

**GRAND FORKS SCHOOL BOARD  
GRAND FORKS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT #1  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
December 9, 2019**

The Grand Forks School Board met in regular session on Monday, December 9, 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)  
Chris Arnold, Director of Buildings and Grounds  
Cindy Johnson, Executive Secretary

---

**Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance.** The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m.

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

**Approval of Minutes.** It was moved by Spivey and seconded by Shabb to approve the November 18, 2019, and November 25, 2019, minutes as written. Motion carried unanimously.

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

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

**Future of West Elementary School.** Palmiscno explained this topic is for discussion only. Board

members will listen to audience comments, Board members will continue the discussion, and the topic will be moved forward to the January 6, 2020, meeting for action.

Audience members who spoke in favor of keeping West Elementary School open were:

Emily and Alaina Marto, Grand Forks, ND  
Cindy Peterson, Grand Forks, ND  
Leah Henderson, Grand Forks, ND  
Debbie Watts, Grand Forks, ND  
Nadine Raymond, Grand Forks, ND  
Mike Berg, Grand Forks, ND  
Lee Hensrud, Grand Forks, ND  
Bob Hoselton, Grand Forks, ND  
JoEllen Paintner, Grand Forks, ND  
Kathleen Coudle-King, Grand Forks, ND  
Christin Hoselton, Grand Forks, ND

Ami Lattergrass, Grand Forks, ND  
Amanda Walker, Grand Forks, ND

Palmiscno said the demographer's report indicates future growth in the neighborhood and incoming new students will be stagnant over the next few years.

Hoffarth spoke about being a former West parent, the importance of diversity at the Board table, frustration with the deferred maintenance throughout the district, the possibility of having to make changes in order to be fiscally responsible, give students equity, and give teachers a good working environment, uncertainty about making lasting decisions with knowing the next steps, frustration about hearing of poor air quality at West in the news, and the possibility of misrepresenting the reasons why the Board is doing things.

Arnold explained that air quality issues are part of the master facilities study (HVAC upgrade) and are not new information. A lot of the elementary schools use univent heaters. In the classroom mentioned in the news article, the univent heater that was installed in 1949 no longer operates, parts have been discontinued, and the district cannot afford to upgrade it.

Mikula asked several questions including why all schools with air quality concerns were not being addressed in Phase 1 of the master facilities plan. Arnold said West was the direst in regards to steam piping, which is original to the structure and well-past their service life. All classrooms use a univent heater.

Palmiscno said the phasing was when the district estimated needing \$5M a year for deferred maintenance. If the referendum passes, phases would change.

Mikula questioned the timing of making a decision about West when the Board did not know how much it would be asking for in the referendum and what it would be spent on. She questioned whether there would be any budgetary savings if all West staff will still have a place in the district, asked if there is a plan for transportation for West students to their new school and if there were any thoughts about

what would be done with the building.

Palmiscno said a decision in January would give families and staff time for planning.

Brenner pointed out that a decision was not just about money and the priority is the educational experience for students and staff.

Berge explained deferred maintenance from a property tax perspective and discussed disparities in the number of mills available to peer districts as compared to what is available to the district.

Palmiscno reported a historical timeline of various projects since the 1997 flood and how, through legislative action that discontinued the district's unlimited mill levy and capped the number of mills that the district could levy, the state took control of the district's property taxes. Additionally, the state takes 75% of the Impact Aid dollars the district receives.

Lunn asked if the schools were not facing imminent disaster regarding air quality. Arnold clarified that a lot of the univent systems were in disrepair so they are not drafting in the amount of fresh air they are designed to do, but there is still air exchange.

Lunn requested information about what it really costs the district to have small class sizes be provided at the January meeting.

Shabb and Arnold summarized a number of emergency and maintenance projects over the past two years that have strained the district's budget. Shabb said that she sees families that really like their school and engaged teachers at all of the schools she has visited. She expressed concern that teacher collaboration cannot happen at West as it happens in the larger schools and said that the Board had to consider learning opportunities for children. She said she is a proponent of neighborhood schools but that the Board had to look at the budget and that the district could not financially keep all of the schools at their standard without a lot of public support.

Hoffarth spoke about the need to have a detailed

plan before making a decision and to identify additional options. She asked how West’s class sizes, learning spaces, and building layout compared to other schools.

Weston Caillier said that people will respond better when they know and understand what the plan is.

