technology committees.

Budget and facilities committee met for the first time on Sept. 23, reported Jeff Tharp. Dennis Herman serves as chairman, Tom Bennett vice chair and Michelle Van Overbeke secretary. The committee involves a good cross section of people including staff, board and stakeholders in the community, said Tharp.

The committee hopes to make a list of budget priorities, in an advisory capacity. Tharp said he feels this is a valuable forum to get various opinions. Board member Kris Camblin also serves on the committee.

Formed this year, the standards of excellence committee is chaired by Andrea Kammer, with Lori Nelson as vice chair, reported Linda Jelden. The committee premise is to talk about what makes excellent schools.

Jelden said the end goal is to forward recommendations to the board for ongoing quality and accountability.

Continuing on the leadership team which has been in place for six or seven years, Jelden reported Laura Loutensock serves as committee chairperson.

This year there's been a shift in focus. Right now, they're looking at a transition plan for aligning curriculum to a pacing guide. This group is also involved in providing input on professional development for the staff.

Most recently, Jelden said there has been a lot of talk about grading practices, with the elementary school looking at standards-based report cards.

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Supt. Bret Miles said the superintendent's advisory committee is made up of classified and certified staff. It's not represented by board or community members, as it is designed to address internal issues.

He noted everyone brings ideas to the table, and a summary is sent out the morning after the meetings.

The revival of a district technology committee has seen some hesitancy to serve, said Miles. The committee has worked together to define the need for a grant, and the group has helped identify a grant project.

Miles said employees have been extremely generous with their time to serve on these committees, as have community members.

Board president Dan Kafka noted appreciation to individual board members for their time spent on the committees. He said they'll try to make these committee reports fairly regular in board meeting agendas.

Supt. Miles updated the board on the progress on his entry plan. He noted he has completed 76 of the 85 district employee interviews and has been to 40 of the 49 classrooms. The second half of the year, he noted he will evaluate effectiveness of committees reporting.

Principal evaluation instrument discussed

Board comments were favorable on the proposed evaluation instrument for principals, which will return to the Jan. 19 meeting for approval.

Tharp said each of the six criteria domains breaks out nicely, emphasizing and focusing on the

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aspect of change. Communication is accentuated at several levels, he added.

He cited the instructional leadership domain and the evaluation for reaching out to students. Tharp added he would like to see technology utilization added at some point.

Kafka added it's a growth tool with a set of standards. The evaluation instrument provides an avenue to correct actions and takes away punitive damages, added Kafka. He cited leading with empathy as part of the fifth domain: student, parent and community relationships.

Camblin said he likes the self evaluation part of the instrument. Jelden added the last domain about mandates helped her appreciate the principal position and all the demands put on the position in the buildings.

Camblin and Kim Killin addressed the "change" domain, noting they would like to see parents added to students and teachers in starting lines of communication.

Supt. Miles noted appreciation for the opportunity to open this instrument and look at it together to come up with the best opportunity for a fair process.

CASB convention highlighted

Highlights of the Dec. 3-6 Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB) annual convention were presented by board members.

JR/SR High Principal Susan Ortner and board member Jeff Tharp led one break-out session on the district's random drug testing policy that was implemented last school year.

Dr. Phillip Boyle's governance session featuring a model of competing values was cited by

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Tharp and Supt. Miles. Tharp said Boyle gave them several exercises on ways to arrive at decisions and drove home the fact that everyone has different values when making decisions.

Tharp also attended a break-out session on utilization of cell phones in the classroom. Jelden reported on a technology session, with one of the concepts involving laptops for every student.

Killin heard lots of issues in the legal break-out sessions she attended. One session she enjoyed involved connecting with kids. It emphasized a district can have a great curriculum, but it must connect with the kids. She also enjoyed the speakers touting motivation and support, not just curriculum.

Jon King, as Holyoke's new BOCES board representative, said his interest was with costs for different shared programs.

Supt. Miles added he attended an afternoon session for superintendents that dealt with budgeting.

Tharp commended the Colorado Springs area groups (jazz bands, show choirs, etc.) which entertained throughout the convention.

Other business

In other business at the Dec. 15 meeting, the Re-1J board:

—accepted the resignation of custodian Brenda Daniel, effective Dec. 4.

—approved Guadalupe Montes Alvarez as substitute custodian.

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—reviewed agenda items for the Jan. 9 board retreat, and noted there will not be a regular meeting on Jan. 5.