

Tri-County Area School District

409 S. West Street
Plainfield, WI 54966-9608
(715) 335-6366

Elementary Fax (715) 335-6364
High School Fax (715) 335-6322

Middle School Fax (715) 335-6339
Administration Office Fax (715) 335-6365

www.tricounty.k12.wi.us

Minutes from Special School Board Meeting Held October 17, 2016

Jeff Hopkins, Vice-President called the meeting to order at 6:01pm in the High School Library

School Board Members present were: Jeff Hopkins, Cindy Baumgartner, Jim Cesar, Wayne Cummings, Jim Knutson, Susan Lederer and Jerry Knutson. Mark Bacon and Peggy Buckholt were absent. A quorum was declared. Also present were Lara Craft, Jen Wilkinson, Doreen Kruger, Annette Carroll, Gary Knuth, Kathy Knutson, Martha Becher, Jessica Rettler, Lisa Ertl, Anthony Marinack, Shawn Jepson, Nicholas Marti and Amy Hopkins.

The "Pledge of Allegiance" was recited. Wayne Cummings made a motion, Jim Cesar seconded and carried on a voice vote to adopt the Agenda.

Jeff stated that it was discussed at the last meeting to create a survey in regards to the proposed changes to the grading system and co-curricular policies. Tony handed out copies of both policies, a grading scale comparison of surrounding schools and a sample survey drafted by Nicholas Marti, Shawn Jepson and himself. The survey was to be used as a starting point to develop the final product to be distributed to parents, staff, students and community members. There was time given for everyone to read over the survey.

Tony said the goal of the survey is just to gather data and opinions regarding the possible changes being looked at for the two policies (370.00AR and 345.01AR) in question. The survey would be sent out electronically so that the data would be easier to organize. It was discussed that some people may not have access electronically and that they should have access to a paper copy to complete. It was also discussed to have some way to identify who was completing the survey such as a staff member, student or parent. There will be an option added in both the electronic and paper surveys so that the different groups are distinguished. Annette wondered if we should break in down for students by grade level. Nick added that the survey could be adjusted or changed in any way the Board preferred. Wayne Cummings suggested having a comment box after each question to give room for people to add further comments on each item. Everyone seemed to like this idea and it will be added to the survey. A question was brought up about whether the survey would be anonymous or not. Nick wasn't sure if there would be a way to do that electronically or not. Lara suggested using a program such as Survey Monkey. Jen Wilkinson thought that parents would not complete the survey if it was not anonymous. Doreen Kruger thought there was a way to make it anonymous if done through Google. Nick is going to look into that and make sure it could be done since this was a big concern. It will also be added as a statement at the beginning of the survey so people know it is anonymous.

Jerry Knutson asked why EE, Environmental Education, was on the list of activities under the third survey question if it was a class for a grade. It was discussed that there was quite a bit of school time missed with this program because of the trips to the school forest during school hours. Nick said he had talked to Joe Raboin, the teacher for EE, and he was fine with this being added on the list for the survey. Nick also mentioned that Joe, the advisor for National Honor Society, was fine with this being on the list as well. Jerry suggested breaking up the list into two categories: Educational and Fun Activities. It was mentioned that this was just a survey to gather information and further discussion could take place on the specific activities after the survey results were gathered. Lisa Ertl also brought up the fact that jazz band and pep band were used in the grading process as extra credit for students. Annette Carroll suggested adding Yearbook to the list of activities.

Jim Knutson inquired about how everything would look right now with current students if the possible policy changes were in effect. Nick said he did not have that information at that time.

Jim Cesar asked if the way the survey was written was implying that these were changes the School Board would be making and they were asking for opinions. Jim Knutson thought we should add a disclaimer on the survey saying that the Board would be using the survey results as input toward any decisions being made regarding the two policies. Everyone seemed to agree that something on this line needed to be added to the first part of the survey.

