

**SOPER BOARD OF EDUCATION
REGULAR BOARD MEETING
Monday, August 23, 2021
7:00 P.M.**

The meeting was called to order by Angella Dancer.

Members present: Angella Dancer, Arlis Young, Gaylen Branton.

Administration present: Scotty Van Worth.

It was determined that a quorum was present.

A motion was made Gaylen Branton to determine that the agenda for this meeting was posted in due time and to approve the Regular Meeting minutes for the Soper School Board for May 24 and July 19, 2021. The motion was seconded by Arlis Young. Gaylen Branton—Aye, Angella Dancer—Aye, Arlis Young—Aye.

Recalling last month's visitor, Mrs. Gilbert, Dr. Scotty Van Worth and Angella Dancer both reported having recently visited with her and were able to say that she is pleased so far with the way things are going with the sports programs and the concerns she'd expressed at the previous meeting.

The Superintendent and the Board welcomed visitor, Lindsey Penner, a former student of Soper Public Schools and now a parent of two young students. She said that she'd come to learn and to understand.

Dr. Van Worth offered the Superintendent's report, diving first into the financial report. Expected monies are coming in including the building fund increase which went into the bank between Friday and the day of the meeting. About \$600,000 of this money will go to currently approved projects, such as the new roof, bus, and HVAC systems. These are specifically geared to meet criteria for the ESSER3 monies. After these projects, the Board will be able to plan more projects.

There are plans to have an architect to verify that the building structure will be able to bear the weight of the new air conditioning systems. Gaylen Branton suggested that the Board should discuss drainage as well.

Dr. Van Worth reported a small amount of ad valorem monies (about \$688), which is normal, as this has traditionally been the slow time of year for those funds.

The elementary school enrollment is higher than past years, although the student body k-12 totals about 340, about 20 fewer than last year. This is likely to change in either direction until October. The focus right now is to make sure the teachers have everything they need.

Current concerns with Covid-19 are on the minds of the administration and the school board. Dr. Van Worth reiterated that shutting down the school would be his last choice as long as there are other options. He prefers take on an A/B schedule if many of the teaching staff goes out for illness or quarantine. This would prevent a shut-down by allowing the students to come in shifts so that classrooms could all be covered by the remaining teachers.

With about 60% of the staff vaccinated, Dr. Van Worth has high hopes that the classrooms can be covered. Vaccination is not required for staff; choice is still in place and will be for the foreseeable future. Without emergency orders, however, staff cannot be paid for quarantine time; paid sick days would have to be used for this purpose at this time. The advantage for the vaccinated is that quarantine is not required after exposure.

For the students, the administration is working toward quarantine decisions based on observation. If students are masked and vaccinated, quarantines would not be necessary, including masking for the young ones. However, none of this is require at the time of this meeting.

Dr. Van Worth said that a complete shut-down will be the last resort and that he will consult the Board if it begins to look necessary. If students go into quarantine, the plan is to send home work packets to keep them on track.

The vaccination would be offered on the following Wednesday from 9 until noon for those who might want it. A consent form was sent home for parents, and any consent for the shot will be verified with a parent by phone before the vaccine will be given.

Hosting the vaccination at the school will put the school district into an advantage for obtaining future ESSER funds. Dr. Van Worth only accepted the offer to host these vaccinations after the third offer, having weighed the advantages.

Gaylen Branton voiced his support for the plan to keep the students in the classroom. He had spoken with two 10-year-olds recently, and he said that they told him "They wanted to use the pencil," as they, too, preferred to learn in the classroom and not by internet.

The Board reiterated that it is in agreement with the Superintendent's choice to stay in the classrooms as much as possible.

At the time of the meeting, Soper was heading into its first full week of school, in fact having just finished the sixth day. So far, all has been going well. The two new teachers, Justin and Cheyenne Franks, have been doing well so far. Justin, in particular, was subject of conversation because he is teaching 3rd grade, a benchmark grade level. Justin has a bachelor's degree in sociology and safety, but this is his first year to teach.

Justin and Cheyenne are working together to obtain their teaching certifications. Their contracts are temporary, renewable each year by Board vote, with the agreement that they will have secured their certifications within three years in order to continue. They are being highly supported by the principals and other teachers, often being assisted within the classrooms. The plan is to have the new teachers to observe within seasoned teachers' classrooms.

Dr. Van Worth addressed the common concern of Board members and some of the parents that Soper has hired non-certified teachers by explaining that there is a teacher shortage across the State and that many of the larger school districts have several non-certified teachers. The effort to find certified teachers to fill the vacancies was made. The emergency certification option is often successful, and Dr. Van Worth and both principals have faith in Mr. and Mrs. Franks's dedication and high probabilities of success.

After the current projects are complete, Dr. Van Worth will consider applying to ESSER funds to hire another teacher as well. This year's second-grade class is large, and so next year third grade will likely need extra teaching support.

Angella Dancer and Dr. Van Worth reported that the Rodeo went well.

A motion was made by Arlis Young and seconded by Angella Dancer to approve the general fund encumbrances 85-141 & 70014-70058 and checks. Arlis Young—Aye, Gaylen Branton—Aye, Angella Dancer—Aye.

There were no Principal's reports, as both Tina Jeffreys and Parker Harless were at ballgames as administration representatives.

Gaylen Branton made the motion to approve the statutory waivers for adjunct teachers and the emergency certification for the 2021-2022 school year. Angella Dancer seconded the motion. All present agreed, although Arlis Young expressed his concern and agreed that it was at this time the only option.

In other business, the Board discussed the pay scale of the support staff. Up until now, there has been no step system such as the teachers have for pay raises, and there have been no evaluations or rating systems. This is the third year in a row that the support staff have not received pay increases. This staff includes cooks, teachers' aides, maintenance workers, etc. The average pay is \$10 per hour and insurance benefits options. The scheduled off time and work schedule to match their children are the perks of the job. There are about a dozen support staff currently employed by Soper School District.

One of the staff, Lori Edge, an aide, has been with the district for four years and has requested a raise, thus opening this discussion. Dr. Van Worth agrees that she is deserving, as she does her job well and that she is a big benefit to the 2nd-grade teacher, this being a particularly large class this year.

Since there is no current set policy for these raises, and since consistency for fairness needs to be established across the board, Angella Dancer suggested that the discussion be tabled for next month's meeting so that data can be collected to create a policy. She asked that Dr. Van Worth create a list of staff with job duties and current pay so that a more thorough discussion can be presented at the September meeting. The Board and Dr. Van Worth agreed to this process.

With no purchase requests and no new business to discuss, Gaylen Branton moved to adjourn the meeting. Arlis Young seconded the motion. Arlis Young—Aye, Gaylen Branton—Aye, Angella Dancer—Aye.

The meeting was adjourned. The Board lingered so that members could sign contracts.

