

NORTHERN TIOGA SCHOOL DISTRICT

110 Ellison Road
Elkland, PA 16920

Minutes – Work Session
September 27, 2021

The Northern Tioga School District Board of Directors met for a work session in the Board Room at 110 Ellison Road, Elkland, PA. The session was called to order by Board President Julie Preston at 6:00 PM.

Board Attendance: Board Members Present: Ed Bonham, Jean Kohut, James Moyer, Jim Neal, Kim Strauser, and Julie Preston. Absent: Greg Cummings, Ben Howe and Jolene Meisner.

Administrators Present: Superintendent Barnes, Kathy VanSchaick, Jeremy Freeman, Kris Kaufman, Jess Millard, Dan Fie, Christina Fry, and Matt Sottolano. Absent: Cheryl Sottolano.

ESS Presentation

Representatives from ESS presented to the board on the substitute teacher service they offer. The representatives shared the incentive programs, recruiting methods, and trainings that they offer to their employees. They also shared how their automated absentee system works. ESS stated that, if the district chooses to proceed with using them as their substitute provider, they will hire the district's current substitutes. ESS charges a 33% mark up on the district's daily substitute rate. The district is only charged for substitutes that are put in a classroom. The recruiting and technology systems are provided at no extra cost. ESS tracks certification for the substitutes as well. If the district enters into an agreement with ESS, they will be the sole provider of the district's substitutes. The transition period to start using ESS would be 40-45 days and there is no cost for the transition. Kathy VanSchaick, Business Manager, asked what the process would be if the district wanted to hire an ESS substitute as a district employee. ESS said they ask for 60 days to recoup their costs. Substitutes that originated as Northern Tioga School District substitutes before the switch to ESS can be hired right away. Dr. Barnes asked if the district has to use ESS to fill long-term substitute positions. ESS said the district can just use their services for daily substitutes and does not have to use them for long-term substitutes. Matt Sottolano, Principal of Cowanesque Valley High School, stated that the district has a few teacher aides that are certified teachers. He wondered if these aides can still be pulled by their principals without going through ESS to substitute for a teacher if needed. ESS said the district can keep these employees as our district substitutes. ESS also stated that retirees can come back and work at no penalty if they go through the ESS process.

Dr. Barnes asked the board if they would like the district to continue to pursue using ESS for substitute services. The board agreed that the district should move forward with ESS. If the district is not satisfied, we will not renew the contract for next school year. Dr. Barnes said she will have the district's solicitor review the contract to make sure it matches our needs and move forward.

Professional Development

Dr. Barnes asked the principals to share what their staff did during the September professional development day. The principals shared the various trainings in which their staff participated. There was also a math curriculum meeting at the district office for math teachers. Dr. Barnes stated that during a future in-service, she would like to conduct building and bus drills again.

Possible Response to Mandate

Dr. Barnes shared a response that another school district released to explain the district's compliance with the masking mandate. She asked the board if they would like her to put out something similar. The board agreed that, at this time, they do not want to put out a statement.

Weather Station

Dr. Barnes shared that Penn State University reached out to her to see if the district would be interested in hosting a weather observation site on district grounds. There would be no cost to the district and the data would be available to district staff and students to be used by teachers in their classes. The site would monitor wind speed and direction, air temperature and relative humidity, incoming solar radiation, atmospheric pressure, rainfall, soil temperature and soil moisture, and sky conditions from a camera. Both principals are interested in having sites installed if Penn State will allow a site at each school. The board agreed that they are interested in having the sites installed.

New Phone Provider

Todd Terpstra, Network Administrator, shared with the board his plans to update the district's phone system. The district has had ongoing issues with unreliable phone service. The district's HVAC and security systems were recently upgraded and they are no longer tied to the phone lines. This upgrade makes it a good time to update the phone system. Mr. Terpstra proposed that the district switch to the IU for the main service provider. There would also be backup providers in each building. This change would save the district money and give us a more reliable phone system. The board agreed that Mr. Terpstra should proceed with the change.

Scheduling

Dr. Barnes shared that she has met with the high school principals and guidance counselors to begin the process of aligning schedules as the board directed them to do. As a result of their meeting, the principals have some questions for the board. Kris Kaufman, Principal of Williamson High School, and Matt Sottolano, Principal of Cowanesque Valley High School asked the board what their goal is with schedule alignment. They stated that whether they are looking to align staff or increase opportunities for students will affect how they go about aligning schedules. Dr. Barnes reminded the board that their previous discussion was to align staff so that the district could better evaluate the need to replace staff upon retirements and resignations. Mr. Kaufman asked if the board is looking for teachers to travel between schools or for remote options to be offered between the schools. Kim Strauser stated that the board wants to do whatever is best for the students' education. Mr. Kaufman noted that if the board is looking to align staff, both schools will need to use a semester based schedule. If the board is looking to do what is best for the students at each school, the principals feel that they are already doing that. Mr. Sottolano stated that if Cowanesque Valley High School moves to a semester based schedule, the size of their school and the number of staff means that their students will lose options. Kim Strauser stated that she appreciates the principals' concerns but also noted that the district needs to be looking towards the future and how to plan for future budgeting. Keeping this in mind, she added that the needs of the students come first. Dr. Barnes added that another reason for looking at schedule alignment is class sizes. In some areas, class sizes are small enough that only one teacher is needed between both schools. The board noted that Greg Cummings and Jolene Meisner were the board members most interested in schedule alignment. They would like to continue this discussion at a meeting when these two board members are present.

Food Service

Dr. Barnes shared an update on food supply from Judy Quick, Food Service Director. U.S. Foods is making health care facilities and schools a priority for food deliveries. The district has been asked to order only the essentials. If future deliveries are not received, the district will turn to local suppliers. Dr. Barnes added that the district is thankful for the food we can get and for the staff working hard to make sure students are fed.

Open Forum

Chris Collum, NTEA President

Chris Collum shared his concerns with the board's schedule alignment discussion. He stated that both principals are saying that their schedules work for their students. He does not believe it is best to reduce staff and share teachers between the buildings. This would create a long commute for some teachers and create childcare issues. He is concerned the district will lose teachers if this is the direction we move. Some elective classes that show lower enrollment grow over time. Some grade levels have more students which could impact aligning schedules.

The board adjourned the work session at 7:49 PM.

Alyson Yerrick
Board Secretary