

**MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 28, 2025
REGULAR MEETING OF THE
WASHOE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

January 28, 2025

1. Opening Items

1.01 CEREMONIAL SWEARING-IN OF NEWLY APPOINTED TRUSTEE

James (JJ) Phoenix received the oath of office from Arlan Melendez.

1.02 CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Board of Trustees was called to order at 2:04 p.m. in the Board Room of the Central Administration Building, located at 425 East Ninth Street in Reno, Nevada.

1.03 ROLL CALL

President Beth Smith and Trustees Christine Hull, Adam Mayberry, Diane Nicolet, James Phoenix, Colleen Westlake, and Alex Woodley were present. Superintendent Joe Ernst, Student Representative Annie Batavia, and staff were also present.

1.04 PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Trustee Phoenix led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance.

1.05 LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

President Smith read the land acknowledgement.

2. Consent Agenda

President Smith provided comments on Consent Agenda Item 2.04. She pointed out that the district had to submit variance requests for the state mandated class sizes in grades K-3 because the state did not fund to those class sizes. She hoped the state would begin funding to their mandated class sizes.

Trustees Mayberry and Westlake provided comments on Consent Agenda Item 2.12. They thanked staff for working with Sierra Nevada Academy Charter School to come to a resolution on the length of their charter renewal.

It was moved by Trustee Woodley and seconded by Trustee Westlake that **the Board of Trustees approves Consent Agenda Items 2.02 through 2.12.** The result of the vote was Unanimous: (Yea: Christine Hull, Adam Mayberry, Diane Nicolet, James Phoenix, Beth Smith, Colleen Westlake, and Alex Woodley.) Final Resolution: Motion Carries.

- 2.02 The Board of Trustees approved the following appointments of members of the Board to non-Washoe County School District public bodies and committees for 2025: Christine Hull to the Washoe County Debt Management Commission; Colleen Westlake to the Nevada Association of School Boards Board of Directors; Diane Nicolet to the Nevada Association of School Boards Executive Committee; Adam Mayberry as an alternate to the Nevada Association of School Boards; and Beth Smith to the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Governing Board.
- 2.03 The Board of Trustees approved the agreement with Lexia Learning Systems, LLC for the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) to purchase professional learning for \$69,112 funded with Title IIa grant funding.
- 2.04 The Board of Trustees approved the 2nd quarter Fiscal Year 2024-25 average daily attendance and pupil-teacher ratios for grades K-3 report to be filed with the Nevada Department of Education.
- 2.05 The Board of Trustees awarded Bid #25-30-B-11-DA, Gym Sound System Replacement at North Valleys High School and Spanish Springs High School, to Valley Communications, Inc. in the amount of \$256,622.86.
- 2.06 The Board of Trustees approved Change Order #1 to Bid #24-46-B-12-AA, Replacement of Roof at Natchez Elementary School, to Bruce Purves Construction, Inc. in the amount of \$105,467.91.
- 2.07 The Board of Trustees approved the additional dual credit courses with the University of Nevada, Reno.
- 2.08 The Board of Trustees directed the Superintendent to conduct a compensation review process through the Office of Human Resources for the Chief Internal Auditor and to return to the Board with a recommendation.

- 2.09 The Board of Trustees approved the award of Request for Bid (RFB) #42-B-09-25-AC, District-Wide Water Treatment Services, to Global Water Technology, Inc. in the estimated amount of \$177,934.30 for an initial term of 2 years beginning January 29, 2025 and ending January 28, 2027, with three optional 1-year renewals.
- 2.10 The Board of Trustees awarded Bid #25-29-B-11-DA, Tennis Court Reconstruction at Robert McQueen High School, to West Coast Paving, Inc. in the amount of \$677,700.
- 2.11 The Board of Trustees approved the Independent Contract Agreement with RMC for the evaluation of the United States Department of Education Native Youth Community Project in the amount of \$210,000 for the 2025 School Year through the 2027 School Year.
- 2.12 The Board of Trustees approved the Charter Renewal Agreement with Sierra Nevada Academy Charter School for 5 years.

