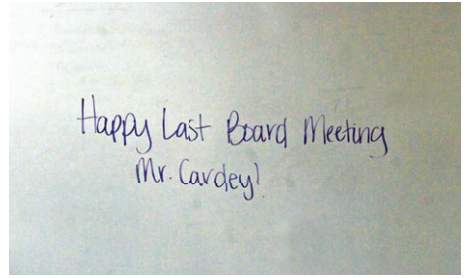


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Rib Lake School Board
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BRIAN WILSON/THE STAR NEWS

Cow-costumed volunteers served up sausage and eggs to Bill and Bonnie Gebauer of Medford during the annual Town and Country Dairy Breakfast held at the Taylor County Fairgrounds on June 12. Hundreds of area residents and visitors came out for the annual meal celebrating the area's dairy heritage.

Starting a dialogue

Medford schools starts community discussion about bullying

BY BRIAN WILSON
 NEWS EDITOR

The stated goal of the June 8 Medford School District Policy Committee meeting was to review and possibly make changes to the district's long-standing policies about bullying.

The broader goal of the meeting, and of the future meetings being planned, is to prompt a community-wide discussion on bullying and its impacts to the educational development of young people.

Policy committee chairperson Jodi Nuernberger, who has a doctorate in behavior analysis with a focus on learning and developmental differences, made it clear at the outset of the meeting that she wanted it to be dialogue between the school and community members.

"It is important that we are approaching this collaboratively," she said, noting the differing perspectives will help any policy that is developed be stronger.

See **MEDFORD** on page 13

County eyes federal funds for projects

BY BRIAN WILSON
 NEWS EDITOR

Taylor County is looking to tap into federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to help fund a number of one-time purchases around the county.

Members of the Taylor County Finance and Personnel committee on Monday gave their approval to spending ARPA funds for radio equipment for the sheriff's department and county fire departments as well as for boat landing replacement at Miller Dam and replacement of a parking lot at the Taylor County Education Center.

Under the ARPA funds, every county and municipality received the federal grants to help communities recover from the negative economic impacts of COVID-19. The county has a limited window of time to spend the money and is limited in how it can be spent with the preference for larger one-time projects.

The committee had previously approved spending the money for the radio equipment, but had formal resolutions to bring it to the full county board.

The two new requests came from the county's buildings and grounds committee.

Buildings and grounds director Joe

Svejda said the issues with the boat landing at Miller Dam have been going on for some time with the ramp breaking up and the gravel at the end of it washing out.

He said last summer he had looked into hiring an engineer to do a survey of the ramp to determine what the needs would be, but when he saw the costs involved put it on a back burner as there were other budget priorities. He has since revisited the project and has looked into the potential for securing state grant funds that could cover half of the project costs.

See **COUNTY** on page 4



Jodi Nuernberger, chair of the Medford school district policy committee, addresses a parent during discussion on bullying.

Page 11: Gilman youth plans, hosts dog show



SPORTS: Woodchucks baseball clinic



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★ Medford schools opens community discussion on bullying policy

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To that end, Nuernberger asked parents, community members and educators attending the meeting about their expectations as to the outcome.

The responses range from educators wanting bright line rules about identifying bullying and how to respond, to parents wanting improvement in responses from staff when faced with bullying behaviors that are different depending on grade levels. Others called on the district to formulate specific consequences and consistently enforce them when it comes to bullying behaviors. Other concerns were with “under the radar” bullying that never gets reported to an adult.

Teacher Tim Meerstein said he sees a lot of the anti-bullying messages becoming a joke for many students. “The kids don’t take it seriously,” he said.

He also noted that many victims of bullying don’t tell anyone because they feel that it will open them to being more of a target.

Others such as resident Chuck Prihoda raised concerns about the district going too far in its definitions of bullying. He gave examples of someone calling another person’s shirt ugly, noting that by itself that is not bullying. Other examples are that of a player being criticized by teammates for messing up and losing a game. His third example was in telling a student that it is time to do their homework.

“What I am hoping is that you don’t get too far down the slippery slide that everything is bullying,” he said.

Nuernberger said students should be learning about being responsible citizens. She noted Prihoda’s concerns that some things could be bullying or show conflict and teasing.

