

Tempers high at board meeting

1/13/75

Tempers and attendance both ran extremely high during a special Grinnell-Newburg Board of Education meeting held Thursday afternoon in the G-N school offices.

The book dispute, the bus route controversy, a possible reopening of Cooper School, and remodeling of the junior high and Newburg buildings topped the list of controversial items covered in the third of the irregular afternoon meetings to be held in the last month. (See separate stories in this issue of The Herald-Register for discussion of the Cooper, book, and bus issues.)

Meeting Times

Opening the meeting, President Harold McCulloch cited a letter complaining about the afternoon meetings. He apologized for the last two, explaining that last week's was an emergency session, and that this week's meeting was held in the afternoon because he (McCulloch) was in Louisiana until late Wednesday evening. He also apologized to members of the board for not remaining in the room during last week's two-hour executive session. He had a bronchial condition, McCulloch said, and had not wished to interrupt the meeting; further, he had felt that the session was almost over.

Moving on, the board approved with little discussion resolutions allowing the use of tape recorders during the meetings, and prohibiting smoking in the board room during those sessions. The minutes of the Dec. 12 meeting and a series of vouchers were also approved.

Next, Mrs. Robert Toney addressed the board, asking how long the group was going to continue with afternoon sessions. ". . . (they) effectively eliminate businessmen, teachers, and other taxpayers who wish to attend the meetings and express their opinions," she said. "Many people are not happy with the direction education is going in Grinnell, and would like to have the meetings at a time when more people can come and express their opinions."

Vernon Graham assured the woman and other G-N constituents that board policy calls for evening meetings, and that the board would adhere to that policy from now on.

Open Meetings

Later in the meeting, McCulloch asked if open meetings could be held expressly for the purpose of going into executive session.

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'Dropout figures are inaccurate'

G-N Board—

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Jim McNally asked Superintendent Buford Garner to clarify executive sessions for the people in the audience; Garner noted that Iowa law permits executive sessions for three reasons: 1) to prevent irreparable and needless injury to the reputation of an individual; 2) to prevent premature disclosure of information on some real estate proposed to be purchased; or 3) for some other exceptional reason so compelling as to override the general public policy in favor of public meetings.

"In line with the collective bargaining law which was passed in the last session of the Iowa legislature," said Maynard Raffety, "it expressly permits executive sessions for the purpose of discussing strategy . . . Those sessions have to be in executive session . . . I think I could very safely say that, in this particular school district, salaries account for somewhat over two million dollars of our annual operating budget. We had this sort of session last Thursday afternoon for some two hours, with numerous items to be considered for either inclusion or exclusion in contract with employees. I really can think of no more important duty of a board member than to be in attendance and expressing themselves to our chief negotiators—in this case, Mr. Slusher—and, as Mr. McCulloch apologized earlier in the meeting, he was absent for over an hour in that session."

"I'm sorry," McCulloch interrupted. "That was a little more time than I thought. I think I left approximately 3:30, with the understanding that you were going to adjourn."

"You left sir, about three o'clock," Raffety retorted, "and we adjourned approximately four o'clock."

"Maybe we can talk about this privately, then, because I am certain that I left closer to 3:30. If you persist in going along with that, I'll do my best to change your mind."

A brief report by Dr. Neal Winkler on drug education and a new emphasis on nutrition followed. Winkler also mentioned complicated new rules on special education, an expansion of outdoor education in the district, and homework.

Fire Marshall

A communication from the State Fire Marshal's office was next on the agenda. Sept. Garner read the letter, which came in response to a recent request by the board. It said, in part, that a representative of the office would be happy to call on the board and inspect the junior high to give the board an idea of what was needed to bring the structure up to current fire standards. Garner suggested that since all board members should be present, along with maintenance director Bob Burnham and Mike Fitzgerald, and that the session would have to be an open meeting.

Burnham then spoke on the lighting at the Newburg School and on remodeling and updating the junior high building. Lighting at the Newburg building currently falls in the neighborhood of 35 footcandles at desk level; state guidelines call for 70 footcandles, he said. Board members explored several solutions, and directed Burnham to make more inquiries so that an entry can be made in the school budget, which must be finalized by Feb. 15.

Board members also voted to ask a Marshalltown remodeling firm to visit Grinnell and draw up plans and estimates for updating the interior of the junior high.

McCulloch at this time asked if \$90,000 had not been budgeted in February of 1974 for the remodeling of Cooper School and the junior high; where had the money gone, he wanted to know?