3. Items for Presentation, Discussion, Information and/or Action

3.01 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE ALIGNMENT OF THE ACADEMICS ORGANIZATION FOR THE 2025-26 SCHOOL YEAR TO ADOPT A TARGETED APPROACH TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUPPORT OF THE DISTRICT'S STRATEGIC PLAN

Joe Ernst, Superintendent, provided a presentation on the changes to the academic organization of the Washoe County School District that would be implemented for the 2025-26 School Year. One of his priorities after becoming superintendent was to conduct a comprehensive review of the organization and to determine if changes needed to occur to best support opportunities for students and increase efficiencies. The organizational model review process was discussed. The realignment of the academic organization side of the district was consistent with the priorities in the strategic plan and superintendent. Senior staff believed the changes would provide focused leadership and long-term stability that would support academic success. The new academic organizational model was reviewed. The changes would result in a reduction of central office staff and corresponding increases in site-based resource availability through the streamlining of services and reduced bureaucracy.

President Smith asked if there would be a reduction of existing staff with the changes. Mr. Ernst stated there was not a reduction of existing staff, but a realignment of duties

and responsibilities. The changes were done in coordination and collaboration with executive leadership team members.

3.02 MILESTONES AND MOMENTUM PRESENTATION TO PROVIDE THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AN OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS MADE ON STRATEGIC PLAN PILLARS

Dr. Paul LaMarca, Chief Student and Family Supports Officer, Dr. Troy Parks, Chief Academic Officer, and Doug Owen, Chief Human Resources Officer, provided the Milestones and Momentum presentation on the following aspects of the strategic plan: Beam – Safety and Connection; Pillar A – Consistent Standards-Aligned Curriculum and Instruction; Pillar B – Strong Partnerships Among Families, Community and School; Pillar C – Commitment to Elevating Educators; and Pillar D – Culture of Excellence and Accountability. The pillars provided how the district would achieve the goals of the strategic plan. Examples of work occurring related to each pillar was presented, including the adoption of new curricula, changes to English Language instruction and supports, chronic absenteeism, School of Choice, community partnerships, Native American education, decreasing vacancies, professional learning, and site-specific data dashboards.

President Smith and the Trustees expressed their appreciation for the information on successes and improvements in the district. They were impressed with the progress made under each of the pillars.

3.03 PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION, AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO ACCEPT THE PREK-8 STUDY AND TO PROVIDE DIRECTION TO THE SUPERINTENDENT TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROCEED WITH NEW PREK-5 FACILITIES ON THE CURRENT EDWARD L. PINE MIDDLE SCHOOL AND FRED W. TRANER MIDDLE SCHOOL CAMPUSES

Adam Searcy, Chief Operating Officer, Paul Mills, CannonDesign, Lauren Ford, Lead Secondary Associate Chief, and Dr. Mike Paul, Lead Elementary Associate Chief, presented the findings of the PreK-8 study. Included in the presentation was background information on the purpose of the study, the process and timeline used for the study, the findings, and the recommendations from the study. The study came out of the Facility Modernization Plan (FMP) to determine if a PreK-8 or PreK-5 model would be appropriate on certain campuses within the district to provide a higher degree of equity and efficiency for some schools located primarily within the McCarran Ring. The process used for the study was similar to the process used in the development of the FMP. It was determined the PreK-8 model had merit for future consideration, but the model was not being recommended at the present; however, the recommendation included keeping options open to add onto the PreK-5 design for the PreK-8 model.

Superintendent Ernst thanked staff for the presentation. He appreciated the forethought to provide options for the Board and district to consider in the face of declining enrollment. He emphasized that the plan took into account the feedback from the community and allowed for flexibility. He clarified that the recommendation would be to construct a PreK-5 school on the current Edward L. Pine Middle School campus, which would house the current Smithridge Elementary School located across the street and potentially other elementary schools.

