Eye On The Board

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Board Highlights April 12, 2005
By Mariann Klinger

NSHS vote rings bell with board

North High faculty's decision to alter the bell schedule for 2005-2006 drew approval and favorable comments from trustees.

"They're going back to what's best for students," said Trustee **Anne Brown**.

By a vote of nearly 78 percent NSHS returned to the six-period day. As a result, students will attend six classes for the year. The schedule also set a time for announcements separate from class time.

In approving the schedule change, trustees let their wishes known for a traditional six-period schedule throughout the district. Brown and Trustee **Rich Foster** commented on the importance of the year-long program, stating an interest in seeing AHS make the change.

In the 1990s, the faculties of EAHS, NSHS and AHS voted to experiment with the intensive block schedule – three classes a semester, covering a year's course work. Like Dominoes each has abandoned the project, often after years of discussion and failed votes. Schools set the block in place on a trial basis, said Brown, adding, "it hasn't worked out."

Arguments against the intensive block schedule grew increasingly strident, as teachers and students struggled to complete course work in time for state testing in the spring. In addition, teachers argued that coursework lacked continuity. For instance, students may attend a semester or two semesters without an English, math, social studies or science class.

Currently, only AHS remains on the intensive block schedule.

Last year, EAHS voted to continue the block-style classes but extend the program on a year-long basis. Students under this plan carry six classes that meet every other day. This schedule along with the six-day period allows maximum time for course work prior to state testing in the spring.

AHS voted twice to adopt a schedule similar to EAHS. The vote failed last year with 61 percent in support of the schedule change and failed again this year with nearly 63 percent.

AHS teachers are set to hold a second vote this year to consider the six-period day.

Currently, a vote of 67 percent is required to pass a schedule change.

SHS remains on the six-period day, never having changed the schedule.

Influx of families to impact district

Nearly one thousand more students are expected to enroll in district schools over the next five years.

The city of Salinas plans for the development of an additional 3000 houses and a population increase of about 40,000. The new houses account for a growth of nearly 1000 students, according to **Karen Luna**, facilities manager.

Luna included the data in a five-year master plan destined for review by the city, county and state.

The district is acquainted with increasing enrollment. In the past five years, it built a new middle school and added many portable classrooms to accommodate 1598 additional students. Two of the districts schools – AHS and SHS – already operate at full capacity.

Over the next five years, the student population is expected to increase at nearly all the district schools, according to Luna's report.

To handle the expected influx, the district plans to add 174 portable classrooms at its schools, the report said. In addition, the district is expecting state funding and the establishment of community facilities districts in the areas of new housing development. And finally, the district plans to evaluate the possibility of seeking another general bond.

At an earlier meeting, the president of the district's bond campaign arm – Bricks and Mortar – told the board the fund-raising committee lacked leadership and, in fact, members. The committee, said **Mike Payne**, dissolved over the past few years. "We don't have a bond measure, so we don't have that kind of urgency," he added.

Payne said members were needed soon. Continuity is important in order to maintain the $16,000 treasury. The money would provide start up funds for any future bond attempt.

"Anyone knows we'll have to do it again," he said

Payne spearheaded the successful Measure F and Measure M campaigns several years ago. Once the bond measures passed the district began remodeling and repairing its schools.

Many of the school sites already have had significant construction. Superintendent **Roger Anton** told trustees the district expects to celebrate the completion of the work with special ceremonies.

Update on Measure F and Measure M projects:

ESMS – front of school landscaping complete, plants in place; work on second set of restrooms to begin in May.

LPMS – foundation poured and framing of walls beginning on multipurpose room.

HMS – administration building nearly complete; multipurpose building expected to be completed by July.

WMS – work on second set of restrooms to begin before May; data upgrades complete.

AHS – phase two of the modernization project and stadium restroom under review.

EAHS – bleachers going in the stadium.

NSHS – field renovation complete; bids in for weight room and multi-use classroom, construction to begin in May.

SHS – framing and sheetrock going in for the Performing Arts Center; drawing for tennis courts submitted.

