



## BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES

John A. Krings, President  
John Benbow, Jr.  
Troy Bier  
Larry Davis  
Sandra K. Hett  
Katie Medina  
Julie Timm

April 17, 2023

### **SPECIAL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING Board Workshop**

LOCATION: Thomas A. Lenk Educational Services Center, 510 Peach Street, Wisc. Rapids, WI 54494  
Conference Room A/B

TIME: 6:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: John Benbow, Troy Bier, Larry Davis, Sandra Hett, John Krings, Katie Medina, Julie Timm

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT: Craig Broeren

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

#### Roll Call

Mr. Krings explained the purpose of the meeting is to consider information gathered by individual Board members who recently participated in listening sessions hosted with staff. The purpose of the meetings was to connect with staff to listen and hear about the positive things happening in District schools, as well as learn about any concerns staff may have.

Individual Board members met with interested employees at each building location throughout the month of April as follows: John Benbow (Grant Elementary); Katie Medina (Central Office/Central Storage/Substitutes); John Krings (Washington Elementary, Woodside Elementary, Lincoln High School); Sandra Hett (River Cities High School, Wisc. Rapids Area Middle School); Julie Timm (Howe Elementary, THINK Academy); Larry Davis (Grove Elementary); and Troy Bier (Pitsch Early Learning Center, Mead Elementary).

Board members shared and discussed what they learned from their individual visits. Mr. Davis suggested that identifying building or staff names may be concerning to some employees, and should perhaps be avoided. After some discussion, the overwhelming sentiment by Board members is to have buildings identified in order to determine what, if any, follow-up might be necessary to address any concerns. Individual staff member names are typically not identified unless there would be a compelling reason to do so.

Following is not an exhaustive list of everything discussed at each visit, rather it is a collection of some of the main points of discussion raised during the meetings. Certain topics were brought up in multiple buildings, but may only be recorded one time on the list.

- In terms of scheduling listening sessions in the future, more 4:00 p.m. options for elementary staff members would be helpful
- Substitute teachers feel supported and welcomed in schools
- Subs would appreciate being invited to the welcome in-service activities in August (even if unpaid), and to also have an opportunity for technology related professional development activities to prepare them for their duties in classrooms
- Subs would appreciate the opportunity to leave early on Fridays, similar to regular staff members who are allowed to leave once their students are gone; currently, subs must stay in order to clock out and be paid
- Subs are having to use teacher passwords (which they are understandably reluctant to provide) in order to access technology accounts such as Google classroom and copy machines – they would like their own email address used to access the tools needed to perform their duties
- Staff members have worked very hard to provide quality virtual/off-campus learning opportunities for students; it is unfortunate that not all of the resources and assignments provided get taken full advantage of by students/families
- Aides in classrooms don't always seem to appreciate the experience many substitute teachers bring to their roles, and boundaries are sometimes crossed in terms of classroom management when aides step in and not allow the sub to handle situations that arise
- Staff members from Grant expressed concerns around a lack of clear and consistent rules relative to student behavior expectations, and a lack of consistency among teachers to ensure all students are uniformly following the rules – a more united front or approach is needed