President Smith wondered if there was a plan in place to ensure all potential communities that could be impacted by the opening of the new school had the opportunity to participate in the process and offer feedback. Mr. Searcy reviewed the next steps in the process, which would begin once the new E. Otis Vaughn Middle School opened so the current Edward L. Pine Middle School could be closed. It would not be until the fall of 2028 that possible school attendance zones would be discussed by the Zoning Advisory Committee. Once a recommendation was made by the Zoning Advisory Committee, an agenda item would be brought to the Board for final approval at least a full school year in advance of any changes. The current and subsequent agenda items were providing notice to the community surrounding Edward L. Pine Middle School that there would be changes in the next few years.

Trustee Westlake asked if there would be impacts to school transportation. Mr. Searcy reviewed the possible transportation impacts if Edwin Dodson Elementary School were to be included in the new elementary school, but those were the types of questions the Zoning Advisory Committee considered when they made their recommendations. It was important to note that in school trade-up or consolidation situations there would likely be transportation costs the district would have to work through.

President Smith opened the meeting to public comment.

Mike Dixon, Principal, Smithridge Elementary School, thanked everyone for the presentation. He appreciated the time the team spent with Smithridge Elementary School community to explain how the new Edward L. Pine Middle School mentioned in the FMP would impact his families because that was not clear to them. He explained he could not support a PreK-8 model for that area of the community because of safety and instruction. He was excited over the prospect of a new school campus for the area.

Antonio Angulo was a parent at Smithridge Elementary School. He thanked district staff and CannonDesign for hosting meetings for the community because it helped people understand the new education model and listening to families regarding their safety concerns for a PreK-8 model. He urged the Board and district to continue to work with the community on safety concerns and other topics.

Pablo Nava Duran expressed his support for the agenda item. He thanked everyone for listening to the community and recommending a PreK-5 model. He looked forward to the process of opening a new elementary school in the area.

Calen Evans, Washoe Education Association, thanked CannonDesign and district leadership for including staff in the decision-making process. He indicated that with the new phase of the FMP starting, it would be important to begin conversations on what the district should do with the existing buildings when there were school consolidations. He provided some examples of what other school districts were doing related to affordable housing for staff, which was part of the recruitment and retention process. He looked forward to continuing conversations.

The Board received emails from Elyse Hansen and Brooke Kimber related to this item.

It was moved by Trustee Hull and seconded by Trustee Westlake that **the Board of Trustees accepts the PreK-8 Study and directs the Superintendent to implement the recommendations herein.** The result of the vote was Unanimous: (Yea: Christine Hull, Adam Mayberry, Diane Nicolet, James Phoenix, Beth Smith, Colleen Westlake, and Alex Woodley.) Final Resolution: Motion Carries.

3.04 PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION, AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO PROVIDE DIRECTION TO THE SUPERINTENDENT TO INITIATE THE TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF EDWARD L. PINE MIDDLE SCHOOL IN ACCORDANCE WITH ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION 7087 AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 2026-27 SCHOOL YEAR FOR THE PURPOSES OF RECONSTRUCTING A PREK-5 FACILITY AT THAT LOCATION

Adam Searcy, Chief Operating Officer, explained the agenda item was an extension of the previous item. The intent was to provide clear direction and information to the community on the plan to construct a PreK-5 facility on the current Edward L. Pine Middle School location. The school would be temporarily closed to construct the new facility at the start of the 2026-27 School Year.

President Smith hoped the district would be reaching out to all potential communities that could be attending the new school so they could be involved in the design process. She wanted to ensure their voices were included in the decision-making process. Mr. Searcy indicated there would be multiple opportunities for families and school communities to be involved in the process.

Trustee Hull felt it would be appropriate to involve the School Naming Committee because multiple school communities would be part of the new school.

Trustee Mayberry asked if the design would be similar to the new elementary school design the district had been using for the past few years. Mr. Searcy remarked that there might be a unique opportunity at the site to repurpose different aspects of the current building, but that would be part of the design process. The school would have all current educational specifications of the new schools.

President Smith opened the meeting to public comment.

Pablo Nava Duran mentioned he had attended Edward L. Pine Middle School so he was sad to see that the district would be closing the school; however, he understood the importance of providing new opportunities for the community and would support the agenda item. He was concerned about possible attendance zone changes for the area.

