



Teacher Employee Handbook Committee

Nov. 12 Meeting Summary

The following is a summary of what was discussed and considered at the Teacher Employee (previously certified staff) Handbook Committee meeting on Wednesday, Nov. 12. The 6-hour, 30-minute meeting was held in the DAC conference rooms.

Background

The minutes for the meeting held on Oct. 22 were approved. The committee's next meeting is scheduled for Dec. 2. Due to the length of the meeting, the video file size is too large to post to the District's YouTube Channel. If you are interested in getting a copy of the video, please contact Cheryl Janssen at 829-9004.

Handbook Process Completion Timeline

Superintendent Don Johnson reviewed the next steps in the process. He hopes the handbook can be completed by Dec. 3, a day after the next committee meeting. The Board of Education would then consider the handbook language at its meeting on Dec. 8 and possibly approve on Dec. 15. The committee could reconvene in March 2015 to consider items worth revisiting.

A committee member questioned if an issue needs immediate attention will the committee reconvene. Johnson said ultimately that is a Board decision but the goal would be to gather feedback from July to February each year and then reconvene the group every March. The goal would be to keep some continuity with committee members but he added, "We don't want to make it a death sentence." He also reminded committee members that there shouldn't need to be the need to meet as often after this first year.

Johnson also reviewed the timeline for the compensation committee. He discussed some models that are out there. "We're not going to create a system we can't support," he said, adding administration doesn't have a salary schedule template in mind. "We want to look at the options that are out there. ... I don't know that we have enough money to make a radical change."

He went over the proposed makeup of the committee. The meetings will be open to the public, and follow same format the teacher handbook committee did. He believes the best-case scenario for funding from the state legislature in the next biennial budget is \$75 per student and the worst-

case scenario is nothing. Meanwhile, two Board of Education members said a meeting they attended on Saturday made it sound like there might even be cuts to public education funding.

“What we think is sustainable right now might not be sustainable,” Ellen Lindgren said.

Johnson also said he has no desire to see the District take money from some employees to help others. He also pointed out some districts have used recurring referendums to fund salaries.

Special Education Licensure Pilot Update

Director of Student Services Jerry Nicholson said the pilot is taking staff in areas of surplus and moving them into areas of shortage. He said the idea is to find certified teachers who want to add special education to their certification and that informal interviews were done this week. The greatest shortage and most turnover is at MHS.

“I think the pilot and the types of people we will be putting in front of our special education students is absolutely the right thing to do,” he said.

Three staff members will participate in pilot and all three are OK with the opt-out option available. The District received 12 internal applications but not all of them met the requirements of the pilot. Participants will need 19 credits from Viterbo and Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services George Mavroulis said they should complete the program in two years or less. The District will pay for that and pilot participants would owe the District three years of service. If they leave the District before then, they would have to pay back a portion of that.

There was a question about the pilot becoming permanent. Johnson said staffing needs and feedback will play a role. He plans to a report back to the Board and said the District only has authorization to do the pilot for this year. He also keeping the program a pilot or having the teacher handbook and compensation committees evaluate the pilot makes sense.

Special Education Language Items Review

Nicholson suggested that he or other staff members particularly impacted don't have to be on the compensation committee but be asked to attend meetings where decisions impacting special education are being discussed. Johnson also said he would like that committee and the Board to look at stipends because it is all part of compensation so the District has to decide where and how that money is spent.

“I'm not saying we won't do it but that we look at that big picture,” Johnson said, adding he thinks it is important for other staff to understand what special education teachers are doing.

Nicholson said the District does receive money from Medicaid billing but also isn't aware of many districts that pay staff for this.

He heard feedback from staff and committee members and is recommending language that provides 225 minutes of preparation and contact time at all levels. Johnson asked him what

would happen if the District changes the bell times in 2015-16, especially if the length of the student day at the middle and high schools shortens. Elementary isn't expected to change, which would actually help close the gap between the levels, Nicholson said.

