



**WISCONSIN RAPIDS
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES

John A. Krings, President
John Benbow, Jr.
Troy Bier
Larry Davis
Katie Medina
Kathi Stebbins-Hintz
Julie Timm

March 11, 2024

REGULAR BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

LOCATION: District Board Office, 510 Peach Street, Wisc. Rapids, WI 54494
Conf Rm A/B

TIME: 6:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: John Benbow, Larry Davis, John Krings, Katie Medina, Kathi Stebbins-Hintz, Julie Timm

BOARD MEMBERS EXCUSED: Troy Bier

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT: Ed Allison, Craig Broeren, Roxanne Filtz, Steve Hepp, Aaron Nelson, Brian Oswald, Kelly Schaeffer

President John Krings called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call

Public Comment

None.

School Showcase – Grove Elementary School

Pitsch Early Learning Center/4K Director Kelly Schaeffer and Teri Thomas, 4K Coordinator and Student Engagement Facilitator, provided an update to the Board on early learning initiatives. The program thrives on community connections made with local organizations who support the program through donations, volunteering, and providing expertise and resources in numerous ways. Goals and action steps from the Pitsch/4K professional development plan were shared. A variety of family events are planned to increase interactive experiences with 4K and Early Childhood families, and inclusive practices are evaluated and woven into the program. The Board thanked Ms. Schaeffer and Ms. Thomas for their informative presentation.

Student Representative Report

Sarah Panzer reported on:

- The wrestling team received runner-up at State competition
- Powerlifting achieved first at State for the third consecutive year in a row
- The Visual Arts Classic team had 11 team members advance to State from district level competition
- Eight members of the Educators Rising group have qualified to compete internationally this summer
- The Livestream Team just took first place at the Wisconsin Broadcaster's Association seminar in the category of TV/high school sports programming
- On March 12, 2024 juniors will be taking the ACT, and seniors will participate in the annual "Reality Check" event
- A Teen Job Fair event is scheduled to occur on March 20, 2024 from 5:00-9:00 p.m. and any community teen is welcome to attend
- Students will be off for Spring Break from March 25-29, 2024

Approval of Minutes

Motion by Kathi Stebbins-Hintz, seconded by Larry Davis to approve regular Board of Education meeting minutes of February 12, 2024; special open and closed session Board minutes of February 12, 2024; special closed session Board minutes of February 27, 2024; and special open and closed session Board minutes of February 27, 2024. Motion carried unanimously.

Committee ReportsA. Educational Services Committee – March 4, 2024. Report given by Katie Medina.

Ms. Medina reviewed the following consent agenda item brought before the Board through the Educational Services Committee, and asked if there were any motions to be held:

- ES-1 Approval to accept a \$400,000.00 grant award as outlined in the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act – Stronger Connections Grant.

Motion by Kathi Stebbins-Hintz, seconded by Larry Davis to approve consent agenda item ES-1. Motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Medina provided updates and reports on:

- Teri Thomas, District 4K Coordinator and Student Engagement Facilitator at Pitsch Early Learning Center, presented information on the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program which is an internationally acclaimed parent engagement program proven to help children succeed at school by building stronger, more supportive relationships at home. The District has implemented the program in four elementary buildings: Pitsch, Grove, Howe, and Washington. FAST activities are scheduled to run for eight weeks in the evening and are designed to strengthen family bonds, empower parents, increase positive communication, and improve the child's overall academic performance and emotional functioning. The program has been well received by participants.
- Ms. Thomas also provided information about the WRPS Play and Learn program which is a collaborative effort between 4K teachers and the Special Education team that was introduced to families in the fall of 2023. Play and Learn provides some school experience to general education students in the community who may not be enrolled in a 3K or 4K program, and it also provides an alternative general education setting for 3- and 4-year-olds with special needs to receive special education services. Between ten and twenty families attend Play and Learn weekly on a fairly consistent basis.

