

**GRAND FORKS SCHOOL BOARD  
GRAND FORKS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT #1  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
October 28, 2019**

The Grand Forks School Board met in regular session on Monday, October 28, 2019, at the Mark Sanford Education Center with Bill Palmiscno presiding.

**Board Members Present:**

Bill Palmiscno, President/Voting Member  
Amber Flynn, Vice President/Voting Member  
Doug Carpenter, Voting Member  
Jacqueline Hoffarth, Voting Member  
Eric Lunn, Voting Member  
Jeff Manley, Voting Member  
Shannon Mikula, Voting Member  
Cynthia Shabb, Voting Member  
Matt Spivey, Voting Member

**Student Board Members Present:**

Riley Thoreson, Non-voting Member  
Oliver Wolfe, Non-voting Member

**Board Members Absent:**

None

**Student Board Members Absent:**

None

**Others Present:**

Dr. Terry Brenner, Superintendent of Schools  
Scott J. Berge, Business Manager  
Jody Thompson, Associate Superintendent of Elementary Education  
Catherine Gillach, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education  
Amanda Weston Caillier, President, Grand Forks Education Association (GFEA)  
Cindy Johnson, Executive Secretary

---

**Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance.** The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

**Approval of Agenda.** It was moved by Manley and seconded by Lunn to approve the agenda as written. Motion carried unanimously.

**Approval of Minutes.** It was moved by Spivey and seconded by Hoffarth to approve the October 14, 2019, minutes as written. Motion carried unanimously.

**Citizen Comments (non-agenda items).** None.

**Review School Board Norms.** Manley read aloud the school board norms.

**Policy 4000 Series Committee Report – Possible Rescind of Policy 4300 Early Retirement of Professional Staff Members.**

Mikula reported on the October 14, 2019, meeting of the 4000 Series Policy Review Committee at which the committee took action to recommend to the school board that Policy 4300 be eliminated after this school year.

Several teachers shared their thoughts about the recommendation. Dan Taylor spoke about retaining teachers and how important the early retirement benefit was to him and his family and the school district. He wanted to know more about the statistical data that was reviewed at the committee meeting and what was meant by “doing something more programmatically” and “possible options for a different type of compensatory opportunity” as recorded in the committee’s meeting minutes.

Tim Tandeski spoke about the district’s history of studying things and asked if eliminating the early retirement policy has been studied and a

conclusion drawn that it would save the district some money. He encouraged the board to be thoughtful when making its decision because it would affect a lot of people's lives.

Steve Paintner said he did not understand the quickness to eliminate the early retirement policy after this year. He spoke about his loyalty to the district. He said this would not fix losing teachers and predicted there would be a mass exit of teachers instead. Paintner shared his calculations about the economic savings in salaries to the district with early retirement and said it seemed like the program should continue, or consider a phase out as it would naturally take place.

Melissa Buchhop shared comments from Dawn Mord about the economic savings in salary costs to the district with early retirement.

Board members shared their thoughts about the recommendation. Palmiscno rejected the perception that this topic was a surprise and explained protocol for bringing the topic for discussion to the board.

Responding to board members' questions, Tracy Abentroth, Human Resources Director, explained that with TFFR's elimination of the Rule of 85, 2023 is the last year that any teachers are eligible for retirement under the Rule of 85 and if the board wanted to continue it, the policy would have to be adjusted. She provided an updated copy of the statistical data about the number of retirees from 2009 to 2019 that was reviewed at the committee meeting. Abentroth also said there may be a few small school districts that have a similar policy but none of the large school districts had one.

Lunn said that he could not support the recommendation in its current format because the abruptness to just end it was not the correct way to treat employees. He wanted to hear more rationale for the recommendation and suggested that he could possibly support it if it were phased out over a period of years.

Carpenter pointed out that the policy is discretionary and on any given year the board can decide to fund some, none, or all of the early retirement applications. It is not something that should be utilized in retirement planning. He said the policy is something that hurts the

district in negotiations and that the payments could be used for all of the employees' salary schedules. He also spoke about a cost to the student when replacing a very experienced classroom teacher with an inexperienced teacher, and inciting teachers to leave when there is a teacher shortage makes the teacher shortage problem worse. Carpenter said that at some point in time in the future it may be necessary to do something for recruitment and retention but that conversation would take place at that time.

Hoffarth said she agreed with Carpenter yet struggled with the personal aspect of people having planned on the benefit for their retirement. She is interested in hearing other options, but overall, she was in favor of eliminating the policy.

Flynn encouraged teachers to share their thoughts about the recommendation. She said she was in favor of modifying the policy but agreed with Lunn that there needed to be a longer period of notification.

Discussion continued on a provision in the policy that allows staff who retired early under Policy 4300 to be rehired as teachers in special fields where qualified candidates are not available.

Shabb said she was not in support to eliminate the policy as proposed and requested additional information about the numbers.

Mikula asked the board to consider non-economic costs such as setbacks high-needs students may have with a new, inexperienced teacher. She also spoke about the time and economic value to hire and train new staff. Mikula said that the policy is not a benefit. At the bargaining table, nobody wanted to add this in as a compensatory benefit; it is an incentive. It is not bargained and it is not written as a benefit. It is an enticement to have employees retire early and the district could not afford to lose experienced teachers and the district could not afford the fiscal cost. Talking about rewarding loyalty or service is a different conversation for the future.

