



BELLEVUE COMETS
COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Comet Highlights from the July 10, 2023 Board Meeting
From Tom Meyer, Superintendent

July 23-30 Students	IGHSAU and IHSAA Non-Contact Period for High School (Events, activities, etc.) - No practices, open gyms, etc. Facilities closed for students
July 31 and August 1	Registration - 10:00 AM - 7:00 PM
August 7	Fall Practices Start (High School)
August 14	Regular Board of Education meeting - 6:30
August 15	Teacher Leadership Group and some other staff working <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Literacy - Elementary Grades 2-5• Authentic Intellectual Work - MS/HS Pilot Group
August 16-22	Teacher Professional Learning
August 16	All Staff Meeting and Breakfast
August 17	Poverty Awareness/Mental Health Training (Ott)
August 18	Mental Health Training (AEA)
August 21	"Unpack the Backpack" and MS and HS Orientations
August 23	First Day of School
September 4	No School - Labor Day
September 13	2-Hour Early Dismissal - Teacher Professional Learning - 1:30-3:30
September 25	Homecoming Week
September 29	Homecoming Parade

To view a calendar of events see the following link:

<https://www.rivervalleyconference.org/public/genie/628/school/1/>

Notes for the Board Meeting on July 10, 2023

APPROVED - Consent Agenda

Approve Open Enrollments

- Sam Kremer - Grade 11 - Dubuque to Bellevue - Sam and his family made contact with the school during last school year, and Sam has been working out with some of our athletic teams this summer.
- Franky Skrivseth - Grade 3
- Freddy Skrivseth - Grade K
 - Both of these students are open-enrolling from Easton Valley to Bellevue. The family is living temporarily in the EV district as a

result of selling their home and the process of moving into a different home in the future.

Approve Recommendations to Hire

- Associates (Elementary)
 - Nicole Kremer (Special Education - full-time) - Nicole has had experience in the East Dubuque Schools as a substitute teacher, along with experiences in the Dubuque CSD.
 - Danielle Reimers (Preschool - 0.5 time) - Danielle has not worked in the schools before, but has had other positions in the area. She has a strong interest in working with students and seems like a good fit for this position.

- Custodians
 - Elementary - Mathew Schmidt - Mathew will be a good fit for this position and has an attention to detail in his current work, which will be important in this position as well.
 - MS/HS - Tamie Kilburg - Tamie has been summer help in the past (and currently).

- Summer Help
 - The district also has **Seth Smith** assisting as summer help as a student helper (started on 6.15.23), and **Adrian (AJ) Humphrey** as a summer worker (she has been working in Oklahoma recently as an experience for her animal science program at Iowa State until recently).

- Athletic Trainer - Katie Ernst - Katie is a full-time physical therapist in the Galena/Dubuque area, and will maintain this role with the part-time athletic trainer role in our district. A summary of the events is later in this section.

**School districts are NOT required to have a trainer, BUT it is highly encouraged for a variety of reasons (including monitoring student injuries - concussions, etc. - and providing trained medical input for student-athletes). There has been talk back and forth about it being required, but there is also a shortage of people with the correct certifications as well which makes it difficult to require it for all districts.*

Events

- HS V Football (9 games)
- JV Home and Away Football games (8)
- MS Home Football games (3)
- Home HS Boys Wrestling (2-3)
- Home HS Girls Wrestling (2)
- Home MS Girls Wrestling (2)
- Home MS Boys Wrestling (2)

- Home Cross Country Meet (1)
- Home HS Track Meet (1)
- Home Regional Events (Volleyball and Basketball - 1-3 total typically)

Certification

The district would need someone to be state certified. The AT also has a background check, etc.

Game Days

On a game day, it would be appropriate to be in Bellevue about 2 hours before the game (5:00 for football). The only time the trainer tapes some ankles is for the game.

Baseline Testing

We need to do baseline testing, and that will be through Sway. We have purchased this service for the 23-24 school year for \$400. In accordance, the district will work with the Sway process for "return to play" and its protocols as needed.

Traveling to Games

Traveling to games is left up to the trainer, on the bus or on their own. The district would have room in vehicles/bus but also understand if the trainer wants to drive on their own. This can be flexible.

The bus for football usually leaves to arrive about 1.5-2 hours before game time. That means for some longer trips leaving at 3:30 or so.

Cross Country

The role at cross country would be for anyone who gets injured/fatigued...we only have one regular home meet (also host a smaller event with county schools with a shorter distance in the evening as a preseason meet).

Wrestling

For wrestling, the role of the trainer would be to monitor concussions, impact injuries, bloody noses, etc.

Regional Events

The role of the trainer would be to monitor concussions, impact injuries, and similar situations.

Med Kits

The district orders all of the supplies for the med kits with the athletic trainer's input. The AT would prepare kits for the activity.

Recognize any Visitors

No visitors were present.

Facilities Updates

OPN Updates

Steering Committee Meeting - 6.29.23

Below are notes from the meeting.

OPN Meeting Summary 6.29.23

At this time, OPN and the Bellevue CSD are a week-away from putting out price/costing estimates.

No topics are officially finalized, and are being used to develop cost estimates and future work/ideas.

Some topics discussed:

1. Access to Elementary School
 - a. Connecting entrance to the elementary parking from the MS/HS area to the south side of the new parking lot.
 - b. Will need to redo striping for parking spaces between the MS/HS building and the bus garage.
 - c. Will create two "islands" to divert traffic away from the bus garage, and to allow buses to pull in and pull out of their parking areas in the garage
2. Access Areas
 - a. Food Service - West side of building
 - b. Buses - West side of building (pull-off area for buses to drop-off and pick-up students before and after school)
3. Trash area
 - a. North side of the building - by gym
4. Gym Area
 - a. Windows are on the north side and west side
 - b. Not on east or south side
 - c. Awareness of potential issues of a "glare" being problematic
5. Access around building
 - a. Full-loop around the building, and where the future PK-2 addition will be built. Allowing for buses to drive around, along with emergency vehicles
6. Playground area
 - a. North of the traffic loop
7. Commons Area
 - a. OPN has added a "commons" area to the building. They have provided two options for this, but one will add an additional 2400 square feet based on "circulation patterns" and usage overall, which would mean \$720,000 if it is that extra amount at \$300/square foot.
 - i. As a result, they are looking at the less expensive option - which also has several benefits to it overall, and is viewed positively overall by OPN and the committee
 1. This example of cost shows how increase in prices can accumulate very quickly!
8. Exterior Materials
 - a. Brick (light brown - tan - similar to a light limestone color)
 - b. Pre-Cast
 - c. Metal
 - d. Glass

- i. The cost estimating will provide some input on costs of the different materials, and guide any adjustments
- 9. Classrooms
 - a. Each classroom will have two large exterior windows
 - b. Classrooms may also have a window to view the collaboration areas, but not excessive
- 10. Interior Concept Plan
 - a. The group saw some examples of colors and designs for inside the building
- 11. Lockers vs "Cubbies"
 - a. Overall the group felt lockers in the hallway for grades 3-5 seemed the best, especially compared to "cubbies" in the classroom (would impede on classroom space). Lockers are also "cleaner" with no clothes, etc. sticking out and being in the hallway, etc.