Strong family connections are formed and children in the program expand and grow in their social, fine motor, and communication skills which helps increase their readiness for 4K. Families are provided helpful resources, and the program's partnership with community groups such as Women's United helps provide items such as books for students to take home and keep.

Two parent surveys were conducted in October and December, and another round of surveys will go out in April and May to gauge program success and determine other ways families can be supported. For the future, the program may be offered on Monday mornings at Pitsch and potentially at a community site such as McMillan Library.

- Ms. Filtz provided an update on the use of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III) funds. The District has strategically and responsibly utilized these dollars in the amount of \$7,082,465 to address challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. WRPS has demonstrated transparency to stakeholders through routine reporting and Board approval on expenditures throughout the grant funding process. As required, all reporting deadlines have been met and at least 20% of the funds were identified as meeting the required Evidence Based Instructional Strategies (EBIS); in fact, WRPS allocated 83%, or \$4,973,515.07 of its total ESSER III funds, to support activities and strategies outlined in the EBIS categories.

Examples of how funds were used include the hiring of classroom teachers to reduce class sizes, the addition of Student Engagement Facilitator (SEF) positions, purchases focused on a deliberate effort to improve the overall school culture and atmosphere for learning at the middle school, numerous professional development opportunities for both instructional and non-instructional staff, enhanced programming to promote social and mental well-being, and expanded community partnerships to offer opportunities for families to take advantage of such as the Morning Jumpstart program which offers wrap-around care service and additional academic support for elementary school students.

Ms. Filtz concluded by stating that all ESSER III Formula Grant Funds are on track to be expended by the September, 2024 deadline. It is possible that approximately \$400,000 may be available to strategically assist with the looming budget shortfall anticipated for the upcoming 2024-25 fiscal year.

Motion by Katie Medina, seconded by Julie Timm to approve the balance of the Educational Services Committee report and minutes of the March 4, 2024 Educational Services Committee meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

B. Business Services Committee – March 4, 2024. Report given by John Benbow.

Mr. Benbow reviewed the following consent agenda items brought before the Board through the Business Services Committee, and asked if there were any motions to be held:

- BS-1 Approval of an increase to the 4K contract with Head Start, Building Blocks, and YMCA for the 2024-25 school year by \$100.00 to a total of \$2,425.00 per student.
- BS-2 Approval of the proposed 2024-25 school year breakfast, lunch, and extra milk price increases as presented.
- BS-3 Approval of the proposed CESA 5 agreement for the 2024-25 school year in an amount of \$517,696.45 to be paid for with Flow Through and other District accounts.
- BS-4 Approval to apply for credit cards from WoodTrust Bank for the principals at Central Oaks Academy, Grant, Grove, Howe, Mead, Pitsch, Washington, Woodside, Wisconsin Rapids Area Middle School, and a credit card from First State Bank for the principal at THINK Academy.

Motion by John Benbow, seconded by Larry Davis to approve consent agenda items BS 1-4. Motion carried unanimously on a roll call vote.

Mr. Benbow provided updates and reports on:

- Invoices, bid specs, and purchases made

Motion by John Benbow, seconded by Katie Medina to approve the balance of the Business Services Committee report and minutes of the March 4, 2024 Business Services Committee meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

C. Personnel Services Committee – March 4, 2024. Report given by Kathi Stebbins-Hintz.

Ms. Stebbins-Hintz reviewed the following consent agenda items brought before the Board through the Personnel Services Committee, and asked if there were any motions to be held:

- PS-1 Approval of the support staff appointments of Selena Cabral (Noon Duty Aide – Grove), Jeffrey Kolb (Custodian – Lincoln), Jon Shaurette (Custodian – Howe), and Allison Bohlmann (Noon Duty Aide – Washington).
- PS-2 Approval of the professional staff resignations of Emily Radtke (Teacher – Grove) and Sunshine Broeren (Occupational Therapist/SEL – District).
- PS-3 Approval of the support staff resignation of Debra Stolp (Special Ed Aide – WRAMS).
- PS-4 Approval of the professional staff retirement of Janet Alekna (Teacher – Grove) and Scott Sigourney (Teacher – Woodside).
- PS-5 Approval of the non-represented support staff retirement of David Barber (Computer Technician – District).
- PS-6 Approval of the professional staff voluntary contract reduction for Leslie Anderson from 1.0 FTE to .60 FTE.
- PS-7 Approval of Board Policy 352 Exhibit 2 – Student Travel Release for second reading.
- PS-8 Approval of a professional staff base wage increase for starting teachers with no experience to \$45,500.00 and an increase for starting teachers with no experience and who hold a master's degree to \$50,500.00 effective for the 2024-25 school year.
- PS-9 Approval of using \$45,500.00 as the new base-wage calculator with athletic and non-athletic co-curricular pay percentage rates to calculate wages for District coaching and advisor positions beginning with the start of the 2024-25 school year.

Ms. Stebbins-Hintz requested that item PS-9 be held out to be voted on separately.

Motion by Kathi Stebbins-Hintz, seconded by Katie Medina to approve consent agenda items PS 1-8. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Kathi Stebbins-Hintz, seconded by Katie Medina to approve consent agenda item PS-9. Motion carried on a vote of 5-0. Ms. Stebbins-Hintz abstained.

Ms. Stebbins-Hintz provided updates and reports on:

- The Committee was provided information on the District’s utilization of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP usage rate was slightly down from the prior year, but still near the average for the past four years.

Motion by Kathi Stebbins-Hintz, seconded by Larry Davis to approve the balance of the Personnel Services Committee report and minutes of the regular March 4, 2024 Personnel Services Committee meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Referrals/Information Requests

None.

Legislative Agenda

Mr. Benbow shared the following legislative updates:

- The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) recently proposed changes to the school start date rule that governs the issuance of start date waivers with a goal to provide clearer guidance and additional flexibility for school districts when applying for a waiver; a preliminary hearing will be held on March 25, 2024 to consider public testimony on the proposed rule
- A Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families voted against recommending legislation that would bar transgender athletes from playing girls sports; AB 377/SB 378 can still advance to the Senate floor
- The Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) met to determine what early literacy curricula will be approved under 2023 Wisconsin Act 20, selecting four specific curricula as recommended by the Council on Early Literacy Curricula
- With regard to Act 20, concerns have been circulating around the new statewide reading screener being made optional in the 2024-25 school year to allow schools enough time to train staff, set up IT and other prep work
- An update on the numerous school district referendums going to the polls for the April 2, 2024 spring election was provided
- A significant number of state legislators are announcing their intention not to return next session

Bills

Motion by Katie Medina, seconded by John Benbow to note February, 2024 receipts in the amount of \$11,003,007.85 and approve February, 2024 disbursements in the amount of \$3,843,395.44. Motion carried unanimously on a roll call vote.

It should be noted that the administration determined that the check registers for the past ten months when the Skyward financial system was updated had cumulative totals year-to-date listed on each monthly report (April, 2023 – January, 2024) rather than monthly totals. The report has been corrected, and the totals approved under the “Bills” section of each Board meeting from April, 2023 to January, 2024 should have had the following “Actual” amounts indicated as follows:

Month	Original Fund Total on Report	Actual Monthly Activity
April, 2023	\$ 4,508,035.70	\$ 3,578,390.52
May, 2023	\$ 9,058,997.83	\$ 4,218,508.37
June, 2023	\$ 14,440,645.86	\$ 6,501,493.54
July, 2023	\$ 18,560,692.65	\$ 3,768,716.28
August, 2023	\$ 21,548,575.86	\$ 3,357,465.80
September, 2023	\$ 25,432,995.71	\$ 3,479,827.87
October, 2023	\$ 29,671,201.89	\$ 4,160,742.75
November, 2023	\$ 33,825,070.79	\$ 3,800,278.51
December, 2023	\$ 37,451,128.13	\$ 4,264,818.99
January, 2024	\$ 42,905,638.31	\$ 5,208,469.09

New Business

Employee Appointments, Resignations, and Retirement Requests

None.

