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School board deals with concerns of Hispanic community

The Morrow County School Board struggled to keep a lid on proceedings as a simmering stew of dissatisfaction among members of the Irrigon Latino community threatened to boil over at the board's regular meeting Monday night in Irrigon.

Complaints ranged from concerns over student safety, to perceived unfair treatment of Hispanic kids, to parents feeling intimidated by school officials, to the perhaps torturously slow pace of the district's complaint procedure.

"Something's going on with the teachers and principal," said Ruben Calvillo, a member of the Boardman Hispanic community, whose parents and siblings live in Irrigon. "When something happens, we report it, but nothing gets done."

"We're not doing secret things," insisted Morrow County School District Superintendent Mark Burrows. "We investigate." "I assure you I want to listen," added Burrows. "Every incident has been investigated...You haven't called me. If there are issues, we want to solve them."

Burrows said that each incident of possible abuse is reported to the district's Risk Management Team, the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, the Teacher Standards and Practices Committee and the Department of Human Services. Burrows reiterated the district's complaint procedure, which lays out the chain of authority with the complainant first talking to the teacher, if applicable, then the school principal, then the superintendent and finally the school board. If no results are seen with the initial steps then the complainant is advised to move up to the next level with his complaint. The superintendent and board acknowledged that resolution of problems could take some time, but stressed that each complaint will be acted upon.

Burrows and board Chair Craig Miles also reminded the audience that the district is prevented by law from discussing particular students and staff members in public meetings and has rules and procedures that have to be adhered to.

Darlene Roa, a member of the Irrigon Hispanic community, said that Hispanics are often intimidated by school officials and many do not know their rights. "We're not to be shuffled around. Something has to be done. We're losing our kids," she said. She also voiced concern about the pregnancy rate among Hispanic teens in Irrigon, which she claims is one of the highest in the state. Roa also alleged that Hispanic students were told that they could not speak Spanish at school because the teachers could not understand them, a charge that was adamantly denied by Burrows.

Burrows and board members stressed that the board has been working to engage all members of the community, but reminded the audience that they can't fix problems they are not aware of. "We have phones," said Miles. "That's what we're here for...We're here to hear from you, so please call. The superintendent and board handed out phone numbers and invited those with concerns to call them and schedule confidential appointments, if appropriate, to resolve their issues.

Roa stressed that many Hispanic parents are laborers, who are working long hours and money is tight. When they are not working, said Roa, they want to be home with their kids. Board member Berto Hernandez, a member of the Boardman Hispanic community, chastised those who do not get involved in the schools, suggesting that they were "lazy". "I was one of those parents who didn't want to get involved," said Hernandez. "Now I'm making the time." "So you were lazy," countered Calvillo, to which Hernandez replied "yes."

Cipriano Vera, an Hispanic parent of Irrigon students, said that he felt his children were treated differently from white students. He said that his kids have "little problems" at school, but were sent to the alternative school, while white students who got into more trouble were not kicked out of school. He also said that one of his children was sent home from school for wearing red, a supposed gang color, but that white students who wore red were not sent home. "I want my kids in the school, I don't want them in the street," said Vera.

After the meeting Calvillo's brother, Jose, who recently returned from a tour of duty in Iraq, also told the Gazette that he believed Hispanic kids were being kicked out of school for wearing red, while white kids were not.

The board is planning to investigate requiring students to wear uniforms, which would possibly eliminate "gang" colors, baggy pants, inappropriate outfits, etc., and would ideally give each child an equal footing.

At the meeting the district provided headsets for English-Spanish translations provided by Joel Chavez, English Language Learner director, and Alma Rodriguez, school liaison.

The Morrow County School District prides itself on its English Language

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Giving Tree goes up at Murray's

Blair Keithley stands behind Giving Tree at Murray's Drug.

Murray's Drug is the site of the Giving Tree for children in Morrow County who live in Foster Homes. Area shoppers are asked to take a gift tag from the tree that displays each child's wish for the Christmas season. Purchase the gift requested, wrap it and place back under the tree with the identifying tag attached. Gifts need to be under the tree by Dec. 17 in order to insure that the child receives their gift by Christmas.

Baby grand piano arrives at St. Patrick's senior center

City manager Dave DeMayo (right) along with city crewmembers Roger Ehrmantraut (front), Randy Sample (back right), Brian Harman (back), and also Mike Meligan (left) install piano at Sr. Center.

St. Patrick's senior center now has a baby grand piano. It is a mahogany 1920 Baby Grand Ampico Symphonique belonging to Kathy Turner, a new resident of the center. The piano traveled over 1,000 miles to its new home at the center.

At first five men tried setting up the piano, but without success. A cherry picker was brought from Lexington to assist. They needed straps to hold the piano up and sent a city worker (Chad Doherty) to get them. The new city manager, Dave DeMayo, and crew Randy Sample, Roger Ehrmantraut, Brian Harman and Mike Meligan a nephew of Ms. Turner set the piano on its legs without the use of the cherry picker.

Kathy hopes to involve the community in playing the piano. Several people have stopped by with family members to play the piano. If anyone knows of someone who would be willing to tune the piano, please contact Kathy at the senior center.

St. Patrick's Senior Center needs new roof

The St. Patrick's Senior Center in Heppner needs a new roof and it could cost between $30,000 and $50,000, the city council was told Monday night.

New City Manger David DeMayo told the council he had met with a contractor and looked over the condition of the roof, which has been leaking, and it was determined a new roof is needed.

One of the rooms in the Senior Center is unusable because of the leaking roof, and a tenant had to be shifted to another room.

The Heppner Housing Authority, which operates the Sr. Center, does not have enough money in its reserve fund to pay for the roof, so the council discussed other methods of funding the new roof. In the meantime repairs would be made to fix the leak, DeMayo said.

Council Member Judy Buschke of the Housing Authority said there are currently three apartments vacant at the center; however, one of them is not usable because of the leaks. She also reported that the meal held every Wednesday had improved "greatly" since John Gochnauer of Heppner had been contracted to provide the meals.

The council also discussed the city's franchise agreement with David Green owner of Heppner Garbage Disposal. The council agreed in principal to a proposed rate increase for garbage pickup as follows:

Current price	Increase	Proposed price
$9.00	$1.80	$10.80
13.9 (2 cans)	2.78	16.68
18.80 (3 cans)	3.76	22.56
45.50 (1.5 cy dumpster)	9.10	54.60
57.52 (2 cy dumpster)	11.45	68.70

Green said he currently has about 600 accounts in the city even though fuel, insurance and other costs have increased over the past 10 years; prices have not been increased during that time. The council also agreed that the new franchise agreement would be for five years instead of 10.

Green agreed that he would make more of an effort to notify customers if he would be unable to pick up garbage on time, possibly with notices at the post office and on TV channel 3.

The council also heard a report from city Fire Chief Rusty Estes. Estes said it was a "very slow year" for the fire department in 2005. He said there were a total of four fires in town, one car fire, one dumpster fire, a couple of flue fires, and only nine motor vehicle accidents.

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