District 20 school board approves updates to curriculum.

District 20's physical education curriculum has been overhauled.

School board members approved revisions at their Monday night meeting which also included a practice session with members using MacBook computers.

Superintendent Mike Teahon, with help from media integration specialist Lori Long, want the board to "go green" and not use paper agendas and other documents.

Teahon and Long hope to be paperless at the April 12 board meeting since all meeting information is now available at gothenburg.k12.ne.us/AboutSchool/boardofed.htm.

Junior and senior high physical education teacher K.C. Lathrop spearheaded physical education changes with help from K-6 physical education instructor Dan Yilk and assessment coordinator Ryan Groene who is also junior high principal.

In a nutshell, Yilk said physical education skills that need to be mastered at the end each grade are identified in the revisions.

Yilk likened the teaching of the curriculum to baking a cake.

"Maybe Mr. Lathrop likes German chocolate cake and I like angel food," he explained. "The way I present the material may be different."

However what they want students to accomplish is the same.

Lathrop showed the board how the curriculum would work.

For example in kindergarten, a goal is to identify the critical elements of basic movements using movement vocabulary.

Youngsters would be asked to walk, run, hop, gallop forward, backward, and sideways which would be observed and noted.

Skills would be built from grade to grade, he said.

If a student can’t do a skill, Lathrop said a teacher or other student who has mastered the skill would work with the student.

When asked about incorporating healthy lifestyles curriculum into physical education classes such as cardiovascular activities to complement weight lifting which is already in place, Lathrop said they could.

He said he’s introduced a new lacrosse unit this year.

The action item was sandwiched between a six-minute closed session to consider approval of certified staff and a 53-minute closed session to discuss upcoming negotiations.

No action was taken upon reconvening both sessions.

The resignation of long-time media specialist Liz Frerichs was accepted with thanks for her many years of service to the district.

Frerichs has worked in the district for 23 years.

The board also heard the one to five-year plan of the transportation and facilities committee.

With $180,000 to work with this year, Teahon said they hope to replace basketball goals and the mechanical system in the north gymnasium this summer.

Other priorities in the plan include:

- replacing two of the district's 15-passenger vans with two 10-passenger vehicles.
- buying bleachers for student seating in the stadium.
- making American Disabilities Act changes in Dudley Elementary.
- adding wireless Internet in the junior-senior high.
- replacing a curtain in the north gym that doubles the practice area.

Board members also learned that the school staff continues to gather data about preschool children in the district.

Officials have applied for a state grant that would help pay for public preschool in the district to help at-risk children.

K-2 principal and special education co-director Teresa Messersmith and school psychologist Gwen Fecht talked about the information they are gathering from lower grade students and others.

Data includes such things as scores from DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) which shows early literacy development and math, numbers of children who attend preschool and those who do not, the number of children who receive free- or reduced-price lunch and more.

At this point, Messersmith said they are seeing a significant difference in learning skills between children who receive free- and reduced-price lunches and those who do not.

However she said there isn't much change when comparing youngsters who attend preschool and those who don't.

In other business, the board:

- extended contracts to 73 teachers on staff for the 2010-11 school year. All are full time except for high ability learning teacher Alice Peters and music teacher and accompanist Marcia Speck. Renewal contracts were recommended by principals.
- approved board policies dealing with district personnel.
- gave the okay that Rachel Simants, a junior from Maxwell, could option into District 20 and that kindergartner Ashton Harbur of Brady could option out.
- heard that students grades 3-8 and 11 will be taking the Iowa Test of Basic Skills next week.
- learned that kindergarten orientation is March 25 and that preliminary numbers of kindergartners next fall are about the same as last year.
- were informed that Gothenburg boys are in the lead for the Southwest Conference Cup and girls are in second place. Points are awarded for how they finish in Southwest Conference activities and overall team records.
- were told that Saturday school number are up—139 so far compared to 116 in 2009 and that the number of detentions have dropped from 819 in 2009 to 544 this year.

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