- Pay for substitutes is low
- Special education aides should have appropriate training and time with teachers during the week before school starts to connect on caseloads
- The low pay rate for aides is a concern and a cause for turnover in these positions; better compensation is needed – this was mentioned at multiple schools
- Consider offering incentives for loyal employees – new aides make a similar amount to those who have been here for a long time
- The Lucy Calkins curriculum utilized in the elementary English Language Arts (ELA) program is a concern, and deficiencies exist in what is taught versus what students get tested on; specific areas of concern mentioned include reading, small writing, and integrated reading/learning; staff mentioned disappointment in how the curriculum was initially adopted; there is limited online capabilities with the curriculum, and rubrics are confusing; it takes twice the amount of prep time for this curriculum; and there is no seamless integration or cohesion from elementary to secondary level
  - Ms. Timm made mention that she learned through the administration that the elementary language arts curriculum is coming up in the acquisition cycle and is slated for replacement soon
  - Superintendent Broeren made mention that the Calkins curriculum has been in place for a number of years as it was undergoing implementation prior to his arrival six years ago. It is incumbent upon staff to supplement curriculum materials when necessary to ensure students are receiving a well-rounded educational experience that covers all of the areas needed to be successful – speaking from his own experience as a teacher, he explained that no single curriculum purchased will cover every single skill or concept needing to be covered – it provides the framework needed and then teacher craft and discretion comes into play to supplement where necessary and ensure students are learning and mastering required content. He also mentioned that a number of steps have been taken throughout the years to provide supplementary resources to augment the Calkins curriculum in areas of identified shortcomings, such as with phonics. He does understand that at the time the Calkins curriculum was adopted, there was not overwhelming support for its implementation; however, there was enough support through the acquisition process that led to its passage and implementation. Mr. Broeren acknowledged that a different curriculum is being utilized in ELA at the secondary level after also undergoing a similar acquisition adoption process, and any deficiencies discovered upon implementation are also being supplemented and addressed as appropriate. Lastly, Mr. Broeren stated that it is fine for staff to bring their concerns forward as is the case here, and there will be no repercussions to anyone for doing so; however, concerns from the listening sessions are brought to the administrative team for consideration and discussion in order to determine ways in which improvement might be made.
- The Mead staff appreciate the strong, effective leadership from their Principal; a reason many of the employees stay
- Students at Mead are amazing and excelling post-pandemic in performance; learning gaps brought about by COVID are closing
- Support staff at Mead are phenomenal and a huge asset, but more help would be welcomed
- The Behavioral Specialist at Mead is a great resource and highly efficient and effective in handling requests received
- Staff are appreciative for the District Health Savings Account (HSA) contributions for both individual and family plans
- Shopping around for the best and most cost effective insurance offerings is appreciated by staff
- Appreciate President Krings’ direction and leadership and wish to thank those who serve on the Board in an important, yet seemingly often thankless, role
- Staff members from multiple buildings expressed a feeling of relief and support from the recent spring election results; the community stepped up and supported candidates who care about public education and WRPS, which is a morale booster for many
- Staff are excited to present about the great things happening in schools through the Board’s monthly “School Showcase” on the agenda
- Layout of classrooms at Mead for special education needs can prove challenging with current logistics and space
- More resources would be welcomed for mental health needs to address overall mental health concerns
- Resources/assistance to reduce burnout would be welcomed
- Discovering ways to rebuild relationships with parents and get them connected is needed
- Sub shortages continue for teachers and aides – continue to explore ways to incentivize and attract them
- Provide better communication/understanding for staff of “blocked” personal days in terms of logistics and planning – Mr. Broeren will follow-up with Human Resources concerning this
- Explore possibility of hiring a floating teacher or aide, offering health insurance as an incentive versus hourly staff member
- More help/resources would reduce burnout and boost teacher morale
- Consider adding a benefit for full-time spouses working in the District since one is not actually taking the benefit and the District is saving money by paying for only one employee benefit (in the past, spouses had their health insurance premium fully paid on their behalf)
- The team of staff at Pitsch bands together and helps out where and whenever needed to operate efficiently
- Students at Pitsch are wonderful and show up each day to thrive and learn
- Having the 4K Coordinator is a huge asset and very beneficial at Pitsch since the Principal wears many hats – overall leadership by the Principal and School Board is noted and appreciated
- The addition of a qualified Library Aide is fantastic for the students at Pitsch
- Pitsch staff would enjoy having a greater presence in the school by the administration and Board