Doreen Kruger would like to see a third grading scale option (65%) added to question one of the survey. She stated she would have an easier time going to 65% versus the 60% option and Gary Knuth was in agreement. Everyone seemed to like the idea of adding the third option to this question. Cindy Baumgartner proposed a question as to if we knew any information on the surrounding schools at the 60% grading scale and their policies on F's and Co-Curriculars. Nick said he did not have that information but could gather some of that from our conference at his next meeting. Regarding the first survey question, Annette thought that the percentages should be taken out of the first few statements as she thinks it will sway people to vote a certain way. It was discussed to attach the handout of the Grading Scale comparisons so that people would have the whole picture. Nick is going to check and see if this can be added or attached to the survey. Jim C. would like the word proposed taken out of the second paragraph in question one. Jen brought up the paper option again and Nick suggested we could offer resources available at school too for people to take the survey electronically. Lisa Ertl agreed we need a paper option. Tony suggested adding it the November Newsletter that will be processed on November 4th. The group thought the newsletter would be the best solution to offering a paper copy to parents who would prefer that method.

Moving on to question two of the survey, Wayne asked Nick to clarify academic probation and how the policy on co-curriculars worked. Nick said that if students are on Academic Probation they can practice but not compete and at the time of progress reports they can gain back their eligibility to compete. Jim Cesar would like to remove the word minimum in the first paragraph where it states "minimum allowed standards" as defined by the WIAA. Jen thinks that academics should be a priority and that students need a balance between extra-curriculars and school work. Gary would like to see a third option added to question two: 0-1 F's you have full participation status, 2 F's you cannot practice or compete for the remainder of the quarter. This would eliminate any probation period. He thinks this will give some students the incentive to stretch their abilities and take a harder class that they might be in fear of not passing. He doesn't want to take any opportunities away from students because they are afraid of losing their status for co-curricular participation. Doreen used an example of a previous student, and athlete, that she said went outside of her comfort zone and took an advanced computer class when it wasn't necessarily her strong suit. She says some students need that 1 F as to not kick them out of the co-curriculars if they want to try a different class they aren't sure of.

Annette brought back up the 60% grading scale and stated that moving to this scale doesn't necessarily mean more student success. She thinks teachers will adjust how they run their classes and change how they weight homework

and tests. Some teachers may not make retakes an option, take away use of notes on a test or eliminate extra credit options. Jen says we need to look at post graduation numbers and success rates. Lara wondered if we were successful at the 70% grading scale compared to other schools and we would need to look at testing scores and the school report card. It was brought up as to what was more important to colleges-ACT scores or grade point average. Discussion was made for both options being most important or that it was a combination together. Jen also added that grade point might be more important for potential employment after graduation for those not going on to college. Employers might like to see the grade point to make their hiring decisions and that it could sway who they choose for a job. Lara thought that colleges might take a deeper look at an applicant's background if they had a lower grade point but a high ACT score. Jen asked if a college was aware of our grading scale. The thought on that was that they do not know unless you specify the information in your application. Jen thinks we need to have faith in our students that they will rise to meet the new standards if changes are made to the policies.

Jerry Knutson addressed Annette and asked why changing to the 60% grading scale would change their method of grading. Annette talked about the importance of still getting the same knowledge base to move on and be ready for the classes going forward. You still need a certain level of knowledge in a subject to pass a class so she would adjust her grading to make sure the same level is attained. Jim Cesar thought changing the grading scale would help both the lower and higher end of the students but if we lower the grading scale and the teachers change the way they grade we are essentially not doing anything. He thinks college bound students will do fine either way and will adjust but changes might help the struggling students graduate. Annette stated again that if you lower the grading scale and as a teacher do not make adjustments that students don't learn enough to move to the next level. They miss out on some of the fundamentals. It was asked and she explained that you can suggest that a student retake a course but you cannot make them. It is a parental decision. Doreen added that it is important to have that base of knowledge as some classes go hand in hand and students need information to be successful in other courses. She said employers want people with more knowledge and understanding of basic elements to do the job. Nick said it is up to the teachers how they want to weight grades for homework, tests and quizzes. Jerry mentioned making the block classes mandatory based on your percentage. Annette said again that you can suggest it but it is the decision of the parents at this time.

