

Centennial School Board meeting gets heated

By Gary Weckselblatt Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, April 7, 2015 11:00 pm

A resolution to rein in board members and consolidate power with the superintendent got tempers flaring Tuesday night at the Centennial School Board meeting.

“I cannot believe the negativity that’s coming out of this board meeting to the people listening,” said director Betty Huf, joining the meeting by phone. “I’m just flabbergasted. I’m just so disappointed in what’s coming out of this conversation tonight.”

Board member Steve Adams said “Just the way this unfolds are the exact reasons why we needed this resolution here tonight. ... This board oversteps. This board should be voting on issues and not going off on tangents. ... What I see going on here in the last three weeks is disgusting me.”

Adams wouldn’t go into specifics, but said, “We don’t want to lose our superintendent, our administrators, our teachers.”

The resolution, seeking to prevent board members from overstepping their individual authority, would subject a violator to public censure for:

Communicating electronically or in writing in any form with any school district employee without copying the superintendent.

Communicating verbally with any school district employee on any substantive matter without providing email notification of the communication to the superintendent within 24 hours of the communication.

Directing or requesting any school district employee to perform any function or duty for or on behalf of the board member without obtaining the prior written approval from the superintendent.

Going on or participating in any site visits without obtaining the prior written approval from the superintendent.

The resolution passed 6-3 with Mark Miller, the board vice president, Kati Driban and Michael Hartline voting against.

“Public censure is not provided for in the school code,” said Miller, adding that bodies that use the reprimand “need a significant majority of members in order to pass it.”

Except for the penalty phase, Miller said “everything in the resolution comes from a sound and solid basis. However, the resolution is filled with absolutes that do not allow for magnitude of an infraction or the possibility of human error. I voted ‘no’ in the poorly structured form in which it was presented even though I support the concept in general. Had this resolution gone through our board’s policy development process I would (have) most certainly supported it.”

Hartline, who earlier spoke of a spur-of-the-moment visit to Willow Dale Elementary School to watch the Reading Olympics, said according to the resolution he would have to be censured. “That’s

absolutely ridiculous,” he said.

Hartline was also concerned that the resolution could “curtail our ability to converse freely with individuals in the community. ... I really have to wonder if the ACLU would look at this.”

Earlier, Driban objected to the meeting even taking place, as it was the first Tuesday of the month and the board typically meets on the second and fourth Tuesdays during the school year.

Jane Schrader Lynch, the board president, said the meeting was on the calendar approved by the board.

Miller also read a statement in which he apologized for saying that Daniel Ortiz, recently hired as assistant principal at William Tennent High School, was fluent in Spanish, which would help him connect with the district’s Latino community.

Ortiz does not possess that skill.

Miller said his mistake was “unintentional” and said Ortiz, who he did not mention by name, “has spectacular qualifications” for the position.

Also Tuesday night, the district hired Hannah Messner as director of Human Resources. Messner is director of Human Resources and Workforce Development for the city of Philadelphia.

In addition, assistant business manager Katie Braun was promoted to interim business manager.

The board also voted to hold commencement on June 17, with June 18 as a rain date.