



## MINUTES

*Wisconsin Rapids Board of Education*  
**Educational Services Committee**

510 Peach Street · Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494 · (715) 424-6701

Kathi Stebbins-Hintz, Chairperson  
John Benbow, Jr.  
Troy Bier  
Christopher Inda  
John Krings, President  
Elizabeth St. Myers  
Julie Timm

December 2, 2024

LOCATION: Board of Education Office, 510 Peach Street, Wisconsin Rapids, WI  
Conference Room A/B

TIME: 6:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: John Benbow, Jr., Christopher Inda, Troy Bier, John Krings, Kathi Stebbins-Hintz, Elizabeth St. Myers, Julie Timm

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT: Phillip Bickelhaupt, Roxanne Filtz, Steve Hepp, Aaron Nelson, Ronald Rasmussen, Rodrick Watson, Jennifer Wilhorn

- I. Call to Order
- II. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
- III. Public Comment – none.
- IV. Actionable Items

A. JROTC Program

Roxanne Filtz, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, provided an update on a visit to Beloit Memorial High School that she and three other staff members (Teacher Valerie DeVries-Polman, Teacher Sohrab Akhavein, and Principal Rod Watson) made on November 20, 2024 to review and tour the areas utilized to operate their Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) program. While there was some hesitation and apprehension about whether the JROTC program would be a good fit to incorporate at WRPS, particularly in light of impending budget constraints, the group was enlightened by witnessing first-hand the impact of the program as they toured Beloit's campus and interacted with both JROTC instructors and 8 of the 135 cadets currently enrolled there. The program has been active at Beloit for 105 years, and it runs like a well-oiled machine. Takeaways highlighted by Ms. Filtz included:

- The program offers strong leadership components that help students thrive
- Participants include freshmen through senior level
- Two classrooms, a storage room for uniforms, another for equipment, and space for archery were utilized for the program
- Students have unique responsibilities in the program (e.g., uniform check-in/out)
- Uniforms are worn once per week
- Of the 8 cadets the group met, only two intend to enlist while the others plan to utilize the leadership skills they've gained to pursue careers after graduation
- The program does not push recruitment into the military, and the cadets confirmed this
- Students who enroll in the program often do so from word of mouth
- In addition to JROTC, cadets are also involved in other co-curricular activities such as sports, National Honor Society, Art Club, and band/orchestra
- JROTC cadets participate in 4 Leadership Education and Training (LET) courses offered
- The seasoned instructors are phenomenal and highly respected; their passion for the cadets and program is evident

- The instructors supervise a study hall and an academic support period; they also sub when they are asked to do so
- The program has strong ties with local veterans groups
- The Color Guard co-curricular group represents JROTC at local events and school sports activities
- It was evident that the students highly valued the leadership skills and self-awareness that the program developed in them

Ms. Filtz explained that as the group debriefed about the JROTC program on their return trip, they all agreed that the program is not a military program. The program encompasses students from all walks of life as they embark on a journey to hone their leadership skills and chart a path for success after high school. The instructors of the Beloit program are passionate and make the difference in the program's success, and they are vetted by both the Army and the school district. The JROTC program provides positive examples in leadership and responsibility, contributes to a positive school culture at Beloit, and promotes strong community ties.

While the group was extremely positive about the JROTC program and feels it would be a fantastic addition to the offerings at Lincoln High School, they also discussed great concerns about bringing in a new program that would require hiring two new instructors in which the District would be responsible to pay one-half the salary, plus any benefits taken by these new employees. Considering the large budget deficit looming in the coming year, it is difficult to justify adding this new expense when the potential to be cutting staff from other areas is very probable. Morale among staff members is a concern. In conclusion, the group does not believe the timing is right to add JROTC programming and would not recommend it. If the District budget situation would change in the future to allow this program to be supported and sustained, they would not hesitate to recommend adding the JROTC offering at WRPS.

Superintendent Rasmussen stated that he has discussed the JROTC topic with the Central Office administrator group at length, and they concur that the timing isn't ideal to take on the expense involved knowing that it is a 5-year contract commitment.

Committee members had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the possible addition of JROTC programming. While this unique program has strong merits, it would be difficult to support a program that may take away from other offerings and needs. Caution must be exercised when the District is facing an approximate \$2.41 million deficit. It would be difficult to justify starting a program that may serve a very small population of students without the ability to discontinue it if it produces low enrollment.

Mr. Rasmussen stated that some additional work can be done in the future to survey students and gather feedback from them around whether there would be interest in a future JROTC offering. He is uncertain where the District would fall in the application process if a decision is made at some point in the future to reapply. Mr. Watson stated that he believes the program could potentially be approved by the Army in the future, and also be successful as a Central Wisconsin offering since the nearest program to compete with would be Tomah, Wisconsin.

**ES-1 Motion by John Krings, seconded by Elizabeth St.Myers, to approve of the recommendation by the administration for the District to not move forward with the implementation of the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) program at Lincoln High School at the present time. Motion carried on a vote of 6-1. John Benbow voted no.**

## V. Updates

### A. Innovation Mini-Grant Recipients for 2024-25

Ms. Filtz explained that three teachers were selected by the Quality Educator Committee to receive an Innovation Mini-Grant award for 2024-25. Seven grant applications were submitted.

Award recipients are as follows:

- Missy Henneman, Mead Elementary – *Engage, Innovate and Inspire*
- Joni Feidt, Grant Elementary – *Kindness Ninjas: Empowering Students to Lead Kindness Initiatives*
- Jennifer Landers, Washington Elementary – *Mindful Mornings*

The grant provides each recipient with \$1,000 to use for materials and supplies for the project, as well as a \$1,000 stipend which gets paid in the spring after the building principal confirms that the project has been implemented.