Notes from OPN



Minutes

Date: June 29, 2023
Location: Bellevue High School
Project: Bellevue New Elementary
Project No.: 23210000
Subject: SD Meeting 4

Attendees:

Bellevue: Tom Meyer – Superintendent
Brett Ernst – Facilities Supervisor
Matt Wedeking, ~~Janet Sieverding~~ – School Board
Penny Medinger, Abbey Skrivseth – SBO
Jeanette Hartung-Schroeder – Elem Principal
~~Memphis Jess, Tate Gieseemann~~ – Student Rep

OPN: Vicki Hyland, Jill Bills, Bethanie Zeller, Kyle Guenther, Matthew Stewart,
Lisa Lindley, Emily Greathouse

Agenda:

1. Mechanical system update
 - a. We had a small group meeting with members of the steering committee regarding an additional system to be considered. Mechanical engineers will provide pricing for 4 systems at SD review.
2. Site Plan
 - a. Option A with sidewalk reduction
 - i. Minor revisions from previous Option A including moved parking lot, reduction of sidewalk
 - ii. Loop Road will be priced in initial SD
 - b. Other considered options
 - i. Cost analysis of various cul-de-sac turning options came back comparable or more expensive than preferred Option A with full drive loop
 - c. Revised access drive around bus barn presented. Two lane traffic with dividing islands included. This option will be priced in the SD set
3. Schematic Design Plans
 - a. Option 1
 - i. Preferred plan option from last meeting with Art and Music flipped
 - ii. Servery access – will plan to include a separate entrance to servery
 - iii. Will proceed with option 1 for pricing and see if opportunities for additional SF following SD.
 - b. Option 2 (revised)
 - i. Preferred plan option from last meeting with Art and Music flipped and Special Ed and Cafeteria flipped to be more centrally located once PK-2 is added
 1. This option adds approximately 2,400 additional square feet over Option 1 (more circulation required)
4. Exterior Material Ideas
 - a. Contextural buff colored, precast (color and pattern TBD), and a white metal panel make up the solid exterior façade materials.
 - b. Curtain wall glazing with Anod aluminum finish planned for exterior Glazing
 - c. South entrance has canopy as main secure entry
5. Exterior Model Review

- a. Exterior images and walk-around of building reviewed. Current plan is acceptable to proceed with for SD Pricing
6. Interior Concepts
 - a. Diagram review of primary locations for higher level of finishes
 - b. OPN will review alternative options to green as a base color.
 - c. Steering Committee agrees they like the stone/ warmth of the wood, natural light opportunities
 - d. Concerns about letters too literally being associated with grade level
 - e. Like bluff and river references graphics, can focus higher level graphics at the secure entry/admin
7. Next Steps
 - a. Schematic Design set July 7
 - b. Next Meeting: Aug 3 Cost Estimate Review, 9am
 - c. Community Open House September 13 (tentative)

Mechanical Meeting 6.26.23

Brett Ernst, Matt Wedeking, and Meyer had a meeting on Monday (June 26) for "mechanical" discussions and some other related items.

Focus was on the types of heating and cooling systems to be in the costing for future discussion. MODUS (mechanical engineering) will share four different examples in the proposals and allow for a comparison of price, efficiency, and overall capabilities for our school building, both the 3-5 addition and the future PK-2 addition.

Some other topics included:

- Space to add a 2nd system
- Availability and time to order/receive products
- All areas of the OPN planning to work together on models
- Maintenance services for different products in our area



Minutes

Date: June 26, 2023
Location: Zoom
Project: Bellevue New Elementary
Project No.: 23210000
Subject: MEP review 2

Attendees:

Bellevue: Tom Meyer – Superintendent
Brett Ernst – Facilities Supervisor
Matt Wedeking – School Board
OPN: Jill Bills, Matthew Stewart
Modus: Alex Matheson

1. Mechanical system proposed options:
 - a. Initial base system – AHU, DX cooling, VAV's with Hot water reheat
 - i. First costs vs life cycle analysis – this system lower first costs, higher life time costs
 - b. Second option Chiller/Boiler – Terminal Air unit – hot and chilled water to unit
 - i. Most contractors very familiar (Inflation reduction act incentive possible if ice storage is utilized for off-peak utility usage)
 - c. Third Option - Full Geothermal – pump and reinject system (potential IRA money available)
 2. IRA money - Estimate 30% of total cost of equipment directly related to geo systems and possibly an ice storage system. Additional funding comes with additional contract requirements – Davis Bacon labor requirements.
 3. Questions from BCSD
 - a. Base Heat and Cool units – least expensive initial cost, but higher regular maintenance and annual maintenance costs. LCCA may identify this to have the lowest life cycle, but the district may still elect to pursue a more efficient system. Addition to require additional equipment, little up front costs for addition.
 - b. Chiller and Boiler – will need additional capacity for addition, will plan to incorporate expansion connectivity in future. Chiller lead time can be a concern. Would want to get that released ASAP following Bid.
 - c. Geo – would plan to oversize well size/capacity (premium) to allow for addition. Depending on the footprint of the school's land, two future wells could be considered for the future addition.
 4. Air source VRF recommended by district for consideration. Modus noted they have had issues with maintenance with some installations, difficulty finding local contractor, has to be specific service tech, and some mfr's can be great distance (Des Moines, maybe Quad Cities)
 5. Geisler installed the geothermal system at High School and provided the initial maintenance
 6. BSD said VRF service tech Daikin has service technicians located in Dubuque (Modern). Other manufacturers will still be allowed to bid which could result in a non-local contractor having a certified technician.
 7. Modus will add VRF to initial 3 mechanical systems for review and pricing incorporation to SD set. Plan to provide 4 options for pricing to include the baseline, chiller/boiler with Fan coils and DOAS, VRF with DOAS, and Geothermal with WSHPs and DOAS.
 8. BSD raised concerns about extreme cold conditions with the different mechanical systems. Some achieve 15 Below – some mfr's only to zero. Modus plans to include plan to still provide Electric Reheat on systems that would not achieve extreme cold levels.
-
9. Building Monitoring – Johnston controls is currently used on campus for Geo system. BSD requested to keep open spec, understanding a different interface could be used if Johnston isn't low.
 10. Security – The new fire alarm panel will be a voice evacuation panel which can have settings to alert an intruder. Lockdown sequences and discussions surrounding security to happen with the district during Design Development Programming.

Next Steps:

1. Issue SD Pricing set

Our next meetings and important dates in the near future are the following:

- July 7 - OPN sending tentative plans to cost estimators
- August 3 @ 9:00 - Steering Committee meeting
- September 13 - Community Open House

APPROVED - OPN Contract/Agreement

Meyer was sent a contract from OPN last week. As they discussed earlier, their overall charge will be at the amount of 7.25%. This is the fee for the entire design team that is under this contract.

OPN splits this fee between OPN Architects, the civil engineer, the structural engineer, the mechanical engineer, the electrical engineer, and the low-voltage engineer.

Ag Room

Brett Ernst (and others when available) are making progress on the Ag Room. Brett, as a certified electrician, rewired many parts of it, and we recently had a spray foam insulation completed and are now putting plywood over that prior to drywall. A lot of work has to be completed yet before its use, but the hope is it is ready by the first day of school with lighting, etc.).



Scoreboard at Field/Track

Based on information from last week, it appears that the new scoreboard will be installed the week of July 10. We are also working on moving the long jump pit to the area north of the scoreboard as a result of the current pit needing work and a general upgrade needed. Also, it will be more convenient for athletes during meets, assist in the supervision of younger students during events, and having it included with events during a track meet instead of isolated when it does not need to be.