- Videos offered as make-up for support staff would be nice to have available sooner, and not only on snow days; perhaps consider a way for staff to watch the videos and bank them over time to have a more beneficial impact
- Explore different ways for support staff members to make up snow days
  - Mr. Broeren explained that the administration continues to explore ways for effective professional development or make-up time to be made available to support staff on snow days to help ensure that their wages are not adversely impacted when an inordinate number of snow days occurs during the school year
- New aides are making a similar amount to employees who have been working at the District for many years – consider longevity incentives to retain loyal, longstanding employees
- Consider ways to compensate school secretaries for the extra three-week time before/after the school year that they work – perhaps offer vacation or other ways to compensate as an incentive
- Building Blocks rents a room in Pitsch for their 3K program – this can present logistical challenges and difficulties, and tie up office staff time as they provide support to the program which is technically not a WRPS program
- Consider bringing Grant and Woodside 4K programs to Pitsch – these students are not that far away geographically, and having a universal 4K location would be beneficial; THINK should remain where it is due to the geographical area it serves
- Staff members from Washington appreciate the “free” personal day that came out of last year’s listening sessions
- The flexible time provided to staff to make up required time for inclement weather days is appreciated, along with the ability to work from home on certain recordkeeping dates
- Special Education areas could use more staffing help – they are overloaded; physical altercations toward staff by students continue to be on the rise, making these jobs difficult
- More community education around what goes into state test results would be beneficial so the public understands some of the underlying reasons test scores get impacted by circumstances beyond a teacher’s control (opt outs, students unable to test for a variety of reasons, apathy of test takers, etc.) – teachers recognize they aren’t perfect, but also feel undervalued when they see complaints made by people not in the trenches performing the work or who may not have a complete understanding about circumstances beyond teachers’ control – this concern was mentioned at multiple buildings
  - Discussion took place around the types of methods and/or communication avenues that could be used, including the potential for community-wide meetings which had been contemplated prior to the COVID pandemic; educating and informing the community in these ways would be helpful and engaging, but only if they could occur in an environment of mutual respect with civil discourse. Public meetings haven’t experienced tones of civility throughout the past three years, which is unfortunate, has a chilling effect, and inhibits and detracts from the point of having them in the first place.
  - The Board also discussed differences between choice program schools and public schools and the fact that public schools are required to accept all students regardless of their background and socio-economic status or need, and the significant accountability and State/federal reporting requirements of public schools versus choice schools
  - The possibility of developing a District promotional video to serve as an educational tool to help inform the community about District initiatives was considered as it may be one way to help accurate information get disseminated
- Questions were raised around why more days are required by elementary staff versus secondary staff at the beginning of the year
- If teachers attempt to take leave for a half day, it is impossible to get a sub for half day increments
- Intervention staff are swamped, and if they get called out to sub, they end up having to somehow make up the intervention time missed
- If someone that requires a sub takes a day, they must pay even if they do not end up being replaced by a sub
- Woodside staff have been organizing a fundraiser for their Outdoor, Play, Learning, and Activity Center (OPLAC) which is set to occur on Friday, April 21, 2023 – everyone is invited to this special fundraising event
- The Professional Learning Community (PLC) work at Woodside is going well and staff appreciate the PLC opportunities and are excited about this work
- The Student Engagement Facilitator (SEF) does a great job and staff members are happy to have her there
- The new secure entrance area at Woodside is a great improvement that staff appreciate – parking issues around the facility continue to be addressed and seem to be improving – there are more parents dropping students off these days than during any time in history, which adds a great deal of congestion around the school at pick-up and drop-off times
- Staff members feel that bus pick-up at dismissal time was better at Woodside when all kids went out at the same time
- Staff at both Washington and Woodside expressed that they are happy with their Principal
- Staff meetings are not consistently held in all buildings – this commentary came from more than one building
- As calendars get developed for the future, consideration to the potential for year-round schooling should be seriously looked at and considered – WRPS could be a leader in this area
- The topic of required hours for salaried employees was brought up; the expectation for professional staff members is that they work during their scheduled time and put in the time necessary to ensure their duties and obligations are covered, and that they participate in meetings related to their position
- Staff members are wondering if an unused personal leave day could be added to an employee’s sick bank rather than being lost at the end of the year
- Woodside could use a bigger cafeteria and gym space, as well as new lockers