It was moved by Trustee Mayberry and seconded by Trustee Phoenix that **the Board of Trustees directs the Superintendent to initiate a temporary closure of Edward L. Pine Middle School in accordance with Administrative Regulation 7087, at the beginning of the 2026-27 School Year with the anticipation that it reopen as a Prek-5 facility at the beginning of the 2028-29 School Year.**

The result of the vote was Unanimous: (Yea: Christine Hull, Adam Mayberry, Diane Nicolet, James Phoenix, Beth Smith, Colleen Westlake, and Alex Woodley.) Final Resolution: Motion Carries.

President Smith recessed the meeting for 15 minutes.

3.05 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ON THE GUINN CENTER REPORT, EXAMINING SCHOOL FUNDING IN NEVADA: EQUITY IN EDUCATION AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS, WHICH OFFERS AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF NEVADA'S NEW PUPIL-CENTERED FUNDING PLAN

Jill Tolles, Executive Director, The Guinn Center, and Dr. Anna Colquitt, Director of Education Policy, The Guinn Center, provided a presentation on The Guinn Center's report of the Pupil-Centered Funding Plan (PCFP). Information on how school funding worked under the PCFP, including the base per pupil funding and any additional or weighted funding a student might qualify for. A student could only receive additional funding under one weight, even though schools provided students who qualified for multiple weights all the services they qualified for. Additional information on how special education funding was allocated was provided.

President Smith expressed frustration that school districts did not receive additional funding for all weights a student could qualify for. She highlighted that within the Washoe County School District, over \$20 million was spent out of the General Fund to provide the additional services the state did not fund.

Dr. Colquitt continued with the presentation with information on At-Risk students and the challenges related to how they were defined. Comparisons in funding between all school districts in Nevada were shown. The findings related to the various analyses conducted as part of the PCFP were presented. Some of the things learned included that school funding in Nevada was still not adequate, even though huge strides were made with the PCFP; equitable distribution of funds remained a challenge; there were challenges in the funding following the student; and the pandemic intensified student and family needs, which put additional strain on school resources. Proposed policy considerations for the Nevada Legislature from the study were reviewed.

President Smith asked what the national per pupil average was for student funding. Dr. Colquitt stated the national per pupil average was around \$17,000, with the recommended average for adequate school funding per pupil at \$17,500. The Nevada average for per pupil funding, if weighted funds were included, was about \$13,000. The base per-pupil funding was slightly under \$9,000.

Trustee Nicolet wondered if there were ways to improve the process of the funding following the student. Dr. Colquitt indicated that communication between the schools and central office on the needs of the students was critical. It was difficult for money to follow the student when all weights were not funded because the school districts had to draw the money for programming from somewhere when resources needed to be shared. She noted that better education on the PCFP for school administrators would help so they understood the process and what was supposed to happen.

President Smith inquired if the information was being shared with legislators. Ms. Tolles remarked that The Guinn Center had conducted forums when the study was first released. They would also be providing presentations to committees and caucuses on all the studies conducted by The Guinn Center.

Superintendent Ernst thanked Ms. Tolles and Dr. Colquitt for the presentation. He appreciated the objective way the study was conducted and how the information was provided to all the school districts in Nevada.

3.06 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ON THE PRIORITIES OF THE WASHOE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FOR THE 2025 NEVADA LEGISLATIVE SESSION BASED ON THE APPROVED LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM, TO INCLUDE SUCH ITEMS AS PRE-FILED BILLS THAT COULD IMPACT THE DISTRICT AND GOVERNOR LOMBARDO'S STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS RELATED TO EDUCATIONAL MATTERS

Dylan Shaver, Pinyon Public Affairs, provided a presentation on the up-coming 2025 Nevada Legislative Session. The Washoe County School District Legislative Platform was reviewed and how it would be used during the session explained. The platform

laid out the priorities of the district, which was to support the local community and empower our personnel, while creating space for students to thrive and, by necessity, advocate for smart, strategic funding. Additional topics Pinyon would focus on included ways to reclaim time for instruction, shepherding the district's bill through the legislative process, and finding opportunities to create parity between public schools and charter schools. The internal and external processes used to review bills was explained. The priorities of Governor Lombardo versus the Democratic leadership in the Legislature were highlighted. Information on the Governor's budget and the conversations the Legislature would likely have related to school funding were provided, but there were numerous unknowns at the present time.