Flynn said conversations about demographics, priorities, and facilities were not new; they have been discussed for years. She encouraged continued conversation and the sharing of correct information about this topic. Flynn said she was not a fan of making a decision without having a plan.

Mikula requested information about the economic impact if the district owned a fleet of buses and provided transportation to students who live ½ miles from their school.

Spivey expressed concern that if the referendum fails, the Board would have to close a school and make some really hard decisions at the end of June and school starts in August.

Dr. Brenner referred to one of the priority themes from ThoughtExchange regarding West Elementary School which was that the district needs to make the tough decisions and that community permission was not needed to make that decision. Brenner clarified that he and Cabinet administrators have discussed different scenarios depending upon the decision the Board might make but they do not want to make any public proclamations ahead of the Board’s decision.

Flynn said the Board needed to know the plans in order to make a decision about whether to keep open or close the school.

Palmiscno said additional information will be brought to the January 6 meeting for discussion and making a decision will be made at the January 21 meeting.

**Consent Agenda.** It was moved by Lunn and seconded by Carpenter to approve the consent agenda as follows: Open Enrollment applications and Student Travel Request to Spain, June 12-23,

2020, as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

**Committee Report – Early Retirement Policy 4300 and Opportunities for Alternatives.**

Flynn reported on the November 26, 2019, committee meeting and recommendation to terminate the early retirement policy after two years, at the end of the 2020-2021 school year. Audience members who spoke in favor of the early retirement policy were:

- Linda Jenkins, Grand Forks, ND
- JoEllen Paintner, Grand Forks, ND
- Steve Paintner, Grand Forks, ND
- Michael Keller, Grand Forks, ND

Mikula discussed how the cost of keeping the policy at the same time the Teacher Benefits and Leave Committee is actively trying to come up with options to address all of the teacher population could negatively affect the affordability of an alternative benefit to reward staff for longevity.

Carpenter said circumstances have changed. The policy is incenting people to leave early and isn’t the best use of funds. He said the policy should be terminated after two years and if the referendum and next legislative session are successful, then look for other ways to address all the needs of teachers whether it’s those who stay a long time or those who the district is trying to attract into the profession.

Lunn reminded the Board that several years ago the teachers’ salary schedule was compressed in order to reach high earnings quicker and lifelong earnings would be greater. He agreed the policy does not serve a good purpose for the district any more but disagreed with the recommended phasing. He said the policy has been in place for 39 years and people have come to count on it even though they should not have because it is a discretionary policy that could go away at any time.

It was moved by Lunn and seconded by Shabb to eliminate Policy 4300 but not until the end of the 2022-2023 school year which will coincide with the end of the Rule of 85.

Flynn said she agreed with Lunn that more time

is given to eliminating the policy. She wanted to go through another negotiation cycle in order to discuss possible options for a leave and benefits package that is fairer to all teachers to supplant the ending of this policy. She also agreed that the policy should not continue past 2022-2023, but, like her stance about the future of West Elementary School, she wanted to know what would be in place before making a decision about something ending.

Carpenter said if the board decides to keep the policy; it needs to be clear that it is discretionary and can be eliminated next year if necessary. The district will be faced with severe financial considerations and not have money to fund early retirement if the referendum is not successful, if the legislature does not come through, or if the enrollment continues to grow. He said he did not want anyone to think the last three years of the policy are guaranteed.

Hoffarth agreed with Carpenter and with eliminating the policy when the Rule of 85 runs out.

Mikula discussed the criteria being applied to the decision about the future of West Elementary School that she believes is not being applied to the decision about the early retirement policy despite the decisions and their impact being very similar.

Manley said his issue is the early retirement benefit is discretionary and the teacher benefits committee is discussing replacing it with something that is nondiscretionary. He said whatever the committee comes up with should also be discretionary if it replaces early retirement.

Lunn said that he agreed with Carpenter and clarified that his motion did not say the discretionary part of the policy be eliminated because it has to stay discretionary. Besides financial reasons to not pay it out, he said if the board came up with an alternative plan that the board and teachers' union agree to, the policy can be eliminated at that time.

Flynn pointed out the discussion so far has not included talking about teachers taking retirement

and then being re-hired, thus possibly double-dipping. Lunn said he did not recommend trying to reword the policy to address that tonight but it could be looked at in the next two to three months.

Motion carried on roll call vote as follows: Aye: Flynn, Hoffarth, Lunn, Manley, Shabb, Spivey, and Palmiscno; Nay: Carpenter and Mikula.