- A consistent and common PLC/release time for buildings would be beneficial and unifying; many staff would be able to better learn from one another
- Additional after school co-curricular offerings for elementary students would be good for students and could improve negative behaviors
- Staff members from Grove are fortunate for the return of field trips and the experiences these opportunities offer children
- Consider slowing down the constant roll-out of new initiatives; allow staff members to have a year off from having to adopt new programming or methods
- More subs are needed as staff continue to cover other classes which impacts responsibilities in their own classrooms
- Allowing / finding more time for elementary staff members to network and collaborate across the district would be beneficial
- Allow staff members to have a voice in the budgeting process
- Staff members are frustrated with the lack of discipline in buildings and the inability to stop students from running the halls, tearing up rooms, or being disruptive to other children who want to be in school, behave, and learn
- Collaboration time for staff at Howe is excellent
- Resources provided to staff by the District is phenomenal and helps support them in their positions
- The Rtl process is excellent
- The additional Student Engagement Facilitator staff time is extremely beneficial – hopefully these positions will remain after ESSER funding runs out
- The public needs to gain a better understanding about the good work happening in schools – perhaps a video developed by the high school digital media class would be beneficial to help promote District schools and initiatives
- Finding ways to engage more with individuals in the community and invite them into schools would be both educational and beneficial
- Staff members appreciate the Board listening sessions
- Air conditioning at Howe would be beneficial to the learning environment
- Common and consistent PLC time would be helpful and productive
- Better discipline or protocols in place would be helpful when dealing with students who can be physically harmful or assault others
- Finding a way to ensure specials teachers are aware of students with frequent behavioral concerns would be helpful to both the student and other staff members involved in servicing these students
- Staff members are curious about whether the results of the listening sessions would be available (Superintendent Broeren explained that this is taken care of through dissemination of Board minutes)
- Reading Corps collaboration and support is extremely beneficial, as is the data collected to analyze student progress – sample data was shared
- THINK Academy staff are very appreciative of their Principal who consistently shows up, displays her appreciation for staff efforts, and is the first to volunteer when something is needed
- The atmosphere and culture at THINK is very positive, healthy, and team oriented; kids organically do things together
- A strong and supportive Parent Teacher Organization at THINK contributes to the positive culture
- Certain classrooms at THINK have curtains in them when walls would be better
- A sensory room at THINK is needed
- Staff at WRAMS are pleased to have the eduClimber program and see how its benefits will help contribute to student success
- The 2022-23 school year has been much better in terms of consistency and expectations with more people operating on the same page at the school
- Student apathy at all grade levels in the middle school is disappointing; students see no value in trying their best on tests, and flat out refuse to do certain requests and assignments
- Math performance for a number of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students is below basic or grade level and it is apparent that they have not had great preparation prior to entering 6<sup>th</sup> grade; some believe it would be helpful to have the same publisher for math curriculum from elementary through the high school level – for example, a neighboring district is using Eureka math curriculum K-12 which has proven to be successful; staff believe the K-12 math acquisition is in the wrong order of sequence
- New teachers at WRAMS are discouraged with Board and Central Office messages which make it seem like all problems are being dumped on WRAMS and that WRAMS is responsible for so many issues, which is disheartening
- WRAMS is the only school with no lunch room aides, which seems unfair – and if lunch aides were available, teachers would have more availability to be provide opportunities for kids to come to classrooms to make up tests or get extra help
- Staff from the former East Jr. High building spoke about the “Eagle Time” program that was in place, and how much better it was than the current RPT model; however, it isn’t being allowed because it is a carryover from East
- The 6<sup>th</sup> graders being contained in their section of the school is beneficial; it would be helpful to also have a better layout for grades 7-8 to navigate
- More clubs used to exist for students to become involved in, such as the Engineering Club, but the offerings have dwindled way down; students expressed interest in having a “Video Club” established and there were as many as 80

students ready to start; however, it was determined that no stipend would be available for the club, even though a high rate of interest was established