President Smith wondered if the district had ever tried to quantify the human resource value of legislation. Mr. Shaver mentioned Pinyon and the district did work on providing such information to legislators during the 2023 Legislative Session and would continue to do so because it was important for legislators to understand the time implications tasks took on staff.

Trustee Nicolet remarked that it would be beneficial if the Trustees were provided a bill tracker update on a regular basis during the session so they would have an idea of the work occurring and what they should be informed about. Superintendent Ernst indicated staff would have a conversation on the best ways for that to occur.

Trustee Mayberry asked if there were other topics, aside from education, that looked as though they could dominate the conversations during the session. Mr. Shaver remarked that there were a few competing measures that were leading a lot of conversations, including film production incentive packages, the struggle over the budget, and mental health related issues.

President Smith inquired if there were any initial thoughts on the district's bill, Assembly Bill (AB) 49. Mr. Shaver commented that there was positive interest from other school districts, legislators, and the Nevada Department of Education. There will likely be the need to consider some changes, but any proposed amendments would be reviewed by district staff to ensure they remained true to the intent of the bill.

President Smith asked if there was any interest from legislators to back the findings of The Guinn Center's report and fund all weights a student might be included in. Mr. Shaver noted there was interest from legislators; however, the challenge was how that would occur and what would need to be given up to allow such funding to happen. He would continue having the conversations with legislators, so they understood the importance of fully funding education.

4. Reports

4.01 STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

Student Representative Annie Batavia reported on activities related to the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council.

4.02 BOARD REPORTS

Members of the Board of Trustees reported on their activities, meetings, and events.

4.03 SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Superintendent Joe Ernst reported on his activities including meetings with staff, community leaders, and the media.

5. Closing Items

5.01 PUBLIC COMMENT

Sandee Tibbett spoke about transparency in government. She talked about the records she had requested related to the recent appointment to fill the vacancy in District C. She wondered if it was proper and appropriate for the Trustees to meet with individual candidates and if those meetings should be disclosed. She noted that President Smith had such conversations with one of the candidates and that the information should have been disclosed prior to any votes taken.

John Eppolito spoke of the amount of student data collected by "free" education technology vendors. He claimed the district had not informed parents that one of the vendors they used was purchased by a Chinese company. He wondered what had happened to all the student data after the company shut down and if it was ever deleted. He believed the Chinese were merging all the data they had from various apps to create profiles that would be of interest by employers, military recruiters, and others. He argued that Infinite Campus had more information on students than anyone else and that the Chinese could purchase it so they could then have the information.

Michelle Scaduto was a special education teacher in the district. She thanked the Board for their support of the education community. She talked about the work she and her colleagues did for 25 high school students with varying abilities and disabilities. She explained how she worked with her general education colleagues to adapt curriculum and lessons to support all students. She provided additional information on the other duties she was required to do throughout the day in support of special education students.

Terresa Anderson was a 1:1 special education aide in the district. She spoke of the work she was required to do throughout the day to support a student with cerebral palsy, including assisting with taking notes during classes, ensuring assignments were turned in, changing diapers, and helping the student use a walker more throughout the day. She explained some of the challenges she faced ensuring she was constantly available to assist her student and the need for her to find a second job to cover expenses.

Heather Deriso was a special education teacher in the district. She worked in elementary school and expressed how passionate she was about working with special education students. She provided examples of highlights she had with the students and their families, but also wanted to let the Board know of some of the challenges teachers and aides throughout the district were facing related to special education needs. She spoke of the high case loads teachers faced and the additional needs placed on schools. She wanted to ensure special education teachers and aides were fully supported.

Alexandra Fuetsch was a strategies teacher in the district. She spoke of the need for additional special education teachers and lack of funding. She noted there were over 50 special education teacher and aide positions currently open in the district. She spoke of how the higher case loads and work were leading to educator burnout. She mentioned it was critical to provide a competitive, livable wage and benefits to attract and retain professionals, as well as reducing class sizes.