Nicholson is requesting that the District develop a Guide to Special Education. He said much of what would be included would be dictated by the state and DPI. It will spell out who does what form but he made it clear those forms do need to be done. He also recommended no changes to speech and language evaluation load and that staff can do up to 13. However, he wants language to reflect that they do their evaluations based on their assignments. They are usually in one building so he said it makes no sense to have them doing evaluations at multiple schools.

Review Items from Sections 1-3

2.01 District Expectations: A reference to Section 6 of the Handbook was added.

2.12 False Reports: The word "intentionally" was added to the Handbook language.

2.14 Gifts and Sale of Goods and Services: Johnson acknowledged different people will have different responses about gifts. Some might be bothered by \$5 and others won't be bothered by \$50. Mavroulis pointed out it really boils down to intending to influence. This isn't about taking away appreciation gifts, he said. If you feel uncomfortable, you should talk to your supervisor.

Johnson pointed out the District receives gift baskets during the holidays. Instead of taking it home or declining it and offending the business, he takes it to the staff lounge. He also turns down free tickets because the perception is it might influence a decision. "I'm trying to eliminate a possible issue," he said.

There was a question about why gifts are figured out on a per student basis and asked that an example be included. It was pointed out that a teacher might receive a gift worth \$250 but it was from all 25 students in the class so it is really only \$10 per student. That is acceptable.

Items for Additional Research/Discussion

5.08 Temporary Contract: Director of Employee Services Tabatha Gundrum said the language is the same that was in the old contract, although some language was deleted. The intent is someone who goes from a temporary contract to a permanent contract will get credit for seniority and temporary time will count toward their probationary time.

6.03 Non-renewal due to reduction in force, position and hours: Gundrum said there isn't an option to do a layoff so the language must reflect a non-renewal. The handbook blends past language used in contracts with what has been used with support staff. She went over the steps for selection of reduction: attrition, volunteers, involuntary transfer – pointing out the District isn't going to hire from the outside and force a staff member out -- and selection of reduction.

Johnson pointed out that as a growing district we don't usually have this issue. But he also said it has happened at MHS in elective courses when fewer students enroll. Another example is when

an elementary teacher needs to move to a different grade from one year to the next due to one grade being much larger in numbers than another.

There were concerns voiced about requiring staff members to interview and if seniority isn't as important as it was in the past. Johnson said he wasn't concerned if the interview was formal or informal or even a talk, but he believes having a discussion between building supervisors and staff is important. He also wanted to stress the District won't hire anyone externally until all plans have been finalized internally.

Mavroulis said the fundamental question is if there is a reduction because of enrollment does the most senior teacher get to pick where they go or does the District decide knowing that they everyone will have a position. He also pointed out there may be other teachers who want that same position who aren't impacted by reduction so that could have more implications. Seniority is also not based on years at one building but across the entire district.

There was a concern voiced by some staff about having to interview for an internal position and that seniority was seen as a perk they had earned. A committee member also pointed out that with the pilot the internal candidates didn't do a formal interview but did get a chance to talk about it and feel good.

Gundrum went over language related to reduction in hours, insurance benefits and accrued benefits and none of that language was debated.

A committee member suggested trying to find a way to give senior teachers more options and another feared losing this might result in teachers leaving the District. Johnson said it appears there are philosophical differences on this language and may need to just take different proposals to the Board.

6.04 Discipline & Discharge

Johnson said administration didn't make any changes to the original handbook or the contract but teachers had some language suggestions. A committee member was worried about adding other offenses that aren't enumerated because staff fear repercussions. Johnson was worried that by taking that out it would limit discipline or discharge to just the items listed but Gundrum said that wasn't the case because of the language at the start of No. 3. Item will be struck.

6.05-6.06: Resolution of Differences and Staff Complaints and Grievances

There was discussion about being able to skip steps. A committee member asked where binding arbitration fell in the past. Johnson said it came after the decision by the superintendent and the Board wasn't involved in the past. Now, an independent hearing officer (IHO) will be part of the grievance process now. If either side doesn't like their decision, they can appeal to the Board, which would make the final decision.

Paul Kinne pointed out there are still laws that the Board must follow so courts are still available if discrimination occurs. There was a question about why the IHO isn't mentioned in the handbook and Gundrum clarified it is spelled out in the Board Grievance Policy.