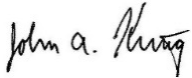
- A quick turn-around for staff to become enrolled in a new insurance program when plan changes occur for cost savings reasons is frustrating; more leeway for staff to be able to consider their options would be helpful
  - Mr. Broeren made mention that it is difficult to offer more time for the changes when the District gets notified about its renewal rate in October and must have a decision made and implementation accomplished by December
- Upset with the mixed messaging happening between the Superintendent, staff, and administration at WRAMS when it comes to student behaviors such as hat wearing – staff feel undermined when decisions get overridden
- It seems that if parents have an issue with staff, rather than work it out at the lowest level with the teacher or building administration they go directly to the Superintendent who doesn't allow issues to be dealt with through the proper chain of command – staff feel left out of the process
- WRAMS staff members are feeling dumped on by both the elementary and high school levels, and are a scapegoat for many issues they haven't created – relationships built on trust are lacking and employees are feeling abused by their colleagues at all levels
- Parental support and involvement in students' lives is lacking, many parents can be difficult to deal with
- With certain scheduling changes happening for the upcoming year, staff members understand that a large study hall is apparently being scheduled; however, they are uncertain if it will have proper levels of assigned supervision which is a concern
- The former "Let's Write, Let's Read" curriculum should be brought back
- Some staff members feel the Principal is solution focused and were appalled that she did not receive an extension of her contract like most other administrators, and they have concerns that this could happen to them; others believe the WRAMS administration is very supportive, while still others do not feel the three administrators in the building work well together and each has their own issues (Ms. Hett noted that some of the commentary came after the meeting when staff members approached her individually)
- A planned trip to reward 7<sup>th</sup> graders got cancelled with no explanation given as to why – this erodes trust and confidence
- River Cities is very happy with their Principal
- An issue at River Cities emerged when two staff members arrived unannounced to the building and weeded out books from the Library without any explanation or communication as to why; the entire process was done in a manner that left staff feeling uneasy, and remaining books have been reorganized in alphabetical order by author, rather than by genre which students and staff found to be more helpful – the lack of communication and unfriendliness during the process was disappointing
  - Mr. Broeren explained that when the District received a public records request earlier in the year to determine if certain titles were in circulation, it was discovered that no media specialist was assigned to River Cities and that the organization of the library was not set up in similar fashion to other District libraries; as a result, the books all needed to undergo a review to determine first if they matched the titles referenced in the inquiry, and secondarily to be put through a vetting and review process similar to how other books enter library circulation within the District.
- Staff members at Lincoln High School (LHS) expressed appreciation for the Superintendent's Cabinet
- Experienced teachers expressed appreciation for continuation of the Other Post Employment Benefit (OPEB) and Health Savings Account (HSA) contribution, while newer staff members do not see the same value in the OPEB benefit now, while also acknowledging that sentiment would likely change over time
- Staff members see the increased number of student expulsions as a positive
- An area of concern for LHS staff is their perceived inconsistency in student discipline with some kids being able to get away with quite a bit while other students who are not troublesome mess up one time and get dealt with more harshly; more consistency across the board is needed and students who continually disrupt the learning environment should experience appropriate consequences
- Events or activities to help new staff from out of town become more acclimated to the area and involved in the community would be beneficial
- Disparities and gaps exist in support staff pay, particularly when comparing building secretary pay with Central Office staff – the entire support staff pay structure across the District should undergo a review
- Special education staff are underpaid – could a portion of this cost be paid from the Special Education budget (Mr. Broeren clarified that this is currently the budgetary area these staff get paid from)
- Concerns expressed around student cell phone use at the high school level and inconsistency with rule compliance and consequences
- Commentary was made by staff around the step and lane opportunities that used to exist under the former Collective Bargaining Agreement and the possibility of a future longevity schedule being considered
- Students sent out into the new independent study areas at LHS need to be monitored

The Board discussed the thoughts expressed by staff during the listening session visits. A number of questions have been addressed by Mr. Broeren, and others will be reviewed with additional information gathered as appropriate to determine what steps might be necessary or helpful to address any concerns mentioned. Mr. Broeren and Board members spent some time discussing the importance of everyone doing their part to speak of the positive initiatives, progress, and achievements occurring in the District. Consideration about potential ways to communicate and engage with the public were discussed.

While known issues will continue to be addressed, the story told by Board members, staff members, parents, and the community sets the stage for how WRPS is perceived by all stakeholders both inside and outside of the organization. The Board expressed deep appreciation for its staff, and will continually seek out ways to show their appreciation for the work that staff members continue to do to help students be successful.

Similar to the prior year, Board members plan to take all of the commentary shared into consideration as they make decisions in the coming year.

President Krings adjourned the meeting at 8:12 p.m.



John A. Krings – President

Maurine Hodgson – Secretary

Larry Davis – Clerk