Dr. Laurie Henderson was a PreK strategies teacher in the district. She thanked the Board for their continued support of education but wanted to speak of the challenges faced by teachers and aides in self-contained special education classrooms. She explained how it was difficult for students to receive the individual support they needed to succeed without proper staffing. She provided examples of additional challenges she faced on a daily basis.

Michele Haugen was one of the district's representatives to the Nevada Department of Education's Commission on Professional Standards and a special education teacher in the district. She spoke of why she worked in special education and the challenges she had faced over the past few years. She explained the higher class sizes were frustrating because she spent more time trying to keep students safe rather than teaching them what they needed to know for kindergarten. She urged the Board to look at class sizes and the need to pay aides and assistants more for the support they provided special education teachers and students.

Nickie Pitts spoke on behalf of Amy Jacobs, who was a special education teacher in the district. Ms. Jacobs wrote of the work she did as a special education teacher and the challenges she faced teaching students who had low visual abilities or were blind. She included information on the specialized instruction she provided students, which was

challenging because there were no state or district guidelines on what should be taught to students who were blind or visually impaired. She believed there were opportunities to improve and hoped to be included in the conversations to provide information and guidance on what the district could do to support student success.

Danniel Reynoso was an educational support professional in a strategies classroom in the district. He spoke of his work with his student and how he assisted his student in life goals they would need to succeed. He added that he always tried to assist other students and educators because many were overwhelmed with the increased caseloads. He mentioned that many other support professionals did the same because they cared and believed in their students; however, they were not compensated fairly for the work they did every day. He hoped the Board would look for opportunities to provide better pay and benefits for paraprofessionals in the district.

Colin Robertson, Nevada Museum of Art, thanked everyone for the work they did in the district because it made him proud to send his children to school in Washoe County. He mentioned he had previously provided the Board with information on a new exhibit at the museum on Ichthyosaurs. He noted the museum had hosted 84 different classes to view the exhibit since September and provided additional in class lessons to 800 more students. He provided additional information on the educational work of the museum and thanked the Board and district for the support.

The Board received emails from Kristen De Haan and Bernadette Godfrey.

5.02 NEXT MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

The next Regular Meeting would take place on Tuesday, February 11, 2025.

5.03 ADJOURN MEETING

There being no further business to come before the members of the Board, President Smith declared the meeting adjourned at 6:19 p.m.

Elizabeth Smith, President

Alex Woodley, Clerk

From: Hansen, Elyse
Sent: Sunday, January 26, 2025 3:30 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Pine/Trainer

I would like the board members to know I DO NOT believe a PK-8 model is a good idea for Pine or Trainer. Middle school age children do not belong on a school campus with PK students. My main concerns are safety, behavior, and exposure to things that are not developmentally appropriate. I also worry that the administrative jobs would be too much for 1 principal. Please follow recommendation and DO NOT approve a PK-8.

Thank you

Elyse Hansen

Sent from my T-Mobile 4G LTE Device
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: Kimber, Brooke
Sent: Tuesday, January 28, 2025 8:48 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Public Comment for 1/28/2025

Board Members and WCSD Community,


I would like to voice my opinion on the PK-8 model and the K-5 model for the Pine/Smithridge area. I do not believe that the PK-8 model is a right fit for the Smithridge/Pine community. My number one reason being safety. Young students should not be mixed in the same building as older students. This model would potentially have 3-4 year olds in the same building as potential 13 year olds. Safety in schools needs to be our number one priority and splitting these age groups alleviates any unnecessary exposure to violence, drugs, weapons, etc. that our preteens are unfortunately exposed to and grapple with themselves.

I would like to voice my opinion on the models for the K-5 school residing in a renovated Pine building. I think that this would be the best and most appropriate option for this area of town. Smithridge is one of the oldest schools, with many structural challenges, little landscaping and HVAC issues that students and staff have faced over the years. This neighborhood is well past due for an upgraded campus. Renovating the current Pine building to be turned into an elementary school is a great way to utilize what is already established in this neighborhood. I also believe that widening the zones to include Dodson and potentially Donnor Springs will add to and provide a diverse community within this new school.

