

Webster School board meets with Providence SBDM

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Before a relatively large crowd of Providence parents, teachers, and students, the Webster County Board of Education offered a show of praise and support for Providence Elementary following a series of presentations — which included a skit by the Providence Pep Squad — during the board's regular meeting Monday night.

Meeting in the Providence Elementary gymnasium, the Webster County school board heard several reports, talked with Providence Site-Based Decision Making Council, and approved several action items, including a series of change orders to the Webster County High School renovation project.

The change orders increase the project's total cost by nearly \$107,000, according to information provided during the meeting.

The change orders — eight in all — vary greatly in price, ranging from as high as about \$30,000 for storm drainage work to a roughly \$2,200 decrease for credits provided in some of the final work. Other change orders included in the packet submitted for board approval add:

- \$26,600 for a new entry at the end of an existing hallway;
- almost \$15,000 for relocation of a new two-hour fire wall; and
- almost \$27,000 for construction of new storm drainage and resurfacing of an asphalt drive.

Several smaller change orders focus on small repair or redesign jobs within the project.

The board seemed hesitant to provide a motion and second, but unanimously approved the list of change orders when the vote was taken. Prior to the vote, board members expressed concern about some of the items included.

"We're paying for something that should have been part of the architect's design," Webster County Board of Education Chairman James Nance said in discussing the change orders, before asking board members to approve the packet of items.

"I need a motion but it won't bother me if I don't get one," he said.

Other board members hesitated but did eventually propose and pass the motion to accept the change orders.

Earlier in the meeting, Providence SBDM members told the board the steps they are taking this year to improve student performance at the school, and pointed specifically to expanded services through the district's Trojan Academy program and higher attendance (94.5 percent) than in years' past.

"We've quit making excuses," said SBDM teacher member and Providence Elementary teacher Jennifer David. "That's the change in our reality."

SBDM council members and members of the community also expressed appreciation for Providence Elementary Principal Greg Bowles, who joined the staff this year. Bowles is the school's third principal in as many years, and the constant change in leadership has been cited as a concern by school officials in the past.

Along with the improved attendance, Providence staff said they are working to involve the community in the school more and continually looking for ways to establish ties between community members and students.

Following the presentation, board members each said they were pleased with how well the school was doing this year as part of the Webster County School District.

"I'm more impressed tonight than any night in the past," board vice-chairperson Lisa Preston told the group.

Former Providence Elementary teacher and current board member Sandi Jackson shared Preston's sentiment, saying she knew the transition would be difficult at times but that she believed the goal should be to "take control of the future."

"We're going to have roadblocks, but we're going to get through them," Jackson said.

Also making a presentation to the board was Webster County School District Director of Special Education Shelia Wheatley concerning the district's Response to Intervention and Student Intervention System programs. Wheatley discussed the programs' "tier" model and explained how students are selected to become a part of the intervention system, and what criteria are used to determine whether a student is considered to have completed the program, or if the student needs to be moved further along the tier system. Each tier increases the amount of additional tutoring focus and monitoring a student receives, and "Tier 4" is reserved for special education students.

Board member E Carolyn Tucker asked about what options parents have if they want their child to get more help than the tier level the child is in provides. Wheatley said such parents should work through the student's teacher, guidance counselor, and principal to resolve the issue.

Preston asked if the board could do more to help speed up the process of identifying at-risk students, to which Wheatley answered that it is up to the students' teachers, something that will continue to improve with time.

“We’ve gotten better at identifying students (who need the intervention programs),” she said. “Our percentage of special education students has dropped by 20 students.”

The board also approved a motion to reject all bids for the former Providence High School and surrounding facilities (see related story), as well as a series of action items “by consent,” including a field trip request for Clay Elementary student government, a resolution for the sale of used buses, acceptance of a “KETS first offer of assistance worth almost \$30,000,” a call for bids on standard insurance and bank depository policies, and the declaration of several district items as surplus. The board then approved a recommendation to split the junior high boys’ and girls’ track coach position into two separate positions, each worth half the pay of the previous single position, and reviewed a proposal concerning the implementation of a district code of conduct committee but didn’t take action on the proposal.

At the end of the meeting, the board went into closed session for the purpose of discussing pending litigation, and negotiations with a public employee. Webster County School District Superintendent James Kemp’s contract expires at the end of June, and the topic was an item of discussion listed on the board’s agenda. However, the board returned to open session with nothing to report, and adjourned.