

Local school focus groups to enhance communication

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Community focus groups on six targeted subjects will be facilitated by members of the Holyoke Re-1J Board of Education. The idea was suggested at the March 4 board meeting and approved Monday, March 17.

Sign-up information and time schedules for the one-time sessions may be found in this week's edition of The Holyoke Enterprise or on the school website from March 20-28. Sign-up deadline is Friday, March 28 at 4 p.m.

Intended to serve as information sessions or venues for simply listening to the public, the focus group concept came about as a way to better communicate with the public.

The subject-area focus groups come from the six Destination 2016 goals, as follows:

—Increase student achievement.

—Retain and develop quality personnel.

—Maintain financial responsibility.

—Facilities management.

—Communication and community outreach.

—Extracurricular opportunities.

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Each subject has been scheduled for a one-hour session between April 1-3, with additional one-hour sessions also scheduled on April 7 and 15, if needed.

2014-15 calendar approved

A school calendar, which looks quite similar to the one for the current year, was adopted for 2014-15 at Monday night's school board meeting.

Teacher pre-service days will run Aug. 6-13, with the first day of classes for students on Thursday, Aug. 14. The last day for students will be a half day on Friday, May 22, 2015. Total days in the calendar include 172 for students and 190 for staff.

Vacation days include Monday, Sept. 1, Labor Day; Friday, Oct. 10, comp day for conferences; Nov. 26-28, Thanksgiving; Dec. 22-Jan. 2, Christmas holiday; Monday, Feb. 16, Presidents Day; Friday, March 6, comp day for conferences; March 16-20, spring break; and April 3, Good Friday.

Teacher inservice days, with no school for students, are set for Mondays, Sept. 29, Oct. 27, Nov. 17, Jan. 19, Feb. 23 and April 27.

Draft resolutions reviewed for school finance and assessments

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Two resolutions from the Holyoke board are in review stage. After input Monday night, Superintendent Bret Miles will revise the proposed resolutions, with approval set for the next board meeting Tuesday, April 8.

One, on school finance, addresses restoring the negative factor as a legislative priority in 2014. The second resolution urges the Colorado Legislature and Department of Education to reduce the amount of state-mandated testing.

There's a formula in the state statutes and Constitution that stipulates a certain dollar figure for funding for each school district. The past four years, the Legislature has said it doesn't have the money to fund this.

The difference between the funding a school district was supposed to receive, by statute, and what it actually received is called its negative factor. □ The finance resolution urges the Colorado General Assembly to honor the intent and language of Amendment 23 and to prioritize the reduction of the negative factor to, at the minimum, support the superintendents' proposal for making restoration of the negative factor in public education a priority this session.

In the assessments resolution, the district is emphasizing its opposition to more state-mandated summative testing added with GOLD, PARCC and CMAS. The district believes it is in the best position to designate appropriate assessments for monitoring progress and attainment.

Reasons for the opposition include loss of instructional time, unreasonably slow turnaround time for results, unfunded mandate of technology resources necessary and the distraction from authentic learning opportunities for students.

After board approval next meeting, the resolutions will be sent to the Colorado Association of School Boards, Colorado Association of School Executives, Rural Schools Caucus and members of the Legislature's education committee. The assessment resolution will also go to the State Board of Education.

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Should district participate in Amendment 23 lawsuit?

Board members discussed the Amendment 23 lawsuit and debated on whether the Holyoke school district should participate. Miles will craft the involvement as a resolution to give talking points, with a board decision to be made at the next meeting.

Miles explained that this is a campaign asking the court to determine proper interpretation of funding provided through Amendment 23 so that districts can go forward from here. It is different than a campaign of inadequate funding, he pointed out.

Miles said school districts across the state are still making decisions as to their involvement. By the time the Holyoke board votes next meeting on whether to participate, Miles said he will have information about other participating districts.

Miles said there will be no cost to the district to be involved. There will be some costs to the case, and all districts will be asked for money, as in the past. They can each choose whether they want to donate. Miles confirmed that if the case is lost, they can't ask the participating districts for fees.

New extracurricular opportunities goal drafted

Board members discussed adding a sixth goal on extracurricular activities to the Destination 2016 five-year strategic plan.

Athletic/activities director Sandra Rahe reported input on the proposal from her committee, and

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Miles will incorporate those changes in the goal draft for review at the next meeting.

The sixth proposed goal in the district's strategic plan includes three target goals, as follows:

- Provide a variety of high-quality extracurricular opportunities for students.

- Provide knowledgeable, enthusiastic and prepared sponsors and coaches at all levels.

- Consistently produce competitive teams and high-quality experiences for students.

Principals report on parent-teacher conferences

At Monday night's meeting, principals Kyle Stumpf and Susan Ortnier gave attendance details and suggestions from the recent parent-teacher conferences.

Stumpf said that at Holyoke Elementary, conferences were held Tuesday and Thursday evenings, March 4 and 6. As of March 12, 94 percent of the conferences had been completed, with 15 make-up times still scheduled.

For next year, Stumpf said it's a desire of the staff to hold the conferences on Monday and Tuesday nights.

Additionally, he would like to investigate and implement other options with grades that are

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departmentalized so parents can have face-to-face time with all teachers.

Ortner noted that participation numbers for the March 3-4 conferences at Holyoke JR/SR High are slightly lower than last spring, with 71 percent participation from JH parents and 70 percent from HS parents.

She added that 112 parents met with an additional staff member in addition to their scheduled conference, and 45 met with at least two additional staff members.

Parents attending the conferences were given the option for assistance in completing a survey on computer when they finished conferences.

Stumpf said the survey process was successful. Ortner said they had some computer glitches the first night, so numbers completing the survey were down as a result.

Other business

In other business March 17, the Re-1J board:

—noted the next meeting will be Tuesday, April 8.

—accepted letters of resignation from JR/SR high business teacher Charles Hurst, effective at the end of his current teaching contract; and Dorothy Drake, elementary paraprofessional, effective at the end of the 2013-14 school year.

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—reviewed a winter sports summary with athletic director Rahe.

—noted Miles will be attending a March 25 Rural Agility Project meeting in Denver, and board members are welcome to accompany him.

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