Thank you for exploring all of these options and making the best decisions for our most precious and vulnerable students in WCSD,

Kindly,
A dedicated WCSD teacher and mother of a WCSD student,
Brooke Kimber

From: kristenirene
Sent: Tuesday, January 28, 2025 8:52 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: [EXTERNAL] General Public Comment - The Importance of Paraprofessionals

 External Email: This email originated outside of WCSD. Please exercise caution. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Board of Trustees and Superintendent Ernst,

I am sorry I am not there in person. I have an IEP meeting for one of my students.

My name is Kristen De Haan and I am a member of the WEA and the Social Resource teacher at Moss Elementary School. I am writing to share my heartfelt support of paraprofessionals.

Paraprofessionals are the absolute backbone of special education. In special programs (of which Social Resource is one), it is extraordinarily challenging to effectively do all we do without our paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals support their teachers as well as their students. They work with students, they help to collect data, they provide individual support, they help to regulate students, they help to teach students, and they support them when they are escalated (in the yellow or red zone if you know zones of regulation) and when they are low (in the blue zone). Paraprofessionals support students with diverse needs. They assist and support teachers. They contribute to overall school success.

Before I became a teacher, I was a substitute for about 13 years. I often worked in special programs, usually in the developmental pre-k class or early childhood strategies class at Spanish Springs Elementary School. The assistants and aides in those programs helped me so much. They helped me run circle time, knew where everything was, which students went on which buses, and which students were picked up. They knew who needed what and when.

In 2015, I was a long-term substitute in a Strategies Pre-K class. When I started there, I let my assistant and aides know that I understood that they knew their students, the routines, and the needs of each student. I needed their help and support. We were a team. Period. They changed diapers, took data, helped calm students, and helped with the routine. I also changed diapers because I felt (and still feel) I should not expect my assistant and aides to do anything I wasn't willing to do as well - and sometimes, my hands were the ones that were free to do the diapering.

Social Resource is a self-contained special education program. However, students are typically in their general education classroom with Tier 1 instruction and their peers 75-85% of their day. This typically means that they have group with me for 1/2 hour daily. Sometimes the assistant is with me during group to help keep students on task (especially when I have younger students). Throughout the day they also do walk throughs. This entails going into classrooms to support students (and collect data). Sometimes this means reminding them of the tools and strategies they know to calm themselves, sometimes it is just to be a support in the room, sometimes it is to give students a break when they need it. We are in and out of

classrooms most of the day. When I am with a group, if another student needs support, it is one of my assistants who go to the classroom and help them.

When I became the social resource teacher at Drake Elementary School, Julia Petersen was my assistant. She had worked previously as an aide in the Strategies SIP (a program, along with CLS SIP, that is sorely missed in WCSD) and then became an aide in Social Resource. After a few years, she became the assistant in the program. You have no idea how lucky I felt to have her with me when I became the Social Resource teacher. Julia had connections with each of our students and was able to help me know their likes, dislikes, and some of the ways to best support them. She knew the routines of the program which helped when I started and as we created our own routines with the students, she was right there to support me. She knew how to collect data which is imperative for progress monitoring where students are with their goals and objectives. She and I would discuss different ideas to better support our students. Honestly, the ways in which she supported me and the students in the program are too many to enumerate.

When the district moved my program to Moss Elementary, Paige Bray became my assistant. Again, I have an incredible assistant who understands our students, who knows how to support them and me as well. She was new to the district and learned quickly all that the job entailed. We went from three students to six students in a matter of months. Some of our students had very challenging behaviors. Paige worked just as hard as I did to build positive relationships with each student. There were, and still are, times when students needed to be in a space without other students around. Paige and I have taken CPI (crisis prevention intervention) training together for the past 3 years. This program is helpful in de-escalating students and Paige does it well.

This year we began the year with 12 students. I run four groups throughout the day. That is a total of two hours when I am with groups while Paige and/or my new assistant, Janet Esparza, are conducting walkthroughs and supporting the students who are not in group at that time. Janet was new to the district and needed to hit the ground running.