Jim K. referred to question two of the survey and wondered if it is right to eliminate eligibility just because a student might not be strong in one area. All teachers arrive at the final grades differently but in the end what the student actually learns is important. The kids need to get the concepts. He asked if it is just the students or do we need help with curriculum or do teachers need guidance to help the students do better. Lisa Ertl asked if students do their homework should they be able to pass the class. Teachers in attendance agreed that this should be possible. Lisa commented that students getting F's are just not putting in the time as there should be plenty of options to pass a class. She stated that academics should come first and that we have the help available out there. The failing grades are not just based on student abilities but on students who just are not engaged or don't care. Annette used an example of the adjustment period from Middle School to High School and that it takes more time for some kids to make that adjustment. We can't just cast aside kids that need more time to adjust and get organized. Jim C. worried that if we make the policies more stringent then we are closing doors for some students and they will become even less engaged. Kathy Knutson suggested that students on probation (practice only) could be allowed to practice certain nights and would have to attend the after school program certain nights to get the extra help to get grades up. Jessica Rettler stated that currently all coaches do not monitor grades for students on probation but she thought this was a good suggestion. Nick said this option of mandatory participation in the after school program could be added to the policy and monitored if that is how the Board wanted the policy to read. Regarding question two, they want to add the third option that Gary suggested earlier and that would become letter B and the current option B would move to letter C. It was also agreed to take out of question two the line "If the grading scale is changed to include a lowest passing grade of 60%, as outlined in the prior question."

Taking a look at question three, Doreen stated that she thought there was a policy in place that said you cannot use academics for court decisions. They used to have to monitor this but the policy was changed. Nick said that most schools in our conference do have academic checks for court eligibility but it is checked based on their current status around the time of the event taking place and not based on progress reports or quarter grades. If policy changed the office would check eligibility and the students name would not be allowed on the ballot if ineligible at that time. Wayne would like to see only items on this list that do not affect your grade for a class. Lisa Ertl agreed using jazz band and pep band again as an example. Jeff Hopkins stated that he would like to see the curriculum or syllabus for these graded items on the list to see how these items correlate to your grade. Lara suggested that requirements that fall outside the normal school day that are currently affecting your grade be removed as some kids just can't attend certain functions outside the normal school day. This should not have an effect on their grade. Gary said that jazz band and pep band are figured in as extra credit and should remain on the list. Wayne thought there should be two columns of activities listed in question three, ones that have ties to your grade be listed separate. It was brought up that this is just a survey and items can be discussed further after the results are done.

Jim K. brought up again that it feels like we are penalizing kids. Annette said that we shouldn't be pulling students out to participate in extra-curriculars if they are already struggling with a class or failing something. Nick suggested they could define what they are allowed out for. An example was used that you could be in FFA but may not be eligible for some of the FFA Fieldtrips that take you out of school if your grades are not eligible based on the policy in place. Jim C. proposed that we get the survey results and go from there. Lara stated that School to Work should be added to the list. She wondered why students would be allowed to leave for a job if failing a core class. They could attend the Alt Ed or after school program if necessary.

Lisa Ertl asked if she should complete the survey as a staff or parent since she is both. It was thought that she could just do the survey twice and complete it both ways.

Tony wanted to discuss the timeline of events regarding the survey. Nick will make the suggested changes to the survey. The updated survey will be distributed at the Board meeting on October 25th, which is next Tuesday. The updated survey will be discussed and approved at that time. If approved, it could go out in the November Newsletter and distributed electronically. A deadline would need to be set as a cutoff for completed surveys. At the October 25th board meeting the date for the next Special Board meeting will be set to go over the survey results.

Adjourned at 7:50 pm
Recorded by: Amy Hopkins

Submitted By:

Peggy Buckholt, Clerk