“Perception is important to some degree,” said Courtney Scholl, co-director of Stepping Stones. She said someone may have tougher skin than another person, but that it is important to make sure that all students are heard and that they have adults they are comfortable talking with.

Elementary principal Dan Miller said it was important to build relationships where students are comfortable coming with concerns.

Among parents in attendance there was a desire for stiffer consequences and clear expectations of what those consequences would be for those displaying bullying behavior. “The price to pay has to be something,” said one parent noting that there needed to be a negative consequence to give the student a reason to not do it.

“This is an opportunity for education,” Scholl said, noting the district also needed to take into account the development of the students involved.

“Are we catching the instances that we need to catch?” Nuernberger asked.

In defining bullying, the district looked to the Department of Public Instruction

model policy which states: “Bullying is deliberate or intentional behavior using words or actions, intended to cause fear, intimidation or harm. Bullying may be repeated behavior and involves an imbalance of power.”

Miller cited the definition that bullying could be repeated, or not, as being a good talking point. He said it may be a repeated pattern, but that is also not always the case.

“Every bad choice doesn’t mean it is bullying,” said a parent.

Medford Area Senior High School vice principal Andy Guden said they need to educate the students that something may not be bullying, but that if it continues it could become bullying. “I don’t have an answer,” he said of the ways to combat it.

However he noted that someone only has to look to social media to see that adults in the community don’t set good examples when it comes to showing bullying behavior. “How are we guiding our children in the right direction? How do we get our kids to understand when we aren’t giving them a good example,” Guden asked.

Prihoda said that using the excuse that everyone does it, so it is not your fault implies people don’t have a choice and that they don’t have to take responsibility for their actions.

School board president Dave Fleegel said it becomes more of a challenge in the world we live in. “Literally every second of the day someone is bullying someone online,” he said.

In diving into the 9-page policy itself committee members Aemus Balsis and Corey Dassow noted many things were in place and that in incorporating things from the model policies they wanted to make sure it works for Medford.

“If it is best practices, it makes sense,” Dassow said.

Some of the challenges facing the committee include dealing with bystander intervention and improving communication between parents and students about when alleged bullying behavior has occurred. There was lengthy discussion of establishing response timelines that would have parents being alerted of potential bullying activity even before building principals had an opportunity to do an investigation.

Miller noted that as the parents of victims would be notified, they would also need to alert the parents of the children accused of being bullies. District administrator Pat Sullivan said doing this before the principal has had a chance to look into it could lead to parents coaching students on how to respond and make it harder to get to what actually happened. “We have had parents coach kids on what to say,” he said.

At the same time, he said the district has to be fair for all the parents. “It is all about judgement and giving our administrative team trust,” he said.



BRIAN WILSON/THE STAR NEWS

Medford Area Middle School principal Justin Hruby uses hand motions to show the thresholds of reactions to bullying during the district policy committee on June 8. The meeting was the first in a series planned to review the way the school district deals with bullying.

Nuernberger said she would still want to have a timeline for when parents are notified of a bullying incident.

Miller said he was comfortable with having follow up within one school day, but noted that if there was an incident on the bus going home on a Friday it might be later before he even learns about it.

“There will be times when it just can’t happen,” Guden said of having a set response time.

Sullivan said that if he as the administrator got one complaint over the entire year about building staff not communicating to the parents that is one thing. “If I hear it five, six, or seven times I have to do my job,” he said.

As far as looking as a punishment-

based deterrent model, Miller said they would likely handle it at the elementary level through the district’s existing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) process that focuses on positive reinforcement rather than punishments.

As expected at the start, the two hour time given for the meeting was only enough to scratch the surface. The intent was to have this be the starting point for a larger discussion to go through the policy review process. The first meeting was held during the day on a Wednesday, the next special meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 28 at 6 p.m. at the school district office.

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The staff and Board of Stepping Stones, Inc. would like to thank everyone who attended and participated in our 2022 Wine & Art Gala.

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PLANNING MEETING

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Come be a part of planning and helping with the Abbotsford Christmas parade.

We need more committee members and volunteers to help ensure the parade continues. We would like to establish dates and times that work for future meetings and float work nights.

If you can’t make this meeting and still want to help, call Kris at 715-223-2342.

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