Comet Curriculum

Meyer shared the Learning Conditions summary from the state of Iowa. The board discussed the results, trends, and comparisons with the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency (our area schools) and the Department of Education across the state. There were no comments allowed by the state for the survey by either parents or staff.

*Responses are positive responses ("Yes") in most cases (For example, the percent they believe the Adult-Student Relationships are positive).

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	DE/AE Avg.
<u>Students Grades 3-5</u>				
Adult-Student Relationships 79/80	87	84	79	
Boundaries and Expectations 73/75	80	85	74	
Emotional Safety 21/20	25	20	15	
Physical Safety	66	60	53	58/58
Student-Student Relationships	90	89	83	83/86
<u>Staff PK-5</u>				
Adult-Student Relationships 91/87	91	100	100	
Boundaries and Expectations 85/84	91	96	95	
Emotional Safety**	0	0	0	3/2
Physical Safety	36	20	27	19/15
Student-Student Relationships	100	100	100	96/93
<u>Students Grades 6-12</u>				
Adult-Student Relationships 32/36	33	32	37	
Boundaries and Expectations 32/36	37	34	33	
Emotional Safety ** 24/24	25	16	22	
Physical Safety	44	36	44	47/48
Student-Student Relationships	34	33	44	34/38
<u>Staff 6-12</u>				
Adult-Student Relationships 49/56	55	59	65	
Boundaries and Expectations 33/38	32	41	35	
Emotional Safety 2/3	0	3	4	
Physical Safety	6	10	4	3/7
Student-Student Relationships	48	36	63	47/50

The district anticipates using this as a resource once again for the staff and student survey this upcoming school year, BUT there is question at the state level of what can be asked of students based on recent legislative actions and gaining specific parental permission for surveys that ask a variety of questions - specifically social-emotional and some other areas. For instance, the Iowa Youth Survey (if the state continues with this, as there is some conflicting information on this currently) now must have specific parent-permission signature for each student who takes it. Getting signatures for surveys, especially at the secondary level, is difficult during the school year.

This state report was released to districts to access recently through an online site, and became available the week of June 12. There are NO comments with this survey as the state did not allow comments on the survey.

The document is a summary of all of the surveys that were completed by 154 students in grades 3-5, 322 students in grades 6-12, 22 staff members in PK-5, and 27 staff members for grades 6-12.

APPROVED - Board Policies - Board Policy Updates and Reviews

As I mentioned at our last board meeting, we will look to approve/amend the first set of policies (those that were presented at the board meeting in June), along with reviewing another set of policies at this meeting that are mainly the result of legislative action (approving them in August accordingly).

June - July

In regard to those being proposed for approval in July, a few information items and reminders

1. Use of Facilities
2. Board Policy overview from the June Board meeting

1. Facilities

906.1 - Community Use of School District Facilities & Equipment (including 906.1R1, 906.1R2, 906.1E1, and 906.1E2)

While there are some other edits noted in the document I shared in the past, one of the questions is the "charge" for facilities based on non-profit, and its use by an "outside of school-group". Some defining points may be, and have been in some other scenarios, it is benefiting those in our community (or not), benefiting our students, etc.

A church group with members from Andrew and Bellevue (about 14 adults and 20 children from my conversations with the leader of the group) would like to use the gym and restrooms - no other areas - for approximately 2 hours/session. They would not need any chairs or tables as they would provide them if needed (but if we charge I believe we could provide a rack of chairs, etc.).

I would recommend that we add the following statement to the area under the \$100 fee that is in bold print in the document on the next page and charge the

group accordingly over a several-week period negotiated with the group. In the past, for some groups or individuals, we have charged them the total fee over a few sessions time if they were only using it for 1-2 hours at a time (For example, \$100 for 3 sessions or something similar):



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Fee (see below for information on fee determination)

_____ *No Fee*

- *No profit being made from entry fees, registration fees, etc. by the group wishing to use the facilities OR any profit goes directly into the district account for the school-sponsored program*
- *Event operated by school district staff associated with the event at the school or district level*
- *Bellevue CSD students participating in the event as a team, etc.*

_____ *\$100 Fee*

- *Profit being made for the organization/individual wishing to use the facilities, **or no profit being made by a local community organization.***
- *Event operated by school district staff associated with the event at the school or district level, **or by a local community organization.***
- *Bellevue CSD students participating in the event as a team, etc.*

_____ *\$250 Fee*

- *Profit being made for the organization/individual wishing to use the facilities*
- *Event not operated by school district staff, but by non-profit local community organization*
- *Event benefiting the community*

_____ *TBD Fee*

- *Event not operated by school district staff, or by a non-profit local community organization*
- *Event is not community-oriented*

A fee of _____ is required based on the above selection

By signing below the renter and/or group utilizing the facilities agrees to the Facility Use Policy of the Bellevue CSD. Agreement and the fee for the use of the facilities.

Renter Signature: _____ Date _____
(Name)

School District Signature: _____ Date _____
(Name)

Some other aspects with this policy change, mentioned in June, include the following:

- Approval by the Superintendent, or appointee, would be appropriate for the use of facilities (906.1)
- There is typically not school employee supervision the whole time (906.1)
- Not sure if it is necessary to share what groups do NOT have to pay (906.1)
- Fee paid even if the event is canceled (906.1R1)
- I do not think we need a specific fee for specific areas, or equipment costs - VCR, etc. (906.1R2)
- I believe our "Fees" in the "Facilities Use Policy" we have been using in recent years can replace most of 906.1E1 and 906.1E2

2. Other Policies for June/July

The policies we will need to review that are "new" or "changed" are the following (from past notes in June):

200.04 (New)- Board Member Social Media Engagement

This new policy provides a legal framework for board members to decide how they will engage with their communities on social media. This policy language should not inhibit the rights or actions of individual board members but should reiterate the responsibilities board members have to safeguard employee and student privacy.

210.05 - Meeting Notice

Additional language has been added to this policy to reinforce an interpretation of the Iowa Public Information Board which occurred during the initial COVID shutdown of some school buildings. Namely, that meeting agendas should be posted to an exterior door or window so that community members may still view the agenda when the building is closed.

216.02 - Board of Directors' Member Development and Training

This sample policy language was updated to reflect the updates to IASB's Annual Board Awards program, and to provide further clarity on the purpose of this policy.

401.05R1 - Employee Records Regulation

This policy language has been updated to better reflect the legal requirements for disclosure of employee personnel information. The final paragraph has also been removed to eliminate overlap with IASB sample policy 708.

401.10 - Credit and Procurement Cards

No changes have been made to the body of this policy. It is being renumbered and moved to the 700 series consistent with school finance policies.

407.02 - Licensed Employee Contract Release

This policy language was updated to include language allowing districts to charge reasonable administrative costs incurred in finding a replacement of a licensed employee. Districts should note that consistent with the policy language, charges should be for costs actually incurred.

604.06 - Instruction at a Post-Secondary Educational Institution

The final paragraph of this policy has been removed after further discussion with the Department of Education. The Department expressed concern that some districts were interpreting this to mean that the district still had discretion on whether to award credit to a student who successfully passes a district-approved course.

607.01 - Student Guidance and Counseling Program

This policy language was updated to reflect the proper licensing state agency, and the correct name of school counselors.