Update on 2024-25 District Budget

Aaron Nelson, Director of Business Services, provided a District budget update for the 2024-25 fiscal year. The District’s spending plan for 2024-25 continues to be adjusted based on data as it becomes available. The following information was shared concerning Fund 10 and 27 budgets:

2023-24 Fiscal Year End Estimates

- Year-end budget surplus will be around \$1,000,000
- Year-end surplus will be the result of underspent building and department budgets
- Fund balance will increase to slightly over \$18,000,000
- Actual amount will be determined after the August, 2024 audit is complete

2024-25 Fiscal Year Estimates

Revenue – Year Over Year Changes

Description	Amount
Revenue cap authority increase of \$325	\$1,529,125.00
Final ESSER revenue with no offsetting expense	\$450,000.00
Reduction in interest revenue	(\$250,000.00)
Estimated Revenue Increase	\$1,729,125.00

Expense – Year Over Year Changes

Description	Amount
ESSER Fund for salary and benefit costs – 26.5 Staff	\$1,985,903.00
<i>Estimated</i> salary and benefit increases (less health insurance)	\$1,538,457.00
<i>Estimated</i> health insurance increase (5%)	\$417,302.00
Known staff reductions through attrition – 8 Staff	(\$846,118.00)
Estimated Expense Increase	\$3,095,544.00

Variance (<i>anticipated shortfall</i>)	\$1,366.419.00
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Summary

- The 2024-25 spending plan continues to be adjusted based upon incoming data
- Building and department budgets will be frozen at 2023-24 amounts
- Reduction in positions will take place through attrition
- Grant dollars will be leveraged where possible
- In the short term, some drawdown of fund balance may need to take place
- Budgets include the \$2,000,000 non-recurring referendum (2024-25 will be year 4 of 5)
- Declining enrollment may impact future budgets
- Expense reductions will need to occur beyond the 2024-25 fiscal year

Mr. Nelson noted that over 80% of the District budget is made up in salaries, which makes reductions difficult; there are few other areas to cut expenses in that would make as significant an impact. Superintendent Broeren mentioned that the overall anticipated deficit equates to around slightly more than 1% of the District’s overall budget. While \$1,000,000 is no small amount, it is a fraction of what the District has access to. He made mention that for the past 12-18 months he has alluded to the fact that it is likely that the District’s fund balance would be the mechanism by which the 2024-25 shortfall would be made up to avoid laying off staff members who may choose not to return if the District found itself in a position to bring them back. The current labor shortage and competitive workforce climate would make it difficult to rehire quality employees back since they would be hired elsewhere, and employee retention is also a concern.

While utilizing fund balance is a short-term solution that likely couldn’t continue for more than a couple of years, difficult budget decisions will need to be made in subsequent fiscal years beyond 2024-25. The administration believes keeping the fund balance amount around \$14-14.5 million would be prudent. The State biennial budget established after 2024-25 will also have an impact on future budgets and will impact recommendations and decisions that will need to be made.

The administration has been carefully reviewing all positions as they are vacated and are attempting to do as much as possible to reduce expenditures through attrition which will help stage down staffing levels to a degree that has the District more aligned to the number of students it serves based upon declining enrollment. The overstaffing to

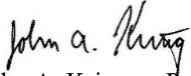
address pandemic related loss of learning through ESSER funding was intentional, but will be coming to an end as ESSER dollars get fully expended as required by September, 2024.

Board members had an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Benbow made mention of concerns he has around increases in voucher school payments being made and the difficulty in sustained State support for dual education systems.

Calendar

Calendar items were reviewed.

Mr. Krings adjourned the meeting at 6:55 p.m.



John A. Krings – President

Maurine Hodgson – Secretary

Larry Davis – Clerk