



The Daily Press

Real people. Real news.

ashlandwi.com 75¢

Subcommittee asks for board input on district's employee handbook

By **SARA NEMEC**
Staff Writer

A subcommittee of the Ashland School Board Committee of the Whole presented some of their preliminary work on the district's employee handbook at Monday night's meeting, asking for board input on sections including health insurance, early retirement benefits and compacted salary structure.

The presentation was informational only, and the subcommittee has made no recommendations. Superintendent Keith Hiltz estimated the handbook would come to the board for review in February or March.

According to documents presented at the meeting, the school board's job will be to offer a salary and benefits package for employees of the district that would allow the district to remain competitive in the region. To do this, the board appointed the subcommittee to review the employee handbook, striking collective bargaining language, as well as evaluating the document.

The subcommittee is composed of board members JoAnn Erickson, Dana Tyler and Peggy Koehler, Business Manager Bonnie Stegmann, Superintendent Hiltz, and Ashland High School Assistant Principal Greg Posewitz.

First up for discussion at the meeting was the issue of employee health insurance. Currently, district employees pay for 12 percent of their health insurance premiums, which is mandated by law. With the current annual premium of about \$15,798, an employee contributes about \$1,895 to their family insurance plans. A single individual contributes about \$916.82 to an annual premium of \$7,640.

On meeting documents, the committee explored what the district would save and employees would pay if the 12 percent

To learn more

Many Ashland School Board and Committee of the Whole documents can be found on the district website at ashland.k12.wi.us. Simply click the "School Board" tab and choose "Board meeting agendas and minutes."

employee contribution was increased to 15 or 20 percent. On a district-wide scale, a 15 percent increase would save the district about \$134,021 per year. A 20 percent increase would save the district about \$357,688.14.

In the document, the subcommittee also looked at revisiting the current health insurance plan offered by the district, as well as a possible payment in lieu of insurance for employees who chose to waive their insurance benefits.

Next the subcommittee looked at the retirement benefits for certified staff, illustrating that if the district changed to an early retirement structure for employees hired within the last five years, the district could save more than \$110,000 per retiree. The district would do this by contributing \$1,300 to an Health Reimbursement Account for each employee that the individual could use for health-related costs after retirement, much like a similar plan adopted by the School District of Superior.

Currently, the district shells out \$160,800 for the average 58-year-old retiree and has a maximum employee retirement compensation of \$218,400.

Under the same topic, board members discussed sick leave options for employees. Currently, certified staff earn 12 sick days per year and at retirement, are able to cash in up to 120 sick days for a payment \$1,600

See **SCHOOL** Page 8

SCHOOL: Full board meets at 6 p.m. Dec. 19 in district office

Continued from Page 1

per sick day toward health insurance costs. At age 65, when a person is eligible for Medicare benefits, the payments end.

Erickson and Stegmann questioned whether allowing certified staff to accumulate sick days was financially responsible thing for the district to continue.

"I know this is normal for districts, but things are changing," Erickson said of the accumulation and cashing in of sick days. "I don't know if we can afford to have this."

Upon asking if decreasing the number of sick days allowed to certified staff would be favorable, Anne Miller and Koehler spoke against the idea, citing teachers being surrounded by sick kids and the need to allow educators to put accumulated sick days toward their retirement.

Finally, the presentation turned to the compacted salary structure of edu-

cators in the district. Currently, the district employs 34 individuals with bachelor's degrees, 10 with a B.A. and an additional eight credits, 12 with a B.A. and 16 credits, 22 with a B.A. and 24 credits, 90 master's degree and five with a master's plus 40 additional credits. The subcommittee presented an option to save the district money on the cost of credit reimbursement, which would lower the pay scale based on the degree and credits teachers have earned.

Though she left the meeting early due to a personal matter, Shelly Viater parted with some words of advice to her colleagues.

"I just think that way we treat people really matters. I want us to consider that it's important that we keep the good employees that we do have and attract good employees to our district," she said. "... Just keep in mind that when I vote on the handbook, I'm going to look for a handbook that looks out for the interests of our dis-

trict, but also looks out for the interests of our employees."

Agreeing with Viater, Miller said that though the state government had given school administrations more power with in the districts, that still meant they had to treat their employees with respect.

Though the more than 30 people employed by the district, as well as union representatives, attended the meeting, several declined to comment to The Daily Press on the subcommittee's presentation.

At this time, the subcommittee has not scheduled a future meeting. The Ashland School Board will meet at 6 p.m. Dec. 19 in the district office.

*Sara Nemec can be reached at [sne-
mec@ashlanddailypress.net](mailto:snemec@ashlanddailypress.net).*