

Dist. 20 board considers 'jump start' preschool program

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 15 April 2010 16:37 - Last Updated Thursday, 15 April 2010 16:40



Feasibility to be explored for summer start.

What school officials are calling a “jump start” school-based preschool could be offered as early as this summer.

At their meeting Monday night, District 20 school board members gave the administration the thumbs up to examine the feasibility of implementing such a program.

Because the district didn't receive a Nebraska Department of Education grant officials had applied for, the cost of preschool at this time would be paid by the district.

If offered this summer, the cost for 16-20 days would be approximately \$5,700 for a teacher, three paraprofessionals and equipment compared to about \$127,250 for a program during the school year.

Teresa Messersmith, K-2 principal and special education co-director, has spearheaded a preschool information-gathering process for the last year.

Messersmith and a preschool committee have looked at data about preschoolers and

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non-preschoolers in the community and how well they perform in school grades K-3. She's also met with preschool providers.



She noted that there wasn't a significant difference in academic scores between those who attended preschool and those who didn't in Gothenburg.

However Messersmith said there are children in the community with unmet needs, noting that a Head Start program serves children in their homes where they may not be receiving the same socialization as preschool children.

When asked how many children are slipping through the cracks, she said maybe 20 to 30 with some likely having special education needs.

Superintendent Mike Teahon recommended remaining conservative in offering a school-based preschool at this time.

"Personally, I think you need to be careful," Teahon said. "I'm afraid if you swing a wide swath, it's hard to pull back."

Messersmith said the committee and preschool providers had a good exchange of ideas about what was needed in a school-based preschool.

For example, school expectations were discussed such as whether teachers preferred the writing of names in lowercase or capital letters.

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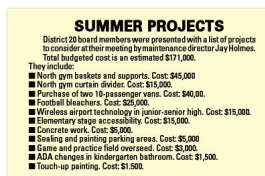
She noted that a school-based program at this time would coexist with community preschools because it would be offered during summer.

Board member Nate Wyatt wondered about space issues, noting that a summer program would allow officials time to figure out how to address it.

Lisa Geiken, another board member, wondered about having enough time to implement a program this summer.

Messersmith said it would involve work but could be done.

Teahon said college-age students pursuing educational degrees could be available as well as staff from other districts.



Based on the consensus of preschool providers and committee members, board member Amber Burge asked what they thought was best for Gothenburg.

Messersmith said she thought the the majority favored a school-based preschool.

Pat Hecox, a board member, said he thought more research was needed although a jumpstart program could be valuable.

Hecox said the district needs to make sure it's done right which may not be possible in a short

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time frame.”

“I'd feel more comfortable taking more time,” he said.

Board president Scott France wondered if more data would be forthcoming next year. Messersmith said it would.

Wyatt said he appreciated the work Messersmith and the committee has done, noting that Gothenburg is a unique community.

In other action, the board also accepted the resignations of the following teachers. Included is their time in District 20:

Kindergarten teacher Mariann Boyd, 32 years.

High school media specialist Elizabeth Frerichs, 23 years.

Gifted learning teacher Alice Peters, 10 years.

Elementary media specialist Ann Matzke, two years.

Industrial technology teacher Jim Hoyt, two years.

The district is advertising the following positions: media specialist, elementary teacher, industrial technology, technology integration specialist/business teacher.

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In other business, the board:

approved 25 slots for a laptop purchase program in which the district pays 50% of the cost for three years after which it becomes the property of the teacher.

It's the fifth year of the program where teachers have convenient access to lessons plans, online grade books, Internet resources and can create multimedia lessons at home.

declared district items, primarily a bus, surplus and authorized Teahon to determine how to dispose of junk items and collect bids on items considered valuable.

authorized Teahon to advertise for bids for basketball goals and curtain replacement in the north gym since the cost will exceed \$40,000 which requires advertising and bid collection.

School officials are also looking at expanding the weight room with volunteer help and replacing windows in the elementary foyer area.

accepted option in enrollment requests from Curtis Andres, ninth grade, and Lauren Andres, seventh grade, both of Cozad; and Preston Franzen, 10th grade of Brady. Erin Smith, a senior, was allowed to option into Brady Public Schools.

reviewed policies dealing with tobacco use at public facilities, use of school facilities and students.

heard that the last day of school will be Tuesday, May 25, with dismissal at 11 a.m.

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learned that officials are evaluating the effectiveness of the summer school program.

were informed that Tiffany Patrick has been hired as a para educator to support children with disabilities. She replaces Christy Aden.

were told that students took a new statewide reading test and will be taking a new pilot statewide math test.

listened to the activities director tell of a new use of new automated timing system to be used at the Dutch Zorn track meet Friday, a plaque to be placed in the Community Building highlighting the track achievements of former Swede Heye Lambertus and a pole vault award in memory of Jim Ambler.

A plaque honoring students with high ACT scores will be placed in the school.

acknowledged a report from Lindsay Tederman about the Teammates mentoring program.

heard several Teacher Academy participants tell about their experience. (See story on A1.)

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