

**COMMITTEE TO REVIEW EARLY RETIREMENT POLICY 4300 AND
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALTERNATIVES
GRAND FORKS SCHOOL BOARD
GRAND FORKS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT #1
MEETING MINUTES
November 26, 2019**

A meeting of the Committee to Review the Early Retirement Policy 4300 and Opportunities for Alternatives was held on Tuesday, November 26, 2019, at the Mark Sanford Education Center with Bill Palmiscno presiding.

Committee Members Present:

Doug Carpenter, Voting Board Member
Shannon Mikula, Voting Board Member
Amber Flynn, Voting Board Member
Bill Palmiscno, Voting Board Member
Terry Brenner, Superintendent of Schools/Non-voting Member
Scott J. Berge, Business Manager/Non-voting Member
Tracy Abentroth, HR Manager/Non-voting Member
Tracy Jentz, Communications & Community Engagement Coordinator/Non-voting Member

Committee Members Absent:

None.

Others Present:

Catherine Gillach, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education
Cindy Johnson, Meeting Secretary

Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 7:31 a.m.

Review Early Retirement Policy 4300 and Opportunities for Alternatives. Conceptually thinking, Berge said that he could see growth in the number of staff requesting early retirement in the next couple of years if they knew that it would go away and that possible alternatives regarding the district paying both sides of TFFR or consideration of a sick leave pay out would require that negotiations be reopened. He said a decision needed to be made about dropping the policy first, and then a decision about whether the board wanted to come up with something else.

Mikula said she was worried about saying anything about keeping the policy on the books as it could send a message of reassurance that there is a guarantee of early retirement being paid when it is not a guarantee and not

something that the board can continually to financially carry. She said the referendum also is not a guarantee. In her personal analysis, she likened making a decision about the early retirement policy to making a decision about closing West Elementary School and said both were somewhat discretionary, had a fiscal impact, and impacted people. Mikula suggested keeping the policy in place this year and next year and come up with something such as a sick leave payout that would incent people to stay and reward them for long-term and quality service.

Abentroth said she understood that the policy is discretionary; however, it has been in place for 39 years and the way it has been handled feels like a benefit. She discussed the importance of a decision being made for next year because the deadline to apply is January 15 and lots of people are meeting with her now to discuss their possible retirement. She suggested the policy

stay in place at least through 2020-2021.

Jentz pointed out that at the last meeting of the Teacher Benefits and Leave Package Committee, there was some interest in looking at opportunities for alternatives; however, they would not be ready for any recommendation by December 9. She suggested a decision be made about only the next two years and then let the Teacher Benefits and Leave Package Committee do its work. Jentz also pointed out that there are other considerations regarding the future of West Elementary School and that even a colleague at Bismarck Public Schools is asking why Grand Forks has such a small school.

Carpenter said sick leave is a totally separate issue than what the board does with policy. Sick leave is a negotiation. The referendum will help solve the district's facilities issues. Eliminating the policy will help solve the teacher money issue as he would like to put the money back into salaries if possible. He said if the referendum is unsuccessful, the policy will be going away anyway and the district will probably have to lay off people. He said that he could go along with keeping the policy for two more years. He also said the teachers' sick leave should be modified no matter what.

Abentroth said she agreed that the policy needs to go away; it is just how quickly and how much advance communication can be done.

Brenner shared the thoughts of senior administrative cabinet members. These included advance communication, reinvesting in present salaries, timing is not good in relation to the referendum, and finding an alternative benefits package and timing the package with a sunset clause on the policy would be good.

Carpenter said decisions about the policy and West Elementary School could be made separately but there would be a lot of consistency in the message that the board is serious about the district's financial situation and finding ways to address it knowing that they will be hard decisions to make.

Brenner and Palmiscno said a two-year commitment would give the district time for the

Benefits Committee to meet and come up with any recommendation. Mikula disagreed that it was a commitment. Palmiscno clarified that it was a goal to get to another option.

Palmiscno pointed out that at West Elementary School, the financial impact was not just construction costs but that it was also operational costs and the cost of no improvement. Carpenter said the educational side of closing West needed to be emphasized. Mikula said that fiscally and educationally it did not make sense to keep West open.

Flynn said it was hard to make decisions as a whole in the absence of a strategic plan because indirectly all of the things that have been discussed fit together and at the end of the day, the board has a bottom-line that has to be maintained. She said she was not in favor of eliminating the early retirement policy in one year, but was okay with two years. She talked about the timing of the next negotiations cycle and that there was no guarantee that an alternative would come out of that process and that at the end of the day, she wanted to find a way to reinvest and find something that will recruit, retain, and incent teachers to stay here.

Discussion continued on whether it made sense to reopen discussion about the payment of TFFR. Carpenter and Mikula said the teachers would have to request that discussion be reopened.

It was moved by Carpenter and seconded by Mikula to recommend to the board that the early retirement policy be terminated after two years and that it remain fully discretionary in the interim. It was pointed out that any change would have to be made through policy review. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:20 a.m.

APPROVED _____
(Date)

Bill Palmiscno, Committee Chair