More teachers shared their thoughts about the recommendation. Laurie Clemenson said she thought early retirement was a perk and since it has always been there so she had no reason to

think that it would go away. She implored the board to stick with a phase out plan that would naturally happen and to take that time to come up with something for the Rule of 90 teachers as well.

Jana Bell said early retirement was not an incentive and that she has been counting on it when she retires. She spoke about her loyalty to the district and hoped that the district would be loyal to her in return.

Mike Bisenius also said early retirement was not an incentive and shared his personal status of having been eligible for retirement but not yet retiring. He asked why the district had trouble hiring replacements and suggested the district set up a mentorship program for new teachers.

Carol Wheeler said she knew early retirement was discretionary but she did not know of anyone who applied for it and was denied. She liked the idea of a phase out.

Susie Lancaster said early retirement was a motivation to stay on a little longer. She asked the board to study the elimination of early retirement more and not stop it so quickly.

More Board members shared their thoughts about the recommendation. Spivey spoke about inexperienced versus experienced teachers, his experience in teacher negotiations about early retirement savings and how trying to channel more money to new teachers backfired. He said he had a hard time supporting the recommendation and that the board needed to look at a phase-out or something else.

Flynn encouraged teachers to share their opinions as well as any solutions they may have. She said it will be hard to ask the taxpayers for a mill levy increase this summer if the early retirement policy is perceived as paying teacher to leave early.

Responding to a question from Flynn, Weston Caillier said the Grand Forks Education Association is intentionally not making a comment at this time because they were in the process of collecting data.

More teachers shared their thoughts about the recommendation. Heidi Muus said she wanted to be more educated about the

recommendation and spoke about the fear of the unknown. She said teachers wanted to feel like they are cared for.

Board members continued their discussion on the recommendation. Mikula said the Board could find something different to reward more people and that if early retirement was going to be treated as a benefit, then it had to be treated as compensatory and considered in negotiations.

Hoffarth said she understood the personal aspects of the recommendation but as a board member she had to consider what else is impacted by the budget.

Lunn said that even though early retirement is discretionary, he did not know of any instance where it had been denied, unless the applicant did not meet the policy criteria, and that teachers have expected it through the years. He reiterated that a phase-out had to be considered. He also asked the teachers to include early retirement as a part of their career earnings. Lunn recommended the committee reconvene to look at options to phase out the policy.

Palmiscno directed Carpenter and Mikula, from the 4000 Series Policy Review Committee, and Flynn and himself, from the Teacher Contract Bargaining Benefits & Leave Package Committee, and Administration, to convene within the next 30-45 days and consider options for phasing out early retirement.

Teacher Tim Tandeski spoke about teachers in a different district getting paid for unused sick leave. He said if early retirement were eliminated, there would not be as much time to hire replacement teachers because the district would not know who was retiring until May or June.

Manley requested information on the dollars going out for early retirement through the year ending 2027.

**Recognition of GFEA as Representative Organization for Negotiating Unit.** It was moved by Lunn and seconded by Hoffarth to recognize the Grand Forks Education Association (GFEA) as the representative organization for the

appropriate negotiating unit as per North Dakota Century Code 15.1-16-11 as recommended. Motion carried unanimously.

**Recognition of GFPA as Representative Organization for Negotiating Unit.** It was moved by Shabb and seconded by Carpenter to recognize the Grand Forks Principals' Association (GFPA) as the representative organization for the appropriate negotiating unit as per North Dakota Century Code 15.1-16-11 as recommended. Motion carried unanimously.

**Recognition of GFDA as Representative Organization for Negotiating Unit.** It was moved by Lunn and seconded by Hoffarth to recognize the Grand Forks Directors' Association (GFDA) as the representative organization for the appropriate negotiating unit as per North Dakota Century Code 15.1-16-11 as recommended. Motion carried unanimously.

**Policy 8000 Series Committee Report – Restructure Policy Review Committees.** Brenner reported on the October 14, 2019, meeting of the 8000 Series Policy Review Committee at which North Dakota School Boards Association (NDSBA) representatives Rebecca Duben, Director of Policy Services, and Patty VerDouw, Policy Services Assistant, participated via telephone. The committee recommends eliminating the district's current policy review committees and creating one policy review committee with the intent to move to adoption of the NDSBA's policy templates.

Some board members shared their reasons to support the recommendation. It was clarified that all policies will still come to the board for first and second readings, there may be NDSBA policies that the district does not want to adopt, there may still be policies that are unique to the district, and updates are provided on a regular basis by the NDSBA.

It was moved by Lunn and seconded by Shabb to eliminate the current policy review committees' structure and develop a new policy review committee consisting of three board members, one administrator, and the business manager. Motion carried unanimously. Lunn, Shabb, and either Flynn, as the board's vice

president, or Palmiscno, as the board's president, were appointed to the new policy review committee.

**Announcements.** None.

**Board Requests for Future Consideration.** Flynn requested an update from the District Innovations Committee.

Flynn recalled a future requests matrix was included in the school board agenda packet last year and asked if it could be provided again.

**School Board Norms - How Did We Do?** Manley said that board members did fantastic in following its meeting norms. They listened to the public with respect, learned a few things, and appreciated the input.

**Adjournment.** There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

Approved \_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Bill Palmiscno, President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Scott J. Berge, Business Manager