

Potpourri of reports keep 47J board meeting crowded with data

The Vernonia school board spent much of their February 12 meeting listening to various staff members provide information and data from last school year, and applying it in a systematic way to plans for the future. The board received preliminary copies of both the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal school ratings and the state report cards. (This information will be mailed to all patrons in March.) Building principals presented the School Improvement Plans (SIP) developed by the staff and administration of each school.

Buildings needed

Maintenance Supervisor John Lewis reported that he has been working hard over the last year-and-a-half to keep the district's buildings in operation. However, Lewis said, he is "running out of Band-Aids" to hold the buildings together. He

strongly recommended that the board begin looking at new buildings. When Lewis compared the district's buildings to a car that is no longer worth the cost of repairs, board chairman Jim Krahn responded that continuing attempts to repair the buildings would "soon be like dumping money down a rat hole."

Krahn said that the board was well aware of the problem, but that efforts to pass a levy must be supported by the community. He also said there is a very supportive group of people willing to take on the effort.

Washington Grade School (WGS) and Vernonia High School (VHS) are the most in need of replacement, Lewis responded to a question from Joanie Jones. According to Krahn, Vernonia taxpayers were satisfied for many years because the district did not have a school bond. Unfortunately,

the district also did not adequately provide funding for maintenance or upgrade.

Concluding a general discussion on the inadequacy of the buildings to provide a good environment for education, Krahn said it is "the duty of everyone, as a citizen, to see that students have a high quality of education."

Report Cards

Superintendent Mike Funderburg gave the board a brief overview of 2003 state report cards. He reminded the board that very few adjustments were possible last school year. However, major changes in instruction and attendance policy have been implemented this year. The district, as a whole, met annual yearly progress (AYP) targets in 2003, but there is little correlation between AYP and state report cards. For example, Funderburg said, small

schools were far more likely to meet AYP goals than large schools, but large schools have far more teachers designated as highly qualified by NCLB, according to a study released in *The Oregonian*.

Funderburg reported that several problem areas had been identified and corrective actions have been taken. One consequence of raising expectations for student behavior and consistent enforcement of school policy was an increase in student referrals, which resulted in lower ratings in some areas of the report card, particularly at VHS. Funderburg said the board could expect to see improved ratings on next year's report card. He concluded by saying that the reports show that the district, overall, is making progress.

One area where all local schools have difficulty is attendance. WGS Principal Nate

Underwood and VHS Principal Curt Scholl told the board that parents generally believe that if a child has permission to stay home, the absence should be excused. However, the district places a very high value on attendance, based on research that consistently indicates that students need to be in school in order to be successful. Therefore, the district has very specific guidelines about what constitutes an excused absence. Funderburg told the board that

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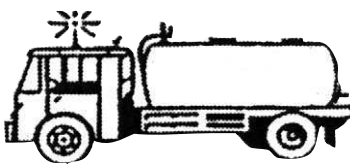
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