

BOARD NOTES  
December 14, 2020

The regular meeting of the School Board was held Monday, December 14, 2020, at New Prairie High School Auditorium with Mr. Phil King, Mr. Al Williamson, Mr. Dale Groves, Mr. Rich Shail and Mr. Jason DeMeyer present. Dr. Paul White, Superintendent, was also present.

Mr. Phil King, Board President, reviewed guidelines for speaking on agenda items.

There was a motion by Mr. Shail to adopt the agenda, seconded by Mr. Williamson and approved 5-0.

**CONSENT ITEMS**

The Board approved the Consent Items as follows:

- (A) Minutes –November 23, 2020
- (B) Financial Reports
- (C) Claims
- (D) Payroll
- (E) Personnel Report as follows:

**CERTIFIED**

- Leaves/Resignations/Retirements
  1. Daniel Weinberg – Resignation as NPMS Instrumental Music Instructor effective December 18, 2020
  2. Thom Smith – FMLA Leave as NPHS Health/PE Teacher beginning 12/1/2020 through 2/26/2021
  3. Jenny Hite – Medical Leave as NPMS 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Science Teacher beginning 12/11/2020 through 12/18/2020
- Employment
- Employment – Extra-Curricular
- Adjustments
  1. \$1,000 Pip Grant Stipends to be awarded to the following Implementers on 12/28/2020
    - Janelle Hembree
    - Rachel Ralston
    - Margaret Stepniewski
    - Elizabeth Schmitt
    - Tina Trojanowski
    - Mary Ward
    - Sara Serry
    - Julie Kirkham
    - Amy Wolfe
    - Jennifer Breitzka
    - Kortney Brennan
    - Margaret Buss
    - Everett Forrester
    - Mark Glassley
    - Gale Gonder
    - Alexandria Homann
    - James Matz
    - Christy Pietrzak
    - Jessica Sinka

- Angela Smith
  - Patrick Teykl
  - Erin White
  - Scott Soss
  - Adam Branch
  - Jeanne Romstadt
2. \$500 Pip Grant Stipends to be awarded to the following Implementers on 12/18/2020
    - Maria Sobeki
    - Shawn Sterling
  3. \$1,000 Pip Grant Stipends to be awarded to the following Implementation Team on 12/18/2020
    - Carrie Cannon
    - Katie Kester
    - Rhonda Myers
    - Becky Bartlett
    - Tara Bush
    - Tim Scott
    - Justin Heinold
    - Tim Flanagan
    - Tia Kolasa
    - Allison Middlebrook
    - Sara Harmon
    - Tara Walden
    - Heidi Schellinger
    - Megan Papp
    - Angela Ruby

**CLASSIFIED**

- Leaves/Resignations/Retirement
  1. Angela Lenig – FMLA Leave as Health Aide at Prairie View Elementary School beginning 11/9/2020 through 1/4/2021
  2. Melissa Krycka – FMLA Leave as Administrative Assistant for the Assistant Superintendent beginning 12/21/2020 through 1/5/2021
  3. Pam Cosman – FMLA Leave as NPUSC Bus Driver beginning 11/10/2020 through 12/18/2020
  4. Cathy Henning – Resignation as Olive Twp Elementary Instructional Assistant effective 12/14/2020
- Employment
  1. Susan Aikman – Administrative Assistant to the Nutritional Services Director beginning 12/14/2020
  2. Alicia Deutscher – NPUSC Nutritional Services Floater start date pending criminal background check results
- Employment – Extra-Curricular
  1. Angela Reffo – Olive Twp. Elementary School 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Girls Basketball Coach pending criminal background check results
- Adjustments
  1. Jaime Willis, NPUSC Bus Driver, route change from a single HS/MS route to a double OES/RPES Bus 71 route beginning 12/7/2020
  2. Julie Abbott – Position change from Nutritional Services Worker at Prairie View Elementary to Nutritional Services Crew Leader at Prairie View Elementary beginning 12/7/2020