Twelve students might not sound like a lot to some people, but when each student has their own set of needs, challenges, behaviors, etc., it is, indeed, a lot. My assistants do so much to support each student. They are working with students (ours and other students in the classroom) all day. When I am absent, I know that my students are in good hands because Paige and Janet are there. They are the ones running group in my absence (unless I am lucky enough to have a substitute who already knows my students and program). They support the substitute and the students. They get the students to the buses and to the parent pickup. They know who needs a gentle prompt and who needs a more direct one. They know who will need extra support because there is a big change in their day.

Paraprofessionals are truly the backbone of special education. Paraprofessionals do not make nearly enough for all the work they do. They deserve a living wage. They deserve health insurance. They deserve incredible respect from everyone. I am a better teacher because of all the support I receive from my assistants. Special education students and many general education students receive support from paraprofessionals. Our entire district is better because of the paraprofessionals we employ. If we can provide them with the living wage they deserve, more paraprofessionals will fill the many empty positions. I want our district to support our paraprofessionals as much as paraprofessionals support our district. They deserve adequate compensation and recognition for all they do.

Thank you for reading my public comment. Again, I apologize for not being there in person.

Respectfully,
Kristen De Haan

From: Godfrey, Bernadette A
Sent: Tuesday, January 28, 2025 3:18 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Strategies Programs

Dear Board of Trustees,

First off, I want to thank you for your time and opportunity to share my experiences and challenges that we face as special educators in the Washoe County School District. I have been working for the WCSD, in the strategies program, going on 8 years now. I have worked in a Title 1 elementary, regular elementary, and middle school environment. I am also a mom of three with one child diagnosed with ADHD.

I am writing today to draw your attention to the fact that strategies programs change every year, for the staff as well as the students. According to the National Autism Association, autism has climbed to 1 in every 36 children in the United States. Strategies programs are supposed to max out at 8 students, due to how challenging our job is, but at schools like Virginia Palmer Elementary, they started with 20 students and 2 programs. Each term I have been given a new student as the programs that surround my school fill up. This creates inconsistency for the students, staff and families.

As I build relationships with these students and families, I know that their placement is never secured due to programs being over full. Consistency is everything for these kids. Speaking of consistency, strategies teachers are supposed to obtain an additional degree or endorsement that specializes in autism, before the end of their 3rd year. I don't know the current statistics, but there are not a lot of strategies teachers that stick around, due to the costs associated to obtain this degree or the challenges that come with the job. Autism needs are very specific, and the knowledge of these needs are paramount to our student's success.

My first year I would have to say was my worst year. I was hit, kicked, choked, spit at, bit, had my hair pulled, line backed, and not to mention my room was destroyed daily. My Special Education Facilitator and Special Education Administrator observed my room and every time I was told, "you are doing a great job keep it up". I restrained a child 4 times that year until I found out that he needed a deep pressure hug.

When looking for a new position last year, closer to home, a school asked me if I was comfortable with restraining a student that had severe behaviors. I mentioned that I feel strongly that restraining a student is a last resort for their safety and the safety of others. Their response was that they couldn't imagine a program without using restraints. It is having the knowledge to know how to get in front of behaviors and respecting the child enough to create an environment where restraint is not needed.

In order to support our strategies programs, we need Autism specialist supporting each program, either in the form of vetted teachers mentoring new classrooms or an autism specialist supporting a variety of schools.

We need funding for each classroom so that teachers can get what they need to support their students. Every year I spend about a \$1000 of my own money setting up my classroom, finding incentives for my students and making my classroom feel like home.

We also need to find a way to allow our self-contained programs to complete their legal obligations or pay for their time to do so. Special education teachers work long hours to try and stay in front of the demands of the job (a.k.a meetings, IEPs, fundraising for our classrooms, progress reports, data collection, cleaning and resetting our classrooms, and curriculum prep. We are finding it hard to do it all, as the demands in our positions rise. We teach from the moment our students get to school to the moment they leave.

Finally, we need to pay our paraprofessionals more. They work very hard and have to work with the most challenging kids in the district. We need to eliminate 27 hour positions as they do not get filled and all paraprofessionals deserve to have healthcare coverage.

Thank you for your time, have a great day.

Bernadette Godfrey