701.02 - Transfer of Funds

Additional language has been added to this policy to provide guidance to districts on how different types of funds may be transferred between accounts

705.01 - Purchasing - Bidding

This policy removes some outdated language no longer required of districts.

705.01R2 - Using Federal Funds in Procurement Contracts

This regulation adds in some language required of all entities receiving federal funds related to the prohibition on telecommunications and surveillance services or equipment from specified prohibited vendors.

708 - Care, Maintenance and Disposal of School District Records

Updates were made to several timelines for retention of different types of records. These changes are designed to comply with best practices for districts.

The 500 Series policies are also attached to the email information, with changes to the following, along with some new policies (which are indicated on the documents in order of policy number):

500 - Objectives for Equal Educational Opportunities for Students

This policy has been rescinded as it substantially overlapped policy 102 but was less comprehensive. Some of the policy language in 500 was moved to policy 102, which also has appropriate legal reference citations substantiate the requirements in policy 102. It is important to avoid policies that directly overlap one another, as any inconsistency in the phrasing of overlapping language could create confusion for employees and students in the districts and could make enforcement of policy language very difficult.

501.2 - Nonresident Students

Changes have been made to clarify the intent of this policy and flexibility families have in accordance with the Department of Education's interpretation of the law.

502.10 - Search and Seizure - The policy language has been expanded to specifically allow for the seizure of nicotine as an unauthorized substance when discovered during the course of a search. Nicotine has been added rather

than any paraphernalia used to deliver nicotine (ex. e-cigarettes) so that the policy considers the method of delivery may continue to change over time, but the chemical substance nicotine will continue to be banned.

502.10E1 - Search and Seizure Checklist

This exhibit has been updated to remove reference to a student's past history when conducting a search. Using a student's past behavior as a basis for conducting a search may violate a student's constitutional rights. To provide greater clarity for school employees, this section has been removed from the exhibit as a consideration.

503.1 - Student Conduct

Minor changes were made to this policy to include reference to the new policy 503.6, and to distinguish the subject matter of this policy from 503.6.

503.5 - Corporal Punishment, Mechanical Restraint and Prone Restraint

This policy was revised in accordance with the new changes to the Iowa Administrative Code which clearly prohibits the use of mechanical and prone restraints on students. For greater clarity for district employees, mechanical and prone restraints are defined in the policy language.

503.6 - (New) Physical Restraint and Seclusion of Students

This policy clearly defines physical restraint and seclusion. It also outlines the reasoning behind the use of these behavior modifications, and the limited circumstances when they can be used. This topic has many legal requirements and the policy is not complete without the accompanying regulation and exhibits.

503.6R1 - (New) Use of Physical Restraint and Seclusion with Students

This regulation, which accompanies policy 503.6, goes into further details for administrators on the required parameters for using physical restraint and seclusion within the district.

503.6E1 - (New) Use of Physical Restraint and/or Seclusion Documentation Form

This form creates a framework for reporting requirements when physical restraint and seclusion are used. It is important for districts to fully document these occurrences, and also communicate with parents and guardians.

503.6E2 - (New) Debriefing Letter to Guardian of Student Involved in an Occurrence Where Physical Restraint and/or Seclusion was Used

This letter is a sample districts can use to communicate with parents and guardians of students involved in restraint or seclusion occurrences. The letter outlines the legal reporting and meeting requires established in the Iowa Administrative Code.

503.6E3 - (New) Debriefing Meeting Document - This sample form is a step-by-step guide to ensure administrators complete all of the reporting requirements for holding the post-occurrence debriefing meeting.

Additional 500 Policies from the Legislative Session (updates released on 6.7.23 from IASB).

These updates are in a separate document with the new policy (and a former policy IF it is an alteration to an already existing policy.

New! 503.07 - Student Disclosure of Identity

This new policy language reflects the legal requirement for districts following the passage of SF 496. The policy and accompanying exhibits are designed to provide clarity for districts on how to manage student reports of identities or names different from registration paperwork. It is recommended that districts make all licensed employees aware of the requirements of this policy.

New! 503.07E1 - Report of Student Disclosure of Identity

See comments above.

New! 503.07E2 - Request to Update Student Identity

See comments above.

505.04 - Testing Program

SF 496 created additional requirements for districts to obtain prior consent before issuing certain types of surveys to students related to the student's social or emotional abilities, competencies or characteristics.

505.05 - Graduation Requirements

Districts have some new flexibility with the removal of financial literacy as a requirement for graduation. This change comes from the passage of SF 391. It is important to note that financial literacy is still required to be offered and taught.

507.02 - Administration of Medication to Students

Following legislative flexibility in recent years allowing districts to stock and administer certain medications including bronchodilators, epinephrine and naloxone; the Iowa Department of Education was very gracious in lending their time and expertise in assisting IASB with substantial revisions to this sample policy as well as 804.5, including three new exhibits. These new policies and accompanying exhibits reflect the options districts now have on which medications to carry and administer, and updated authorizations for students to carry and administer certain types of medications or special health services.

507.02E1 - Authorization-Asthma, Airway Constricting, or Respiratory Distress Medication Self-Administration Consent Form

See comments above.

507.02E2 - Parental Authorization and Release for the Administration of Medication or Special Health Services to Students

See comments above.

New! 507.02E3 - Parental Authorization and Release Form for the Independent Self Carry and Administration of Prescribed Medication or Independent Delivery of Health Services by the Student

See comments above.

New! 507.02E4 - Parental Authorization and Release Form for the Administration of Voluntary School Stock Over-the-Counter Medication to Students

See comments above.

403.7E9 - Post-Accident Drug and Alcohol Testing Instruction to Drivers

This policy was noticed by Penny that it will need to be changed to share Abbey Skrivseth's information as the Board Secretary.

The final area is that for substitute teachers (the policy is in italics below), which we have discussed in the past. Some highlights to be aware of for this policy are the following:

710.6 - Meal Charges

Some clarification on language is necessary according to the experts at the state level in food service. This pertains to if a student's balance is "negative" in their food service account, they are not allowed to charge a la carte items. Minor changes in our language, but it will be easier to understand and interpret.

804.7 - Radon Mitigation

This change is mandated by the state and ultimately shares that the school district will test for radon every five years.

Review of Board Policies/July - August Information

In an attachment (July-August Board Policies) are policies to review this month, and then look to approve/edit at the August board meeting.

A couple of edits to the new policies introduced and sent a few weeks ago include the following:

106 - Anti-Bullying Harassment... should state the "Bellevue" Community School District specifically.

605.03R1 - Objection to Instructional and Library Materials... should state 6 members (not 8 members) as the legislature eliminated the student representatives.

APPROVED - 2023 IASB Legislative Priorities

The Board chose four priorities for the 2024 Legislative Session. The previous year's priorities from the Bellevue CSD are also listed below:

2023

- Private School Accountability
- Mental Health Support
- Unfunded Mandates
- School Safety

2022

- Mental Health Support

- Teacher Licensure and Recruitment
- Bond Issues
- Achievement Gap Learning Loss

2021

- Mental Health Support
- School Funding Policy
- Bond Issues
- Teacher Licensure and Recruitment

2020

- Preschool Funding
- Mental Health Support
- Special Ed Funding
- School Funding Policy

2019

- Mental Health Support
- Special Ed Funding
- School Funding Policy
- Bond Issues

Some information about this process from IASB:

Every spring the government relations team asks school districts to submit legislative priorities and for any changes to the legislative platform for the upcoming legislative session. The feedback received helps the government relations team best position the organization on bills during the legislative session.