## REPORTS

- Dr. White reviewed the most recent survey data recently sent to 7 different disaggregated groups (parents/staff) and shared results regarding the attendance plan. The first question on the survey was centered around the attendance plan tied to the Laporte County color metric for the 1<sup>st</sup> semester. The results showed that there is support 2 to 1 for the current attendance plan going into the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester. Questions 2 and 3 are built off of question 1 focusing on winter and post-holiday gatherings. It was found that the majority voted for sticking with the 50% hybrid attendance plan on Question 3 instead of declaring e-learning but it was very close. Question 4 dealt with the State Dept. of Health suggesting that school districts look at full attendance when a county is orange. The majority of all 7 disaggregated groups said “no” to full attendance on orange in state metric. Question 5 asked if there is support for NPUSC calling eLearning for a school when approximately 8 to 10 student body positive for COVID occur, with a majority responding “yes”. Question 6 asked about improved learning and accountability with eLearning. There was an overwhelming approval that “yes it has improved”. The survey data helped inform the conversation regarding 2<sup>nd</sup> semester. Dr. White then read the current COVID statistics within the schools.
- Dr. White touched on grades at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> semester. Interestingly the elementary school’s “F’s” have the same percentages as in past regular years. Secondary schools have seen “F’s” doubled.
- Dr. White added that the CDC guidelines for quarantine could be reduced from 14 days to 10 or 7 days. The LP County Health Department suggests staying with the 14 days for now.
- Dr. White ended by addressing those planning to address the board both for and against more attendance during the pandemic. To teachers in the audience he defended the board and administration for steps that have been taken to mitigate COVID risk for staff. Dr. White cited both 50% Attendance and the amount of money spent on cleaning supplies/PPE as examples that the school district does care and to say it does not care about the health of staff is not accurate. He also addressed anyone in the audience frustrated about partial attendance and argued that COVID does not impact everyone the same and it can be very intense for some people, so he urged those frustrated with partial attendance to understand the concern some have about the virus.

## ACTION ITEMS

- (A) The Board set the Board Organizational Meeting for January 4, 2021
- (B) The Board approved the School Board Meeting Schedule for 2021
- (C) The Board approved the Resolution to Transfer Amounts from Education Fund to the Operations Fund
- (D) The Board approved the Transportation Director Contract for 2020-2021
- (E) The Board approved and adopted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading of Board Policies 4210 & 4310
- (F) The Board accepted the Following Donations:
  - NPMS received an anonymous donation of \$500 in Aldi Gift Cards (\$50 each) to be distributed to families in need
  - NPUSC HOSA received a donation of \$2025 to purchase CPR/AED training equipment from the Healthcare Foundation of LaPorte
  - Prairie View Elementary Library received a donation of a book named “Bird Count” written by Susan Edwards Richmond from the Elkhart Audubon Society

## DISCUSSION ITEMS

- (A) NPUSC attendance plan for 2<sup>nd</sup> semester
  - Mrs. Cartwright, NPMS teacher, read a letter on behalf of Susan French, NPMS & HS teacher. Mrs. French wrote that she feels teachers and staff need to be commended for their work during this pandemic. Every teacher is working very

hard both in and out of the classroom. They truly work very hard because they love their work and students. Mrs. French stated that she lives with and cares for her 81-yr. old mother and is distancing from her husband because they are both essential workers to protect her mother. She stated that the governor of Indiana said that everyone should be living as if we are living in a red zone. She writes today to ask that the Board consider eLearning semester 2 to control the spread and stay safe.

- Mrs. Jen Smith, NPMS Teacher, spoke on behalf of Miss. Jordan Stauss, NPMS Teacher. Miss Stauss wrote that she is proud to be a teacher and coach at New Prairie, however, she has concerns necessary to voice. She stated that as teachers, we look out for our students, however, who looks out for us? It is disheartening to hear bashing of teachers from members of the community when months ago all we heard was praise for our efforts. Now, even though she feels like she is constantly spinning her wheels, we are told to get off our behinds and do better. She considers herself to be very organized and one who prides herself on developing rigorous lessons; switching between hybrid and virtual is putting a strain on planning. The constant unknown of the schedule from week to week is wearing her down. The burn out rate of teachers in the state is alarming. She is worried about her peers. As a younger teacher she would probably recover from COVID but is worried about the older teachers who cannot afford to get sick. She went on that the community is not taking the steps to slow the spread with many of the students taking vacations. She feels that what we are doing is not working. Teachers have voiced their opinions but it has fallen on deaf ears. She urges that we start the 2021 semester virtually for at least two weeks to allow for student quarantine after the holiday season.
- Mrs. Dena True, NPMS Teacher for 22 years, parent of 4 students who have graduated and currently attend NPUSC and a community member spoke. She stated that due to the pandemic she and her family experienced many losses. She has had to be both teacher to her students as well as to her children. There are so many frustrations because of the pandemic but mostly from being a teacher. She stated that teachers are invited to conversations with administration behind closed doors but concerns are not being heard. She is consistently hearing students are falling behind and failing. But what are they failing and falling behind in since the world seems to be in the same situation. She went on that as a parent it would be easier to have my kids in school and as a teacher it would be advantageous to have my students in school to effectively teach and help them, however, the benefits to having kids in school does not outweigh the need to keep our teachers and staff healthy. She asked that the Board please consider teaching our students virtually for at least 2 weeks following the winter break.
- Mrs. Kristina Pentelow, NPMS teacher, stated she is here tonight to urge the Board to begin the next semester virtually for two weeks following Christmas Break. She stated that her concern is she does not know what precautions people are making during break. If we come back and there is a spike we will ultimately have to go virtual. She finished by stating that we could easily avoid this possibility by going virtual for the first two weeks following break.
- Mr. Pietrzak spoke that he is the last person to complain about a teacher in this climate as they should be commended for all their hard work. He stated that what he is hearing from the teachers is the concern following the holidays and the two-week virtual learning "buffer period". He stated that he could not agree more. He suggested that after the two weeks virtual we come back slowly. He