James Earhart, chief financial officer, noted that SHS tennis courts are to replace the school's junior varsity softball field on Riker and Lane streets. The problem centers on the fact that SHS rests on a much smaller campus – 23-acres, than other high schools – 46 acres.

The plan cost about 46 softball players the use of a practice field. Earhart said the decision became one of priority.

PE teachers had pointed out that tennis often became a sport that students pursued well into adulthood, while softball usually did not, he explained.

JV softball players won't be left in the cold, according to Earhart. The players might be able to practice at WMS or the rodeo facilities, he added.

"We tried to work it out," he said, adding that the solution is "not going to make everyone happy."

ELLs gain fluency faster

Students learning English as a second language may be progressing faster, even ads the numbers of ESL students decrease.

About 950 ESL students were identified as fluent in English this year, while 244 fewer students took ESL classes in the district, according to **Abel Valdez**.

Currently, the district has 5597 English language learners. Those reclassified as fluent represent 16 percent of the total number of ELL students. The rate of success exceeds the state norms, as well as the district's standard in the recent past – last year 725 students were reclassified.

Students become reclassified after passing the California English Language Development test.

In addition to the test, the district adopted criteria for identifying fluent speakers, including scores of three or better on the CST, and a recommendation from a content area teacher.

Nearly all the district's schools show an increase in the number of ELL students reclassified, with AHS and NSHS showing the greatest increase at 18 percent and 20 percent respectively.

Valdez did not comment on the reason for the increased success aside from noting the district's new criteria.

HMS readies for HPI grant

HMS brought in a strong review of its program as a response to its continued designation as a low-performing school.

The middle school rated itself as having met the grant demands either fully or substantially. The recommendation for the coming school year focuses on reaching full implementation in all areas.

Because HMS failed by one-point to meet its growth expectations last year, the school again became eligible for a High Priority Schools Grant from the state.

HMS volunteered to participate in the program in 2002-2003, after which it exceeded target growth rates by 53 points.

Having past experience as a grant participant enabled the middle school to reach beyond expectations and meet criteria in the instructional program and instructional time.

Consent Agenda

Trustees voted unanimously to approve:

- A contract with California Campaign Services to begin the process of asking voters to pass a school bond in 2006.
- An agreement with David Eddings & Associates to inspect the NSHS weight room and multi-purpose classroom project.

Senator backs K-12 needs in CCSS talk

State Senator **Elaine Alquist** promised a room full of educators a tough few years ahead. “It’s going to be vicious the next year or two,” she told teachers at the recent California Council of Social Studies conference.

Alquist, who represents District 13 in San Jose, spoke at the legislative breakfast held during the three-day conference in March at the Hyatt Regency in Burlingame.

“I’m concerned about what’s going on in Sacramento,” said the rookie senator, who serves on the Senate Education Committee.

The state expects a $6 billion deficit, she said, noting that drastic cuts have already been made over the past four years. “What is left to cut? . . . There’s talk about taking more from education.”

According to recent news reports, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said he plans to withhold $2.3 billion from school districts to balance the state budget.

This could mean a cut in Proposition 98 funds.

Alquist said she considers the education funding law, Proposition 98, to be the minimum schools should be getting and when compared to other schools “it’s not so good.”

While in the Assembly three years ago, Alquist called for a legislative analysis of K-12 funding, but then-Gov. Gray Davis vetoed the bill. Now, she is again promoting the idea, but this time as a resolution in the Senate. An analysis, she said, would examine all the factors that affect education against the standard of equity for all children. “We have a long way to go for that,” she said.

In addition to better funding, she promoted greater local control for education issues and came out against Schwarzenegger’s plan to change state pensions and to put teacher’s on a merit pay system. The merit pay plan is a problem for schools in low-income areas, she said. “Most teachers will want to work at the best schools.”

Alquist also complained about the governor’s plan for political redistricting. The plan, she said, is based on the 2000 census and would cost taxpayers $70 million. Why not wait until 2012 after the new census is taken. The base information would be more accurate and the state could use the $70 million for teachers’ salaries and for health care, she added.

“It’s one thing to shake things up and blow up boxes, but you should see what is in them,” she said in criticism of the governors plans for change.

Salinas teachers presented a workshop on the summer social studies institute offered by the district.