We hope that you set aside time during your May, June, July, or August board meetings to discuss and then submit your legislative priorities and any changes you would like to see to our legislative platform. As you decide, here are the most frequently asked questions about the process.

WHO DEVELOPS THE RESOLUTIONS?

The Legislative Resolutions Committee (LRC) receives feedback from school district submissions from the call for legislative priorities. The LRC reviews all the proposals and recommends legislative beliefs, resolutions, and the priorities for the upcoming legislative session.

WHAT IS THE LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

The LRC is made of up school board members and a board member from the Area Education Agencies (AEA) and the community colleges. Board members on the LRC represent school districts of all sizes from Schleswig to Sioux City.

The LRC meets twice a year during the summer to review and make recommendations on the proposed IASB legislative platform. Once the LRC finalizes its recommendations, it sends those recommendations to the IASB Board of Directors

who then reviews and approves the platform. That platform is then sent to delegates to be debated at the IASB Delegate Assembly in November.

WHAT IS THE DELEGATE ASSEMBLY?

Delegate Assembly occurs the day before the IASB annual convention. That is where delegates, appointed by their school district, AEA, and community college, debate and vote on the IASB legislative platform for the upcoming year.

WHAT IS THE TIMELINE FOR THE RESOLUTIONS PROCESS?

IASB sends out the "Call for Legislative Priorities" in early May. School boards should set aside time during their summer board meetings to review and discuss what priorities they would like to submit, as well as suggest a new or amend a current resolution to the platform. Once they have reviewed the platform boards should submit their list via the link that was sent to the board secretary in May. The deadline to submit legislative priorities is August 12, 2022.

CAN MY DISTRICT SUBMIT OUR OWN RESOLUTION? HOW?

You bet! The third page on the questionnaire allows a board to suggest a new resolution or amend a resolution we currently have in our platform. These amendments and new resolutions will then be presented at Delegate Assembly and voted on by the delegates. If you need help with wording or content for a new resolution or amendment, our government relations staff is happy to assist.

I MISSED THE DEADLINE TO SUBMIT PRIORITIES, CAN I STILL SUBMIT BY DISTRICTS RESOLUTIONS AND PRIORITIES?

Absolutely! We put a deadline on submissions so IASB staff have time to collect the information and present it to the LRC during their August meeting. The August meeting is where the LRC reviews district submissions and makes its final recommendations on the legislative platform. Last year we heard from over 85% of school districts. Let's get that number higher this year. Even if you miss the deadline, please submit your priorities. We want to hear from every IASB member district!

OUR BOARD IS SET TO PICK OUR PRIORITIES, BUT WE DO NOT HAVE THE PLATFORM FOR THIS YEAR, HOW DO WE PICK PRIORITIES?

Your board should review the current platform as a guide to select, amend or add legislative priorities to the 2023 platform.

IS IT REALLY THAT IMPORTANT TO SUBMIT OUR PRIORITIES? WE ARE BUSY WITH THE OTHER THINGS GOING ON IN OUR DISTRICT.

Yes! By submitting your legislative priorities, it helps our government relations team better advocate on your behalf. When our lobbyists can inform legislators that 90% of districts who submitted priorities made school funding, mental health, and teacher shortage a priority, that makes an impact with legislators.

APPROVED - Board Secretary/Treasurer

The Board officially appointed Abbey Skrivseth as Board Secretary/Treasurer for the 2023-2024 school year. Abbey will be working collaboratively with Penny

Medinger over the next 2-3 months in this role, and then will be our sole person in the office (along with Rhonda Roth). Penny has done an absolutely outstanding job in her role with her knowledge, "common sense" approach, and overall efficiency in so many ways. I am sure Abbey will follow this in her new role for our district.

APPROVED - Partnership School

Over the last several years we have had an agreement with the DeWitt Central Schools to utilize programming from the AEA in a building in DeWitt for students with significant behavioral issues. While years ago we utilized Hillcrest Services in Maquoketa, we were forced to look for other alternatives upon its closure several years ago.

The programming in DeWitt has been good for students and schools, both in assisting students to develop strategies for success both in life and school (and returning to their home district). While we have not utilized this program significantly at all, it is still an option that we must maintain based on future needs and options. The use has increased overall in our area as a result of more significant behavioral issues that cannot be adequately addressed in the regular school settings, and it will be moving to a different building with more space. At this time, the following eight districts participate in its "rental" for student services (the building is being purchased by the AEA and will provide some future savings for our district and a "value in the building if it would ever be sold"): Bennett, Cal-Wheat, Camanche, Clinton, DeWitt, Maquoketa, Northeast, and Bellevue. The cost is split evenly for the building, but additional charges occur each time it is used for students.

The following is a motion/resolution for this July Board meeting, and I will ideally have a price for this as well (funding comes from PPEL).

Motion/Resolution:

The District expresses its intent and commitment to continue participation with the Partnership School for a period of 10 school years and continue the leasing arrangement and 28E Agreement for the Partnership School Consortium with Central DeWitt School District and Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency.

APPROVED - Level I Investigators

As a formality, we need to officially appoint the two principals as Level I Investigators for allegations of abuse of students by employees for the 2023-2024 school year.

APPROVED - Level II Investigators

As a formality, we need to officially appoint Dennis (Bud) Schroeder, Bellevue Police Department Chief as the district's Level II investigator for allegations of abuse of students by employees for the 2023-2024 school year.

APPROVED - Equity/Title IX Coordinator

As a formality as well to a point, although I am changing the recommendation to the Superintendent based on recent Title IX training, I recommend we have Tom Meyer serve as Equity Coordinator for the district for the 2023-2024 school year.

EICC Memorandum of Agreement

This was not an action item at this time, but will be in the August meeting after some follow-up with other school districts and the Eastern Iowa Community College District.

A summary - The Eastern Iowa Community College District (EICCD) has shared its annual Memorandum of Agreement for College Credit Courses for High School Students. This will need to be approved in order for our students to continue to take college-credit courses, but after speaking with area superintendents recently we will look to approve this in the future (August 2023). There are some issues with some of the cost increases and a few other stipulations that have been made in the agreement for this upcoming school year.

Some of this may be a result of a recent accreditation/audit of EICC, with some also from new leadership changes at EICC. Some of the significant changes impacting our district and students (and their learning) this year include the following:

- Tuition Rates increasing from \$187/credit hour to \$195/credit hour. This is a change from a 30% concurrent rate to 32.5% - Before discussions with EICC, this was being proposed by the college to be 40-50%. After multiple discussions, this was reduced.
- EICC must review and approve ANY and ALL new high school faculty teaching concurrent enrollment courses on a case-by-case basis. This may mean the college providing the instructor and the district paying for this instructor.
- If a course is being offered in a career academy in Clinton, DeWitt, or Maquoketa, approval may not be granted for the high school to offer the course in the future in a face-to-face setting
 - This does not appear to impact online courses at this time.
 - This does potentially impact us expanding on-site college course offerings in the future - whether that would be a new course(s) or if a teacher leaves the district who is teaching college courses in the school setting.
 - This already has an impact on us with not being able to add new courses for teachers to teach face-to-face on our campus to students - even if they are qualified to do this and it would come at the cost of the district paying the teacher.
- Books for courses, when needed, will not have to be replaced for 3-5 years - no sooner than this. This has been an issue at times with different books or editions every 1-2 years that the instructor requires. Although, some courses do not utilize print-version books.