#### B. Potential 2025-26 Calendar Change

Ms. Filtz presented potential changes to the 2025-26 school year calendar which would move the spring break dates, shift a student contact day, and rearrange some teacher in-service and professional development days. The reason the change is being brought forward is because the District was informed by Assumption Catholic Schools that they intend to request busing for their students during the WRPS spring break week of March 30, 2026 through April 3, 2026 since they intend to be in school as it is Holy Week for them, leading up to Easter. The cost to the District to transport will be approximately \$6,000.00. To avoid this additional expense, the administration has explored moving the Spring Break week to March 16-20, 2026. This week would align with the Marshfield School District and UW-Stevens Point calendars, and possibly the Stevens Point School District calendar which might be beneficial for families and staff members. If school were to be in session March 30<sup>th</sup> through April 3<sup>rd</sup>, it is suggested that Friday, April 3, 2026 continue to be a day off for students since this is Good Friday and there have been numerous requests in the past to have this day be off for students and staff members so that those choosing to participate in Good Friday services have the ability to do so. This means an additional student contact date would need to be added in, and the administration recommends having this date be November 25, 2025 with November 26, 2025 becoming the Professional Development/Recordkeeping date for teachers. The only other alternative to add a student contact day in would be by extending the school year to have it end on June 5, 2026 rather than June 4, 2026. This would mean staff members have their final recordkeeping date of the year on Monday, June 8, 2026.

Ms. Filtz explained that the school calendar is typically presented to the Quality Educator Committee (QEC) to solicit their feedback; however, because of the timing of the request coming from Assumption, there is a tight turnaround to revise the calendar and have it redistributed to families and staff so that they can make the necessary adjustments to their schedules. If the Educational Services Committee is willing to entertain the change, Ms. Filtz would have a follow-up meeting with the QEC in the coming week, and a final recommendation would be presented for Board action at the regular meeting on December 9, 2024.

Mr. Rasmussen stated that it is possible that a recommended change to the 2026-27 school year calendar and beyond will be forthcoming at a future meeting. The administration is studying the possible benefits of requesting an early start date for the school year from the Department of Public Instruction beginning with the 2026-27 calendar year. If approved, the District could potentially save on busing since parochial schools are able to begin their academic year sooner than public schools. With the additional busing cost being a financial hardship to the District, the DPI may be agreeable in granting the waiver. More information and a recommendation will come forward for Board consideration as it becomes available.

Committee members discussed the potential 2025-26 calendar change, citing concerns for the budget and benefits of aligning calendars with neighboring schools and the University. They signaled support for taking the proposal to the QEC for feedback and bringing back a final recommendation to the full Board on December 9, 2024.

### C. Early Literacy Remediation Plan

Jennifer Wilhorn, Assistant Director of Curriculum & Instruction, explained that one of the requirements of 2023 Wisconsin Act 20 is for the District to create and publish an Early Literacy Remediation Plan that applies to grades 5K through grade 3. Professional staff members have been involved in a number of training opportunities through CESA 5 in order to learn about Act 20 requirements and develop a plan that is compliant. A number of administrators, regular and special education teachers, pupil services staff, and interventionists have been involved to collaboratively develop the plan. Once the plan was in its final draft form, several internal groups reviewed it, including the Council for Instructional Improvement (CII), in order to make suggestions for edit. The plan was developed with a goal by the group to make it understandable for all who review it.

The plan includes specific components in the areas of:

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| 1. Universal Approach to High Quality Instruction | 4. Student Supports and Personal Reading Plans |
| 2. Strategic Early Literacy Assessment System     | 5. Family and Community Engagement             |
| 3. Diagnostic Assessments                         | 6. Strategic Use of Data                       |

As required, a website landing page has been launched under the Curriculum Department area specific to Act 20 Early Literacy initiatives. This is where the Early Literacy Remediation Plan can be accessed.

Committee members questioned whether there is a way that the plan addresses required parental involvement when children are identified as needing a Personal Reading Plan. Ms. Wilhorn stated that there is a section on each Personal Reading Plan for teachers to provide specific at-home ideas to help children work on tasks to help them be successful. Unfortunately, there is no way to force parents/guardians to provide this additional support at home, but at least they will have specific suggestions which may help boost participation. Committee members also questioned the degree of collaboration that occurs with McMillan Library to support the District's reading program. Ms. Wilhorn explained that a number of District staff and schools work closely with the local library to enhance school and summer programming. A suggestion was made to potentially explore ways in which the library can work closely with the schools or local Boys & Girls Club to promote a before and after school reading club or similar programming. Mr. Rasmussen stated that he knows through his involvement with the Library Board that there has been growth in the area of youth programming, which has been positive. He believes that the new WRPS community newsletter may help in promoting positive opportunities for students and families to become involved more. Ms. St. Myers is seated on the Library Board as well and is aware of baby and toddler programming in place to support families well before their children reach school age.

Lastly, Ms. Wilhorn described next steps involved in Act 20 compliance which includes the development of a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade promotion policy and potential summer school requirements and/or family directives that may be put in place as a result of the policy.

### VI. Consent Agenda Items

#### **ES-1 JROTC Program**

### VII. Future Agenda Items/Information Requests

The Committee reviewed the following future agenda items:

- Open Enrollment Space Determination Limits for 2025-26 School Year (January)
- Gifted and Talented Education Program Updates (January)
- AGR Mid-Year Report (February)
- District Strategic Plan (February)

Ms. Stebbins-Hintz adjourned the meeting at 6:44 p.m.