Student Board Members Thoreson and Wolfe left the meeting at 9:14 p.m.

#### **Selection of A&E Firm for Pre-Referendum Planning Services.**

Dr. Brenner explained five proposals were received in response to the Request for Proposals for Architectural and Engineering Pre-Referendum Planning Services with prices ranging from \$29,000 to \$85,000. Berge, Arnold, Palmiscno, and Dr. Brenner opened the proposals on November 27 and using a scoring rubric, Unesco graded out the highest. The administrative recommendation is to enter into a contract with Unesco at \$29,500.

Discussion took place about the scope of work that would be done by Unesco and its benefit to the district. Kevin McGauley, Unesco Senior Business Consultant, explained how Unesco helps districts position themselves for referendum success through a variety of methods including education and community engagement.

It was moved by Lunn and seconded by Carpenter to enter into a contract with Unesco for pre-referendum planning services at a cost of \$29,500 as outlined. Motion carried unanimously.

#### **Approval of Curriculum Proposal.**

Gillach reported that the proposal to add Engineering Essentials, Advanced Placement Art History (Humanities 15011), and English IV-Practical Writing and English IV-Practical Reading was reviewed at the November 25 School Board meeting. The administrative recommendation is for approval.

It was moved by Spivey and seconded by Hoffarth to approve the addition of Engineering Essentials, Advanced Placement Art History (Humanities 15011), and English IV-Practical Writing and English IV-Practical Reading

beginning the 2020-2021 school year as requested. Motion carried unanimously.

**Principals Negotiated Agreement for 2019-**

**2021.** Carpenter explained the Principal Contract Bargaining Committee and Grand Forks Principals' Association reached tentative agreement on a two-year agreement effective July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2021. Changes include a 1.5% increase to the salary schedule with the advancement in steps and lanes, increases in the education factor and school factor, a monetary increase and usage change in professional development/travel, and language cleanup through the agreement.

It was moved by Carpenter and seconded by Lunn to approve the Principals and Associated Principals Negotiated Agreement for July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2021. Motion carried unanimously.

**Director Negotiated Agreement for 2019-**

**2021.** Spivey explained the Director Contract Bargaining Committee and Grand Forks Directors' Association reached tentative agreement on a two-year agreement effective July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2021. Changes include the development of a salary schedule and language changes that mimic the agreement that was reached with principals.

Hoffarth left the meeting at 9:56 p.m.

It was moved by Spivey and seconded by Lunn to approve the Director Negotiated Agreement for July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2021. Motion carried unanimously. Absent: Hoffarth.

**Business Manager Contract for 2019-2021.**

Dr. Brenner explained proposed changes to the business manager contract including an increase in salary of 1.5% each of the two years and an increase in paid vacation days to 26 days per contract year.

It was moved by Lunn and seconded by Shabb to approve the Business Manager Contract for July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2021. Motion carried unanimously. Absent: Hoffarth.

**Associate Superintendent Contract for 2019-**

**2021.** Dr. Brenner explained proposed changes to the associate superintendent contract including an increase in salary of 1.5% each of the two years and language changes to include paid in-district mileage and release from workdays as required by a doctoral cohort program in which the administrator may be enrolled.

It was moved by Carpenter and seconded by Shabb to approve the Associate Superintendent of Elementary Education Contract for July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2021. Motion carried unanimously. Absent: Hoffarth.

**Assistant Superintendent Contract for 2019-**

**2021.** Dr. Brenner explained proposed changes to the assistant superintendent contract including an increase in salary of 3.2% in year one and 3.1% in year two and language changes to include 65 days paid sick leave, one day of bereavement leave for other relatives or close friends, in-district mileage, and release from workdays as required by a doctoral cohort program in which the administrator may be enrolled.

It was moved by Spivey and seconded by Shabb to approve the Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education Contract for July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2021. Motion carried unanimously. Absent: Hoffarth.

**Announcements.** The following announcements were made:

- A school board work session will be held on Monday, December 16.
- The administration will have an on-air conversation with KNOX Radio on Tuesday, December 10.

**Board Requests for Future Consideration.**

Mikula referred to an article about the percentage of males who hold a high school degree and asked for information about what the district does with students who drop from high school besides trying to get them into an alternative program before they decide to drop. Information will be provided in a future edition of Dr. Brenner's *Friday Focus*.

**School Board Norms - How Did We Do?** Flynn

reported the board did great in following its norms.

**Adjournment.** There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:09 p.m.

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

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

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