Comet Reading and Reflection

Meyer included two pieces of reading. One is an article about Artificial Intelligence based on its potential impact in schools (and beyond), and the other is an excerpt from the start of the book staff is reading over the summer (and will review with Jim Ott at the start of the school year, along with future times this upcoming school year).

The AI article discusses Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its potential impact on education...and what changes may have to happen overall in education and in classrooms, etc.

The "Poor Students, Rich Teaching" book is focused on improving the instructional strategies of teachers (PK-12) for all students, with a focus on giving ALL students opportunities to succeed. I have included the "Introduction" part and the table of contents to share the areas that are focused on.

The AI article is below, and the book excerpt is attached.

**I'm a Student. You Have No Idea How Much We're Using
ChatGPT.**

No professor or software could ever pick up on it.

MAY 12, 2023

Look at any student academic-integrity policy, and you'll find the same message: Submit work that reflects your own thinking or face discipline. A year ago, this was just about the most common-sense rule on Earth. Today, it's laughably naïve.

There's a remarkable disconnect between how professors and administrators think students use generative AI on written work and how we actually use it. Many assume that if an essay is written with the [help of ChatGPT](#), there will be some sort of evidence — it will have a distinctive “voice,” it won't make very complex arguments, or it will be written in a way that AI-detection programs will pick up on. Those are dangerous misconceptions. In reality, it's very easy to use AI to do the lion's share of the thinking while still submitting work that looks like your own. Once that becomes clear, it follows that massive structural change will be needed if our colleges are going to keep training students to think critically.

The common fear among teachers is that AI is actually writing our essays for us, but that isn't what happens. You can hand ChatGPT a prompt and ask it for a finished product, but you'll probably get an essay with a very general claim, middle-school-level sentence structure, and half as many words as you wanted. The more effective, and increasingly popular, strategy is to have the AI walk you through the writing process step by step. You tell the algorithm what your topic is and ask for a central claim, then have it give you an outline to argue this claim. Depending on the topic, you might even be able to have it write each paragraph the outline calls for, one by one, then rewrite them yourself to make them flow better.

The common fear among teachers is that AI is actually writing our essays for us, but this isn't what happens.

As an example, I told ChatGPT, "I have to write a 6-page close reading of the Iliad. Give me some options for very specific thesis statements." (Just about every first-year student at my university has to write a paper resembling this one.) Here is one of its suggestions: "The gods in the Iliad are not just capricious beings who interfere in human affairs for their own amusement but also mirror the moral dilemmas and conflicts that the mortals face." It also listed nine other ideas, any one of which I would have felt comfortable arguing. Already, a major chunk of the thinking had been done for me. As any former student knows, one of the main challenges of writing an essay is just thinking through the subject matter and coming up with a strong, debatable claim. With one snap of the fingers and almost zero brain activity, I suddenly had one.

My job was now reduced to defending this claim. But ChatGPT can help here too! I asked it to outline the paper for me, and it did so in detail, providing a five-paragraph structure and instructions on how to write each one. For instance, for "Body Paragraph 1: The Gods as Moral Arbiters," the program wrote: "Introduce the concept of the gods as moral arbiters in the Iliad. Provide examples of how the gods act as

judges of human behavior, punishing or rewarding individuals based on their actions. Analyze how the gods' judgments reflect the moral codes and values of ancient Greek society. Use specific passages from the text to support your analysis." All that was left now was for me to follow these instructions, and perhaps modify the structure a bit where I deemed the computer's reasoning flawed or lackluster.

The vital takeaway here is that it's simply impossible to catch students using this process, and that for them, writing is no longer much of an exercise in thinking. The problem isn't with a lack of AI-catching technology — even if we could definitively tell whether any given word was produced by ChatGPT, we still couldn't prevent cheating. The ideas on the paper can be computer-generated while the prose can be the student's own. No human or machine can read a paper like this and find the mark of artificial intelligence.

When we want students to learn how to think, assignments become essentially useless once AI gets involved.

There are two possible conclusions. One is that we should embrace the role AI is beginning to play in the writing process. “So what that essays are easier to write now? AI is here for good; students might as well learn to use it.” Of course, it’s important to learn to put together a cohesive piece of written work, so it makes perfect sense to embrace AI on assignments that are meant to teach this skill. In fact, it would be counterproductive not to: If a tool is useful and widely available, students should learn how to use it. But if this is our only takeaway, we neglect the essay’s value as a method for practicing critical thinking. When we want students to learn how to think — something I’m sure all educators consider a top priority — assignments become essentially useless once AI gets involved.

So rather than fully embracing AI as a writing assistant, the reasonable conclusion is that there needs to be a split between assignments on which using AI is encouraged and assignments on which using AI can’t possibly help. Colleges ought to prepare their students for the future, and AI literacy will certainly be important in ours. But AI isn’t everything. If education systems are to continue teaching students how to think, they need to move away from the take-home essay as a means of doing this, and move on to AI-proof assignments like oral exams, in-class writing, or some new style of schoolwork better suited to the world of artificial intelligence.

As it stands right now, our systems don’t accomplish either of those goals. We don’t fully lean into AI and teach how to best use it, and we don’t fully prohibit it to keep it from interfering with exercises in critical thinking. We’re at an awkward middle ground where nobody knows what to do, where very few people in power even understand that something is wrong. At any given time, I can look around my classroom and find multiple people doing homework with the help of ChatGPT. We’re not being forced to think anymore.

People worry that ChatGPT might “eventually” start rendering major institutions obsolete. It seems to me that it already has.

APPROVED - Superintendent Goals for the 2023-2024

Based on the state evaluation system (now in its 3rd year), I would recommend that we make the three goals in "bold" (out of the ten total areas) for the 2023-2024 school year based on comments from the performance review:

The 10 areas include the following: (Bold are the three specific goal area):

1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values
2. Ethics and Professional Norms
3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- 5. Community of Care and Support for Students**
- 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel**
- 7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff**
8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
9. Operations and Management
10. School Improvement

Regardless, Meyer stated that he would like to meet with each board member to discuss any specific goals they would like to share with him in conjunction with his performance evaluation recently. This has also been done before, along with meeting with members as needed in-person or on the phone.

One question that came up during the performance review/evaluation was the evaluation of teachers. While teachers receive a summative evaluation every three years, this does not mean that teachers are not observed annually. Principals are in the classrooms and can evaluate a teacher at any time based on concerns...which does happen sooner than three years for some teachers.

Teachers have an Individualized Career Development Plan they must complete each year that is tied to their professional growth and individual developmental needs for success as an educator. The summer conferences can play a part in these as well and serve as a catalyst for future learning or be a follow-up to the prior year's goals.

Along with this, we are also having a new process for classroom observations this year - WeClimb - that will allow the administration to monitor what students are doing in classrooms and share information with the teachers. This will allow the administration to see trends happening in the buildings, district, and individual classrooms - which connects with the evaluation procedures advocated by the state.

Other districts do similar actions as we do in our district, including the Individual Career Development Plans that are state mandated and can serve as part of their re-licensure. They also serve as an evaluation tool in many ways and can be adapted to assist teachers in meeting specific needs. The focus area, in my opinion of the ICDP, is to personalize learning needs for teachers, as not all teachers need the same professional learning annually. This is a goal agreed to by the teacher and the principal annually, reviewed during the year, and then evaluated at the end of the school year. We have modified this

process over the last two years to make it more effective and meaningful to teachers.

