

WEM School Board Work Session April 8, 2021

The special meeting of the Board of Education of the Waterville-Elysian-Morristown School District was called to order at 6:01 pm on Thursday, April 8, 2021, by Chairperson Gary Micheal.

Board members in attendance were Gary Michael, Travis Bowman, Jeff Stangler, June Rezac, and Jon Velishek (left meeting at 7:05 pm). Also present were Superintendent Joel Whitehurst, Margaret Jewison, Principals Dr. Jennifer Wilson, and Bobbie Jo Bastian.

Motion by Jeff Stangler, seconded by Travis Bowman to approve the agenda as presented. Roll call vote: Unanimous. Motion Carried.

Letter of resignation from Stacy Gustafson, Mathematics teacher, Effective June 2, 2021. Motion to accept the letter of resignation by Travis Bowman, seconded by Gary Michael. Roll call vote: Unanimous. Motion Carried.

Letter of resignation from Rebecca Kelley, Special Education Teacher, Effective June 2, 2021. Motion to accept the letter of resignation by Jeff Stangler, seconded by June Rezac. Roll call vote: Unanimous. Motion Carried.

Approve New Hires:

- A. Tauston Lamont, Heavy Duty Bus Mechanic/Transportation Supervisor, \$59,000 Annually, \$60,000 Annually when School Bus Driver License is attained.
- B. Approve Sonja Fiedler, Secondary Mathematics Teacher-BA/BS Step 2, \$33,744
- C. Max Haakonson, Special Education Teacher-BS/Step 9, \$42,409

Discussion: Rezac inquired if Fiedler & Haakonson were hired to replace staff whose resignations had just been approved. Superintendent Whitehurst confirmed.

Motion to approve all new hires by June Rezac, seconded by Jeff Stangler. Roll call vote: Unanimous. Motion Carried.

Approve FFA Land Rental Bid (8 ½ acres) to Jerry Marzahn for \$2,400. Motion to accept the bid made by Gary Michael and seconded by Jeff Stangler. Discussion: Members wondered how much of this parcel is tillable and if it was only bid submitted. Superintendent Whitehurst confirmed acreage and only bid. Roll call vote: Unanimous. Motion Carried.

Discussion regarding increasing student enrollment generated the following suggestions and comments:

1. WEM Website

- Verified if the WEM website is mobile-enabled. People accessing can utilize with their mobile devices.
- Verified if the WEM website is utilizing search engine optimization (SEO). SEOs use keywords and algorithms to draw website traffic to WEM's site.
- Registered via local Google
- Creating a page specifically for the preschool program

Discussion regarding increasing student enrollment continued:

Website Continued:

- Dan Lemcke advised we use RschoolToday for our website platform. This vendor has stated that they will be coming up with a new format that Lemcke hopes will allow us to complete updates and showcase certain aspects of the district more easily. He also stated that the district just migrated to a new website in the summer of 2020 and that he would not recommend migrating to a different platform so soon.
- Suggestion to create pages to highlight programs like Ag program, Arts programs, WoodTech program, etc.

2. Utilizing Video

- Creating a “day in the life” of a student at WEM
- Video of new facilities.
- Bowman suggested a drone video of the school tour.
 - a. Highlight a couple of classrooms with students during this video.
- Student involvement in video production was suggested.
- Bowman suggested some ‘morale’ boosting videos such as “I love my teacher” to bring a positive outlook after the past year of the pandemic.

3. Bussing

- Stangler emphasized the need to continue progress on opening up bussing to other districts for students who wish to enroll at WEM.
- Bowman inquired about a pickup point in Madison Lake and further expansion there.
- Rezac agreed that this is a part of WEM’s strategic plan, and we should continue to look for ways to expand our pick-up points available in other districts.
- Whitehurst advised expansion to a pick-up point, a daycare, in Warsaw has occurred.

4. Branding

- Michael suggested using our small class size as a promotional tool.
- WEM Logo
 - a. Is it consistent?
 - b. Out of date? Need updating?
 - c. Whitehurst advised that our current logo is the most utilized.



