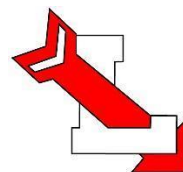


# Board Briefs



Regular Meeting of May 12, 2025

## **STUDENT COUNCIL REPORT**

Conner Casarez stated AP classes have worked hard all year to take the difficult test. Senior release is on Thursday and then graduation next week. Student Council elections are taking place to decide who will be the next Board of Education Student Representative. He thanked everyone for listening to his reports. He thanked the Board for doing so much to ensure that students feel safe in the district and ensure students succeed. He stated that he didn't know much about the Board of Education until he started in this role. Every month he got a glance at the work that the Board does, the time they put in and the dedication to students. Lowell is a special place. No where else could he have received the care and dedication that the Board and teachers have put into making all his peers the best students they can be. He is excited to move on to the next stage of his life knowing that he is the person that Lowell Area Schools shaped him to be. He is thankful to be a Red Arrow for life.

## **RECOGNITION OF RETIREES**

Superintendent Fowler recognized and thanked the 2025 retirees. The following retirees were honored:

Heather DeJonge, High School Science Teacher  
Diane Heikkila, Middle School Resource Room Teacher  
Burt Breuker, Middle School Science Teacher  
Rebecca Smiggen, High School Science Teacher  
Jennifer Cole, Middle School English Teacher  
Rochelle Cummings, Bushnell Elementary First Grade Teacher  
Dan VanderMeulen, Director of Curriculum

## **RECOGNITION OF STUDENT COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE**

Superintendent Fowler thanked Conner Casarez for his service on the Board of Education and the positive energy he brought. He has been a great addition to the Board.

## **ALTO ELEMENTARY**

Paul Papes, Principal, provided a report on the Kids Hope USA Mentor program. Mentors Phil Dougherty, Cheryl Swift and Clint Forester shared their experiences with the program.

## **ACTION ITEMS**

April minutes, payment of bills, second reading of revised/new bylaws/policies, and the acceptance of the following letter of support for staff:

To the Lowell Area Schools Community,  
As members of the Lowell Area Schools Board of Education, we want to express our sincere appreciation for all district employees — including our teachers, support staff, bus drivers, and administrators. Your dedication to educating our students and supporting our community is deeply valued. Thank you for your continued commitment to excellence.

The Board of Education is responsible for establishing and approving the policies that guide our school district. While we set the policies, we entrust our administrators, teachers, and staff to carry them out through procedures and daily operations that support a high-quality learning environment.

If you have questions or concerns about a policy or its implementation, we encourage you to bring them to the attention of your building or district administration. These concerns will be reviewed and elevated to the Board as appropriate.

We want to be clear: bullying, harassing, or threatening our district employees — who are fulfilling their responsibilities in accordance with Board-approved policies — is not acceptable. If you have concerns, we respectfully ask that you direct them to the elected members of the Board of Education. Our staff deserve a safe and respectful workplace as they carry out the important work of serving our students.

Thank you for your ongoing support of our schools and community.

Sincerely,  
Lowell Area Schools Board of Education

## **DISCUSSION**

The Board discussed the upcoming Kent ISD Biennial Election candidates and resolution. Pat Nugent volunteered to represent the Board at the election and Laurie Kuna volunteered to be the alternate.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE**

Dustin Cichocki stated that negotiations will continue in a more formal setting. He congratulated all the retirees. New hires will be coming to the Board in June and July. The final interviews for the Director of Teaching and Learning will take place this week. Cichocki will continue to talk with paraeducators about becoming bus drivers and combining their jobs. He did note that no routes have been shut down this year.

## **BUDGET UPDATE**

Sonia Hodge stated the Governor is proposing a \$392 per pupil increase and the Senate is proposing a \$400 per pupil increase. The Senate included a restriction on how the funds are spent attached to their increase. She is projecting a reduction of 30 students this school year, although not finalized yet. MPSERS (retirement) shows a reduction in funding and At-Risk funding shows an increase. Lowell has been using At-Risk funding to offset ESSR funds, so have not been using the full At-Risk allocation. There is a projected reduction in the retirement rate which would save the district \$700,000. Healthcare is projected to increase 7%. The Revenue Estimating Conference will take place on Friday, so more information to come. She stated that Lowell has officially paid off one of the 2016 re-fundings.

## **CURRICULUM UPDATE**

Dan VanderMeulen stated that Senior Give Back day is this week and graduation will take place on May 22nd. K-5 Open Court reading training will take place during the next professional development day. The district Mental Health team met to debrief about the Parent Education Series that was held. The district will be partnering with Bridging the Gap. On May 29 the K-12 Belonging Committee will meet to plan. He thanked Alto Elementary for their report.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Four audience members made public comments. No action taken.

## **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Superintendent Fowler wished all the mothers a happy Mother's Day. He enjoys seeing classes of students walking through Lowell and playing on the Central Office playground. He remembered Betty Yeiter and her generosity and engagement in the schools. He learned a lot about Lowell history from her. He expressed his gratitude to her and her family. He stated that the DEI Committee has been disbanded due to the current executive orders. Lowell Area Schools has several School Improvement Goals that include literacy and math, and we are now organizing the belonging team with what we are doing at each of our schools to make each one of our students feel like they have a sense of belonging at school. When students feel like they belong at school they learn at a higher level and grow confidence. We do not have specific Board policies related to classroom libraries. What we do have is trained and qualified teachers and a system in place. If there are concerns related to classroom books, a conversation needs to occur between the teacher and parents. In some circumstances we have had to involve the building administrator and the district librarian to help facilitate those conversations. Our system works. He expressed condolences to Jim Turner, former Board President, who lost his wife after a long illness. Staff appreciation was last week. He thanked teachers and staff who make a difference in the lives of our students. He thanked parents and the community for bringing treats to every single building in the district. He reminded all that, due to Memorial Day, the Special Meeting and Work Session will take place next week.

## **BOARD COMMENTS**

- Jared Blough thanked the retirees and thanked Alto Elementary for their report. He hopes that the next Student Council Representative is as enthusiastic as Conner.
- Annie Whitlock thanked the retirees and wished Conner best of luck.
- Laurie Kuna thanked Conner and the retirees for the exemplary dedication. She noted that Lowell Arts held a senior art exhibit that was amazing. Students are very talented. She thanked Emily Bandos and Christine Cosgrove for putting the exhibit together.
- Jennifer Dougherty has had the privilege of watching the Kids Hope mentors in action. Students are very excited to see their mentors. She is looking forward to graduation.
- Jessica Curtis congratulated the retirees and is looking forward to graduation and wished Conner best of luck.
- Pat Nugent appreciated hearing all the details of the Kids Hope mentor program. He thanked everyone involved in the presentation.
- Brian Krajewski stated the superintendent's mid-year evaluation helps the Board connect the dots of all the programs that are in the district. Superintendent Fowler schedules presentations like the one tonight to inform the Board. He is amazed by the program. The Board is in a unique position to support good people, and Lowell has good people that do phenomenal things for our students and community.

## **CLOSED SESSION**

The Board of Education moved into a closed session to discuss negotiations.