asked if anyone considered rolling Fridays which could get us back to 50% instead of 40% that we have been doing. He thanked the Board stating that he feels that the Board is doing the best they can and thanked the teachers for all their hard work.

- Mr. Alexander, NPMS Teacher, stated that he feels blessed to be part of this community and staff. He knows how much the students want to be back in school as do the teachers but he agrees with the “buffer period” two week virtual idea and that it would be the best way to start back. He thanked the Board again for their dedication to students and staff.
- Mr. King thanked everyone for sharing their opinions tonight. Hopefully by Thursday there will be a plan for Dr. White to send out to everyone.

### **BOARD COMMENTS**

- Mr. King announced that this evening we are honoring Mr. Rich Shail for 20 years as a member of the Board of Trustees with 16 years serving as Board President. This is also Mr. Shail's final regular meeting as a Board member. Mr. Shail was elected in 1999 taking his seat in January 2000. Mr. King has found that Mr. Shail's dedication is second to none.
- Mr. Williamson stated that he has served with Rich since 2002. There are no words to express his respect for Rich and what he has taught him. He stated he has leaned on Rich for so many things. This corporation would not be what it is if it wasn't for Rich's leadership and guidance.
- Mr. Groves stated that “thank you” is not enough. Rich has done a lot for this corporation. He went on that every decision Rich has made put kids first of which he thanks him. Rich certainly deserves a break. He thanked Rich again and congratulated him.
- Mr. DeMeyer said that he is grateful that he has had the last 2 years to serve with Rich and stated that he has been honored. He thanked Rich for all he has done for New Prairie.
- Mr. Bernie Baltus stated that the Board when Rich came on was in disarray. Rich had the steadying force to bring them together. He went on to explain that Rich had the ability to handle controversial situations better than anyone he has ever met and applauds him for that. Rich led everyone in the correct direction. Mr. Baltus said that it was a pleasure to work with Rich and thanked him for his service.
- Mr. Jim Dermody stated how nice it is to see his old colleagues. He congratulated Rich for his Outstanding Boardmanship Award which is a great honor and well deserved. He described Rich as a professional with integrity and honor. He stated that Rich has had a great team of which he has been the anchor and mainstay. Mr. Dermody stated that Rich should walk away satisfied with all that he has done.
- Dr. Phil Bender announced his pleasure at being present to recognize such a wonderful individual. He explained that Rich was on the Board when he was hired. He stated that everything that was said this evening is the absolute truth. It is true that Rich was the calming force in any situation that would arise. Dr. Bender stated that Rich was one of the best listeners that he had come across in his career. Rich's philosophy has always been that kids come first. Seeing Rich again tonight along with Al, Dale and Phil, has been a great warm feeling to be with you all again tonight. He went on about the wonderful passion the Board brought to this community. He stated to everyone here tonight, to keep the passion alive and let what is best for kids be the driving force in every decision you make. He thanked Rich for his leadership and wished him good luck!
- Mr. Bill Romstadt wished Rich congratulations on his 20 years of service to our community and our school. He stated that it was a pleasure serving with Rich during his tenure. Mr. Romstadt said that one of his takeaways about Rich is that he valued differences in others. Rich made people feel valued for their input. Rich was a great listener which is a form of respect. He stated that he is grateful to have served with Rich. He wished Rich and his family a very blessed and Merry Christmas.
- Mr. King presented a gift of appreciation to Mr. Shail from the Superintendent and the Board.

- Mr. Shail stated that he is humbled and taken back by all the kind words he heard this evening. He said that he got on the Board on a dare by Jim Dermody. Mr. Shail stated he served under 5 Superintendents. It has been a wonderful journey here at New Prairie. Mr. Shail wished to share the accolades with everyone tonight. He stated that it takes everyone here to make New Prairie great. He stated that he will help out our corporation in anyway he can. He wished everyone a Merry Christmas and thanked everyone for putting up with him for 20 years.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Shail made the motion to adjourn the meeting.