Curriculum

- Rezac asked the administration how our curriculum compares to other districts. Specifically, wondering whether we are offering early coding for small learners through the high school level. These courses would help students pursuing software development or IT positions.
 - a. Bastian advised that the elementary is working with young learners with early coding skills.
 - b. Wilson advised that she echos Principal Bastian that the fundamental coding skills are offered. Not as an individual class but more as an overlap with other courses

students are taking. Individual courses on the topic would require an overhaul of equipment and staffing to allow these opportunities to be available to students.

Other

- Whitehurst suggested featured articles or videos of the new facility, including young learners, daycare, and wrap-around services. He felt these were key areas we should promote.
- Stangler also emphasized the need to feature wrap-around services.
- Having a booth at Le Sueur, Rice, & Waseca County Fair
- Conducting a satisfaction survey and promoting the positives discovered in the study.
- Michael inquired if the “Baby Bucs” program was still active. Whitehurst advised due to the pandemic; the program had been shelved. The program involved home visits for families with infants in the district. Michael encouraged administrators to cue the program back up when timing allowed.
- Michael inquired if the administration contacts realtors about new families moving into the district. Whitehurst advised if they are aware of a new family coming in, they contact realtors at that time. He also informed the board that affordable housing and new housing are an issue throughout the WEM district.
- Find ways to advertise in Madison Lake, perhaps a Paddlefish Days parade presence.
- Whitehurst will be attending a workshop on increasing enrollment through the MN Association of School Administration.

Update regarding potential financial adjustments:

Superintendent Whitehurst and Margaret Jewison presented insight into two possible budgetary adjustments per board request: Building and Grounds and Food Service. The proposed fiscal decrease to building and grounds total equaled \$55,000. Jewison presented the building and grounds budget areas that would be affected custodial supplies, grounds repairs and maintenance, building repairs and maintenance.

Jewison did not recommend a proposed budgetary reduction to Food Service. Jewison presented Food Service fund balances spanning from 2009 to 2021, a by grade breakdown of how many students have been partaking in our school breakfast & lunches, a meals per staff hour served, and a comparison with other districts.

Discussion: Michael asked what portion of the foodservice information presented included the Food Service Supervisor. Jewison stated that she did not include the Food Service Supervisor in the breakdown because it is a shared position.

Bowman advised that with greater square footage, it does not seem feasible to make cuts in the building and grounds budget at this time. Stangler and Rezac added that they felt it would send the wrong message to stakeholders for a budget decrease to occur under these categories.

Whitehurst advised that we would see an initial reduction in these areas due to having newly renovated facilities.

Whitehurst also reviewed the Esser II and Esser III funds. These are federal funds given to the state and then dispersed to school districts. Whitehurst advised that Esser II and Esser III funds are one-time. They can not be budgeted out annually. The funds do give some budgetary breathing room. Esser II funds would need to be spent by September 30, 2023, and Esser III funds would need to be finished by September 30, 2024. He also stated that he and Jewison attended a webinar about the Esser III funds and were hopefully optimistic about the amount of Esser III funds the district would be receiving and how the funds could be used. He also confirmed that we had received the Esser II funds. He also stated that the addition of these funds should help us to achieve the goal of stretching the budget out to 2025 when the operating referendum expires.

Whitehurst also updated the members on the budget talks' status at the state level. There had not been any increases in the budget at the state level as of meeting time. He and other superintendents had set up virtual meetings to discuss this topic with area legislators coming up later in the month.

Jewison also stated that the category listed for building and maintenance is an accounting code utilized when we use vendors (i.e., snow removal) to do the work and not when we use the district's personnel.

Following discussion, the board recommended that the administration not cut the Building and Grounds budget.

Michael and Stangler expressed their dissatisfaction that the budget reduction portion regarding changes to the fifth grade (\$55,700) did not pass. {See amended budgetary vote from WEM School Board meeting minutes of March 22, 2021} Michael felt we should review the possibility of the change again. With the new information regarding Esser funds, this budgetary change will not be readdressed and will stand as voted, March 22, 2021.

Michael also communicated that he felt the board should have a complete consensus when making these budgetary decisions.

Upon hearing no further discussion, June Rezac motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:17 pm, seconded by Jeff Stangler. Roll call vote: Unanimous. Motion Carried.

Attest June A. Rezac