

April 3, West staff cuts might reach 128

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BY TIM WAGNER Staff Writer

NORTH AURORA -- About 100 faculty and staff -- most wearing stickers that said, "Students First!" -- poured into the gymnasium at Jewel Middle School for Monday night's West Aurora School Board meeting.

The district has been considering the elimination of teachers and, despite no additional discussion or public resistance on Monday, reduction-in-force notification letters today will be sent to 128 non-tenured district employees -- 44 of whom are teachers.

In addition to the teachers, 84 non-certified staff will receive letters as well. Non-certified staff includes paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, custodians, secretaries and bus drivers.

Some RIF notices cited performance-related decisions, while others were economic-based, as the district continues to explore cost-cutting measures in light of an operations-rate referendum appearing on the April 17 ballot.

West is asking voters to approve a 50-cent hike per \$100 of equalized assessed value and, should the referendum pass, some of the teachers who received RIF notices will likely be asked to return.

On Monday's personnel report, 17 employees were listed as submitting letters of resignation, and two others intend to retire.

The School Board approved the terminations, effective at the end of this school year, by a vote of 6-0. Board Vice President Neal Ormond abstained, while Board President Rick Slocum was absent because of travel complications on his return from vacation.

In other news, the district began discussions of partnering with the East Aurora School District to jointly bid out the districts' special education bus services as one contract.

The districts recently asked four bus companies to submit bids on scheduled routes, and those results were presented to the board by Kevin Wegner, West's assistant superintendent of finance.

With a joint, three-year contract, both local and state taxpayers, along with each district, would benefit financially. The three-year contract is estimated to cost about \$4.1 million, with 80 percent being paid for by the state. Wegner estimates that East and West districts would save about \$821,000 over the course of three years, thereby lessening the strain on taxpayers.

"Both districts have students located fairly close to each other," Wegner said. "We both were contracting outside vendors and, in many cases, those buses were going to the same places.

"Obviously, we're both looking at any opportunity to take (extra) cost out of the system. We think (the joint agreement) is a model for districts to look at ways to cut costs that occur outside of the classroom, and this is one of them. This is consolidation and efficiency."

The issue remains in discussion, but both school boards are expected to approve the agreement at upcoming meetings.

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