There was a long discussion about the language related to "person" and should it be "representative." Johnson said he is fine with someone having counsel or getting advice but doesn't want to have someone there who allows the person being questioned not to answer questions (ex. "I'm not talking. I will let my lawyer answer for me.") Kinne said he doesn't believe it matters which word is used and that 99 percent of the time the employee would want to get this resolved and will want to answer questions. A compromise was to change person to advocate. It was also suggested changing wording to advocate in other parts of this section.

MEA Distribution of Printed Material

Johnson provided updated language. A committee member asked if materials could be placed on a bulletin board. Johnson said no because the District would have to offer it to other groups. There was also a question if working conditions information could be placed on a working condition bulletin board although another member pointed out e-mail could be used for that. A public bulletin board at each school was suggested.

4.05 and 5.17 Pay for Presentation Time

Mavroulis said the District agreed with teacher's recommendation. The work must be pre-approved and the new language reflects options for outside and inside the normal workday.

Pay for Elementary Recess Duty

Johnson said the District will go back to paying \$11 per recess, although staff will still get paid at \$28 an hour until approved by the Board. Staff will then receive back pay. Instructions will come from employee services about how staff should do it moving forward. It had been capped at \$22 a day in the past but no school has more than two recesses a day now so that isn't an issue.

Overloads

Administration wants to recommend to the Board overloads be based on 100 percent rather than the old 70 percent. However, this won't happen if the Board decides the District can't afford to do this. No objections were raised.

Teaching Hours

Gundrum went over language changes to high school and middle school work day. Fifth-grade language was also added into middle school work day. Johnson provided some background on the District's desire to look at bell times and improve them if possible. Mavroulis said if the schedule changes the language would need to change. As a result, George proposed that it should say there are two periods of planning/preparation time for fifth-grade teachers rather than a certain amount of time.

There was a discussion about inequalities of middle school schedule. Core teachers have academic resource while encore have supervision. Some teachers have two students in academic resource and others have 10. The dilemma is how can the District make it better for staff.

Special Sections Load

Mavroulis talked about now there is a range of how many sections elementary special teachers have to teach. The District tried to create a system this year where there was no FTE increase. As a result there are 5.0 elementary teachers in art, music, tech enrichment and just under 10 in physical education. He believes now is the time for the committee to determine the definition of full time. He suggested adding language that says special teachers may be assigned resource/supervision time equal to the number of classes needed to be 1.0 FTE. Mavroulis said the District has tried to avoid sending one teacher to three schools.

Next year's fourth-grade students will have a second recess, just like all of the other elementary students, which means average instructional day in minutes is 295 at that level. He suggested ranger of sections for encore teachers.

Johnson said he was asked by one art teacher if they could just work part-time at one school because they don't want to travel to a second school. Mavroulis also said elementary principals have recommended having teachers travel during the day between buildings, which might provide more flexibility and better schedules. He said the challenges include travel and paying more for travel if teachers work half-day in one building and half-day in another in 2015-16. He also reminded everyone there were 5.7 art teachers at the elementary level in 2012-13 but this year moved 0.7 to middle school to serve fifth-graders.

There was a question if could make everyone a 1.0 at each school and no travel. George said that would require about four more full-time teachers to be hired, one in each area, which works out to about a \$300,000 budget impact.

A committee member said she has talked with special teachers who think 24 or 48 sections is reasonable. If short, could then still get assigned resource or supervision time. Another member asked if staff who travel should work that many sections. Mavroulis said there have been discussions about not having any teacher work at just one school, which would balance out things. There was also a question about having specials teach the same grades (ex. 3-4) to limit the number of preps and Mavroulis said that is being discussed, too.

Johnson asked the committee to think this over, talk with teachers and try to come up with a solution at the December meeting.

Previous Teacher Experience

Johnson said salary adjustments have been made in low supply-high demand areas, such as tech ed, math, and world languages). He understands teachers' concerns, but he wondered what does the District do if can't have the flexibility to hire a teacher in a shortage area.