

Band director hired, counselor position added

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Employment of a band director for Holyoke School District Re-1J for 2012-13 and authorization for an elementary counselor position highlighted the personnel discussion at the May 15 meeting of the Holyoke School Board.

Mitsuko Martinez was hired as the grade 5-12 band instructor. She grew up in an Air Force family and went to high school in Japan. She attended college in Illinois and graduated from Elmherst College two years ago with a degree in K-12 music education.

Since graduation, she has worked as a substitute teacher and an instructional aide for the band department at Mundelein High School near Chicago, Ill.

Martinez has student teaching experience at both the high school level and with grade 4-8 students. Additionally, she has worked at summer band camps, with a music supply firm and as an instructional aide in the music department at Elmherst College.

Early in last week's board meeting, the resignation of first-grade teacher Julie Beavens was approved.

First grade was the only K-6 grade which had three sections in the 2011-12 school year. All the rest had two sections, which is what will be seen in next year's first-grade setting, as well.

With the available FTE (full-time equivalent) position, Supt. Bret Miles and elementary school principal Kyle Stumpf recommended creating the elementary counselor position.

"There are a dozen places we can put this next staff member," Supt. Miles told the Re-1J board at last week's meeting. He added the elementary counselor position is certainly one that is needed and also is one that could help so many other areas.

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The addition of this position can be done within the existing budget parameters for 2012-13.

Miles said contracting for counseling services with Centennial Mental Health has not been working. The CMH turnover negatively impacts the position, and the needs go beyond the scheduled one-day-a-week visits.

The superintendent pointed out that there is an undisputable need for services for several students. And there seems to be a growing population of needy students, including many traumatic circumstances.

Miles emphasized the need to develop an anti-bullying program, saying they can't dump another thing on classroom teachers.

Additionally, Miles said the principal needs to focus on instruction. More and more time is being spent with social services and families over personal issues. The time will become even more evident when the principal starts evaluating every teacher every year with the new evaluation law.

Board members endorsed the addition of the counselor position at the elementary school, citing how it could impact so many areas and all grade levels.

Two other resignations accepted

In addition to first-grade teacher Beavens, resignations were accepted from JR/SR High ESL aide Veronica Núñez and athletic director Kimberlee Bennett.

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Miles, as well as the board, noted appreciation for Bennett's work as AD for the past two years and commented on her willingness to jump in and help with anything.

Bennett will be teaching in the district, and Miles said he looks forward to her contributions for increasing math scores.

Construction reviewed

Prior to last week's meeting, board members toured the facilities for an overview of the summer construction projects. They were given a construction schedule and reviewed various stages of work planned this summer.

Also included on the tour were the district's owner representative Brian Walsh of Catalyst Planning Group, construction superintendent Frank Garrett of White Construction and Tom Bennett of First Pioneer National Bank, the financial institution backing the project.

The tour followed a two-hour planning meeting with Walsh, Garrett, Supt. Miles and director of transportation/maintenance and facilities Robert Jacobs.

Miles said he feels the investment of the owner's representative has been worth every dollar. Citing the construction schedule, he said they hope to always have a gym open throughout the summer.

The board acknowledged appreciation to the staff and community for their patience. There will be quite a little activity during the construction, and accessibility of the schools will be impacted.

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Budget parameters set

Budget parameters for 2012-13 were approved at last week's meeting.

Supt. Miles pointed out building and department budgets will be flat, with expenditures limited to the 2011-12 budget.

A big unknown factor in the budget involves the grant for the alternative school. The grant application is for \$75,000. If fully-funded, the district is \$25,000 more to the good. If not funded, it is \$50,000 behind.

Information on the at-risk grant had not been received at the time of the board meeting. Additional cuts will be necessary if the grant application is not funded.

Eight parameters for budget preparation were adopted as follows:

—preliminary budget will be built using a student count of 589, with no increase or decrease from 2011-12.

—preliminary budget may include a portion of the fund balance as revenue as long as it does not exceed one-third of the available money above the \$1.2 million target.

—utilize natural attrition of staff as the first option for staff reductions if needed.

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—the district shall make every effort to find efficiencies and make cuts farther away from the classroom when possible and continue to evaluate class sizes and adjusting internally to needs.

—personnel expenditures are the top priority. Steps should be funded acknowledging these 1-1.5 percent increases do not keep up with inflation of 3.7 percent. The district needs to fund the increased PERA employer contribution. The district needs to increase health insurance contributions so employees do not have a negative increase.

—the board understands capital projects are a priority, but will allow some flexibility in 2012-13 to reduce the capital expenditures if needed.

—maintaining the technology implementation schedule is a budget priority.

—the district shall continue to explore and evaluate innovative approaches to increasing revenue in an effort to offset the need for ongoing budget cuts.

Other business

In other business May 15, the Re-1J board:

—heard a recommendation on the retention policy, supporting language which gives the final decision on retention/promotion to the principal rather than leaving it with the parent.

—acknowledged a \$100.94 gift for supplies from Pamida from their Back-to-School fund raiser last fall.

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—noted a May 31 panel discussion sponsored by Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB). The purpose of the panel is to help inform community leaders of the challenges rural schools are facing. Board members will try to attend and will invite other community leaders as well.

—approved the second and final reading of grading and report card policies.

—received Section J policies on students in order to review them individually prior to board work session discussion.

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