Additionally, in regard to professional learning, each teacher is granted Teacher Quality hours to learn. Typically, depending on funds from the state, each teacher is allowed between 8-10 hours to utilize for their own professional learning. Teachers must submit an overview of their proposed learning and send it to the superintendent. The superintendent then reviews it and sends it to the Teacher Quality Committee (which, following state guidance, has both teacher and administrative representation). The committee reviews the plans and lets the superintendent know of any questions, recommendations for approval, etc.

Information Items

Vehicle Update

Mark Guenther from Till's Garage stopped at school a couple of weeks ago to speak with Tim Roth and me about the Chevrolet Traverse that we approved at a board meeting earlier this previous school year. Till's has not been able to order one at this time, and now have been informed that Chevy is changing the model for 2024, the school discount has been reduced from \$4300 to \$2100 in the future, and the sticker price will also be increasing to some extent (\$2000+ likely). As a result, I have given Till's permission to switch from a Chevy Traverse LS to a 2023 Chevy Traverse LT. The cost difference will still increase from \$33,700 to \$37,300 but will include some more options. Ultimately, this is better than waiting for the 2024 model AND paying more money than this option and an increase in price. Tim and I both believe this is the right path forward, and we may have this before the school year starts (although licensing has taken up to 8+ weeks in the future).

Staff Professional Learning and Legislative Requirements

Professional Learning this upcoming school year, including August, will include the following (planning started in February/March 2023 to get dates secured with presenters, etc, along with communication with staff):

- Poverty Training - Jim Ott - August 17 - Teachers and Associates) - This will also include a component of mental health, along with his design of a program based on comments from staff at training on May 31 (Teachers and Associates)
- Mental Health Training - Mississippi Bend AEA - August 18 - Teachers and Associates - This will work in conjunction with the information from Jim Ott - At Bellevue State Park Lodge
- Child and Adult-Dependent Abuse Training - Online
 - All employees MUST be trained in child abuse and adult-dependent abuse training. Up to this time, only teachers were required to have this training once every three years (had been five years in the past). But, now we will be requiring all staff to get this training. This is online through the Iowa AEA system and DHS. We are scheduling this during a variety of times for staff from August 16-21 based on other requirements and attendance at meetings during this professional learning time prior to students returning to school on August 23.
- Legislative Updates (see the below information) - August 15 - Many of these will be shared with ALL staff members

Some other updates that will be presented to staff from the legislative session (in addition to, and/or in conjunction with multiple board policy updates) that are coming more into focus on required actions by district:

1. Student Handbook - Parents will be receiving an email in regard to the student handbook. In the past, this has been online for anyone in our community and beyond who wishes to review it. The legislature has now made a move to require the student handbook to be provided annually to parents of students including the discipline policy. It also requires the parent to acknowledge receipt of the handbook, either in writing or electronically (we are working on a process of this through our student management system).
2. Library Books Online - The library books in our district must be available for parents to review. This was done in the past by the district and have been available for the last 1-2 years on our website.
3. Review of Materials - The district will also be placing a link for parents who wish to review instructional materials, or challenge books or other instructional materials as a whole. The process is in board policy, but a link will be provided directly on our website in the future.
4. Surveys - There must be written parent consent before requiring a student to take part in any survey, analysis, activity, or evaluation that reveals personal information about the student or family and lists all of the

personal information to which this applies, including the student's or family's political affiliations, mental problems, sexual behavior/orientation/beliefs, illegal, antisocial, self-incriminating or demeaning behavior, critical appraisals of close family relationships, privileged relationships, religion or income. There is an exception for income when needed for eligibility in a program.

a. Additionally:

- i. Requires prior written notice to the parent to include detailed information about the survey, including the person who sponsors it, how the information it generates is used, and how such information is stored.
- ii. Requires prior written parent consent for an employee to answer any questions or share student information from the survey (except when developing or implementing an IEP).

**This will have an impact on student surveys in some areas of past questions, including the information on the Iowa Youth Survey - which is being debated in the state currently; Superintendents received information about three weeks ago on parent letters for this and the process, but some at the state level have also stated recently that this will not be allowed/given this school year or in the future.*

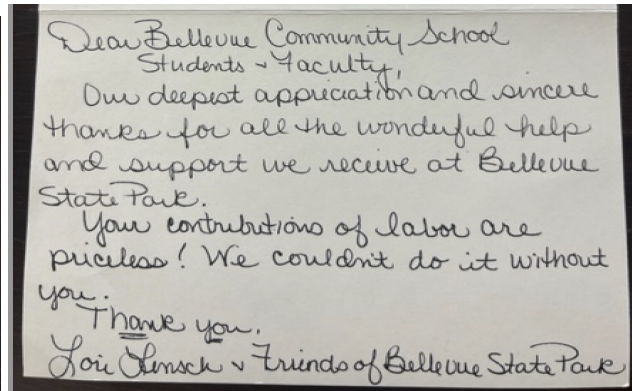
5. Age-Appropriate Materials - The state also has emphasized that all materials in school are age appropriate. We believe we do this already, but there may be questions from some across the state about what this term truly means. And, the Department of Education has stated they will NOT be giving a list of materials or much guidance on this for school districts.
6. Gender Identity - While there are several areas with this, as noted in board policies, the key is that we must contact parents if a student would like to use a different name or be identified by a different gender than their birth certificate states. We have always contacted parents in the past about this when it has occurred in our system as well.

Comments from Building Principals, Superintendent, and Board Members

We will plan on having a social for Penny at our next board meeting in August, starting at 6:15 to recognize Penny. I have spoken with her about this, and having her family members attend as well. I will make some basic arrangements for this event, and honoring her years of outstanding service to our school district in so many ways.

I will have a card for the Board to sign for Jennie Michels and her family as a result of the loss of her brother recently.

Lori Lensch from the community, and a leader in the "Friends of Bellevue State Park", recently sent me a card (below) and mentioned her positive thoughts about our students and staff at a Hometown Pride meeting that I serve as the leader of. She, and the group, are very appreciative of the school.



Adjourn

Next meeting on August 14, 2023 @ 6:30 PM.

Other Information to be aware of in Iowa (and our area):

The following article is something to be cognizant of as a board member, and for myself as an administrator (along with other school employees). We are a "public" entity, and there should not be "hidden" discussions in meetings. There are specific reasons to go into a closed session, but this has to be followed for that reason.

Judge: Iowa school board violated law by holding closed meeting to discuss public topics

Des Moines Register
6.30.23

*Superintendent Dan Peterson and the **Central DeWitt school board** violated Iowa law when they conducted a closed meeting more than a year and a half ago to discuss matters that should have been talked about in public, a district judge ruled last week.*

As a result, the district was ordered to provide a recording of the meeting to The Observer and pay the newspaper's court costs, Iowa District Court Judge Mark R. Lawson ruled.

"The scope of the meeting was breathtaking in contrast to its stated purpose," Lawson wrote. "In other words, this was not a minor or technical violation."

The ruling brings an end to a lawsuit The Observer's parent company, Sycamore Media, filed in April of last year that has cost the company more than \$18,500.

Peterson and the board told the public the purpose of its Feb. 7, 2022, meeting was to evaluate Peterson's performance. But, despite spending thousands of taxpayer dollars on legal expenses arguing it had closed the meeting legally, Lawson disagreed.

