

Cheney, Doyle sworn in to 47J board; M30 resolution approved

Gienah Cheney and Philip Doyle were sworn in January 26 as directors of Vernonia School District, bringing the board back to full strength after the resignations of Leslie O’Leary and Darryl Hamblet. Other members of the board are chairman Jim Krahn, Randy Hansen, Ed Buckner, Tim Titus and Cari Levenseller.

Krahn distributed a short handout discussing the qualities of a strong and effective board, and defining the duties of the board chairman, the role of the superintendent regarding the board, and a description of the duties of board members. Krahn explained that the non-profit organization he works for uses the same material and that he feels it is an excellent outline for board members.

Superintendent Mike Funderburg read a proclamation praising the dedication and efforts of the board to provide leadership.

Booster Booth

After many years of effort, the Booster Club is finally ready to begin construction of a permanent concession stand adjacent to the bleachers, Funderburg told the board. The new building will have a porch on the same level as the front of the grandstand, eliminating the stairs at one end of the bleachers, and will provide improved handicapped access. Levenseller earned applause from females in the room when she asked that the women’s restroom be designed larger than the men’s. Though the request was received with humor, Levenseller pointed out that waiting in line with small children requires additional space.

Wrestling Building

Hansen reported that he has been researching the possibility of building a field house for wrestling and weights. The proposal is to construct a building at no cost to the district, with volunteer labor and donated funds. After completion, the building would become school property. The board easily reached consensus to approve the project.

Reports

Maintenance Supervisor John Lewis reported that nearly all buildings fared well during the snow storm. The exception

was a problem with a ceiling in the modular classrooms at Washington Elementary. Lewis made repairs before students returned to school.

Dawn Plews reported that the district is on target financially. Enrollment continues to be higher than predicted, which will eventually result in a larger allocation from the state school fund. Plews said the only category overspent was insurance, a result of board action to pick up earthquake damage insurance that had been dropped as part of budget cutting strategies in prior years. Buckner said that he had “lived here all my life” and remembered two earthquakes that didn’t cause any damage. He asked if the deductible could be increased to create a reserve to cover the deductible. Plews and Funderburg said that insurance quotes are reviewed annually and that the coverage would be discussed.

Hansen reported that the transportation committee was waiting for feedback from other board members before continuing negotiations. Buckner said he had many comments and questions. An informal meeting was held following the board meeting, with Hansen and Levenseller (Transportation committee), Buckner and Joe Curl, of Curl Transportation.

School Report Cards

Superintendent Funderburg distributed a copy of an article from The Oregonian outlining ten approaches to improving high school academic progress at little or no cost to districts. Funderburg told the board that the district had implemented most of the suggestions, including reducing the number of students each teacher is assigned, by developing a block schedule, forming professional learning teams that allow teachers to discuss teaching methods on a regular basis, creating student advisory periods that make every staff member an advisor and help students make course choices.

These improvements require commitment and time spent on improving instruction and haven’t cost the district money. Funderburg also praised the board’s actions to develop an alternative-learning environment by pursuing grant funding for a charter school. Training has begun on the PLATO system of credit recovery in the

newly set-up classroom with 25 new computers. Funderburg will be writing to the parents of all 7 – 12th grade home school students to invite them to participate in the program.

Though there has been dramatic improvement in attendance, block scheduling has created a challenge for staff. Funderburg said that the district has redefined the three “R’s” of education (traditionally reading, ‘riting and ‘rithmetic) to Rigor, Relevance and Relationship, in order to provide students with high quality assignments that utilize the longer class period.

Another area that needs work, Funderburg explained, is the development of a “living, breathing School Improvement Plan (SIP).” There is no site council – the group designated by the legislature to develop the SIP – at any of the district’s schools. Funderburg said that the district is checking the possibility of a district-wide site council.

Budget Calendar

The board approved a budget calendar, with the first meeting of the budget committee on April 22. Funderburg said that the board would appoint two members to the budget committee at their next meeting. The Budget Assistance Team (BATeam) will also be selected at that meeting. Composed of (up to) three board members, three budget committee members and three administrators, the BATeam examines all aspects of the budget and makes recommendations to the budget committee. The budget committee will meet again in May, with a public hearing scheduled for June 24. Additional meetings will be scheduled if necessary. The budget must be adopted by June 30, but the process is delayed in hopes of receiving accurate revenue predictions. Applications for the budget committee are available at the district office.

M30 Resolution

As an elected body the school board can take a public position on current issues. Funderburg read a resolution noting that the failure of Measure 30 would result in an \$800 million reduction of the state school fund, or \$463,675 to the Vernonia district, and other effects of the measure,

urging the public to support the measure. Levenseller moved and Hansen seconded that the board support the resolution. (Discussion is not allowed until a motion is on the floor.)

Each board member expressed an opinion, in round table fashion, prior to a vote. Buckner said that he did not support the resolution because the “legislature hasn’t done it’s job.” Levenseller said she doesn’t agree with a system where schools and social programs are held hostage by the legislature, but would support the resolution. Titus said that this was another legislative “quick fix” and that he would not support the resolution because he wasn’t convinced that the money would go where it was supposed to go. Cheney said she would support the resolution for personal reasons. Doyle said he wished there was a better alternative but that he would support the resolution. Hansen said he could see both sides of the issue, and would support the resolution because

it was “the Bandaid we need today” to prevent the continued decline of education.

Krahn reserved the last comment for himself as chairman. He told the board that he works with legislators on a daily basis and believes that the money will go to schools, safety and health and welfare programs as designated. According to Krahn, it appears that people in general would vote against the measure because of their lack of confidence in the legislature, though Krahn said that he thought the legislature was doing their job [by spending eight months to reach a compromise solution to the budget crisis]. Krahn agreed with Levenseller and Hansen, saying that he did not want children to suffer because of the public perception of the legislature.

After all board members spoke, the resolution was approved, with Hansen, Levenseller, Krahn, Doyle and Cheney in support and Titus and Buckner voting against.



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