The judge determined the real purpose of the meeting was to discuss controversial topics "of great interest to the public" that had nothing to do with Peterson's performance.

"The audio recording and minutes conclusively demonstrate that, in the two-hour closed session, there is virtually no discussion of Peterson's performance," Lawson wrote.

In fact, the recording captures Peterson opening the meeting by telling the board he requested the meeting to talk about three things: gender and sexuality issues, instructional materials, and an administrative realignment.

Lawson also issued an injunction ordering the district to refrain from future violations of Iowa's government transparency laws.

Sycamore Media President Trevis Mayfield said The Observer intended to make the recording public, but after the district lost the case, Peterson posted a link to the recording on his blog, "Superintendent's Scoop," along with a message defending the district's actions Thursday afternoon. The district's website can be found online at cd-csd.org.

As Lawson noted in his ruling, the recording captures Peterson and the board discussing issues involving gender-neutral restrooms, legal protections for transgender students, controversial books, parental responsibility, teacher communication with parents, and various other topics.

In the ruling, Lawson also wrote that the "practice of calling a closed session for one purpose and then broadly discussing other topics may have been used before (by the district)."

Sycamore Media filed the lawsuit after its staff came to believe Peterson and the board were not being honest with the public and had closed the meeting under a false pretense.

Mayfield said the newspaper had hoped to resolve the issue without filing a lawsuit, but it became clear nothing else was going to work.

"We publicly pleaded with Peterson and the board to reconsider their position, but they wouldn't budge," Mayfield said. "At the same time, when it comes to our organization's stated mission of advocating for democracy and honest government, we weren't going to budge, either."

Randy Evans, executive director of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council, said it is an important ruling.

"Every taxpayer in the Central DeWitt School District should read Judge Lawson's decision in The Observer's lawsuit because he has rendered a stinging critique of the abuse of Iowa's open meetings law by the school board and Superintendent Peterson," he said.

The closed meeting came days after a controversy erupted in the district over Peterson's decision to pull specific books dealing with racial issues from classrooms after receiving a complaint.

"It was Dan Peterson himself who made us skeptical that the purpose of the meeting was what they said it was," Mayfield said. "In his haste to explain why he had pulled books out of the classroom, he posted comments on the school's website that all but confirmed the real purpose of the meeting was not to review his performance."

In his post, Peterson told the public the board and a group of administrators had talked openly about the books in question.

The recording of the meeting also captures participants discussing the need to release a public statement to get ahead of the negative public reaction that occurred in response to Peterson's removal of the two books.

Discussions about books and other such things need to be done in the open, Evans said.

"School boards risk eroding the public's trust and respect when they try to keep people in the community from hearing these difficult discussions," he said.

"By reading the complete decision, citizens will see Judge Lawson's important conclusion that 'the district's interpretation of its power to enter into a closed session would allow the exception of secrecy to swallow the rule of transparency,'" Evans said.

Peterson and Board President Bob Gannon did not respond to questions seeking comment about the case.

Sycamore Media is represented by Molly Parker and Sam Jones of Shuttlesworth & Ingersoll in Cedar Rapids.

Voucher Update - While I am not advocating for the content in this following opinion/article, it is information that is being asked and I am hearing from people in public schools and in the public in general.

Opinion: Reynolds administration must answer 3 key questions on Iowa voucher program

Des Moines Register
6.30.23

Iowa's new private-school voucher program has raised major concerns about taxpayer transparency and accountability – concerns that have only multiplied in the weeks since its launch earlier this month.

So far, Gov. Kim Reynolds and her administration have downplayed legitimate concerns and dodged fair and reasonable questions about the voucher program's implementation and execution.

Today is the final day of the program's voucher application period. It should also be the final day of the administration's delays and obfuscations. Iowans deserve answers – after all, it's their money and their public education system at stake.

Iowa taxpayers – not to mention elected policymakers like us with a responsibility to guard against waste, fraud, and abuse – have a right to know how hard-earned tax dollars are being used. They have the right to judge for themselves whether this voucher program is effectively serving the educational needs of Iowa children.

We've identified three key questions about the governor's voucher, or Education Savings Account (ESA) program. Until these questions are fully answered and understood, we cannot even begin to assess how vouchers will affect Iowa students, families, educators, and schools across Iowa:

How many Iowans applied for vouchers, how many were approved, and what resident school districts do they come from?

So far, the Iowa Department of Education has refused to release comprehensive and meaningful numbers on voucher applications. This information is vital for Iowans to understand the demand for private school vouchers, the cost to the state, and how it impacts school districts across Iowa.

How many approved applicants have actually been accepted into private schools? Getting a voucher is one thing. Getting accepted into a private school is another. The public deserves to know the number of applicants accepted into private schools; which private schools are (and aren't) taking voucher students; and how many students have been denied a spot and why. These details are essential to understanding if vouchers actually increase access and inclusivity at private schools or if they're just a taxpayer windfall for exclusive institutions.

How many students receiving vouchers are enrolling in a private school for the first time, and how many are just replacing personal tuition payments with taxpayer-funded vouchers?

This is a critically important question. Knowing the breakdown between new and returning private-school students will allow us to analyze the program's impact on lower-income families who already had their children enrolled in private schools versus those who are entering kindergarten or transitioning from public schools. It'll help answer the fundamental question: Does this program really provide new options to more Iowa kids? Or is it just a giveaway for families who have already chosen private education?

The program launch this month has also raised serious questions about the stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

We've learned that every applicant approved for a voucher will automatically have money deposited into an account controlled by the private, for-profit, out-of-state vendor hired by the Iowa Department of Education to run the program. That money will be handed over to the vendor regardless of whether the student has secured admission at a nonpublic school.

This may sound like an accounting technicality. It's not – it's a huge concern for taxpayer transparency and accountability.

As the law is currently written, voucher money will be stashed "off the books" in out-of-state bank accounts until students either get into a private school; graduate from a public high school; or turn 20 years old.

Imagine this scenario: An incoming kindergartner is approved for a voucher, but is unable to find an available private school – perhaps because they live in a rural area or have a special need that private schools refuse to serve.

Even without a private school to attend, this kindergartener would have thousands of dollars deposited into an out-of-state bank account under the control of a private company every year for up to 13 years. Multiply that by thousands of Iowa kids, and we're talking millions of dollars in taxpayer money stashed off the books and unavailable to fund public schools, healthcare services, roads and bridges, and more.

This leads us to Odyssey, the private, for-profit company managing Iowa's voucher program. Taxpayers need clarity on what Odyssey is allowed to do with our money banked in their private accounts.

Can Odyssey invest these funds and pocket the interest? If so, are Iowans OK with that? Are private investments generating private profits an acceptable use for public money? And what happens if Odyssey invests taxpayer money and those investments go south?

These are serious questions, and they deserve serious answers. Now. Transparency and accountability are essential to successful public programs and

strong democratic governance. We urge Reynolds to address these questions with clear, timely answers.

Please join us in holding the governor accountable to the people of Iowa and ensuring that billions in taxpayer dollars are not directed to serve the few rather than the many. Together, we can protect our educational system and ensure the responsible use of public funds

Sen. Herman Quirnbach, D-Ames, serves as ranking member on the Senate Education Committee. Sen. Cindy Winckler, D-Davenport, serves as ranking member on the Senate Education Appropriations Subcommittee.