

COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCY #4

The Board of Control met on Wednesday, May 7, 2025 at CESA 4, 923 East Garland Street, West Salem. Chair Catherine Griffin called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

Board Members Present: Jim Bagniewski, Kevin Bauman, Micaela Conlon-Bue, Sara Cook, Larry Cyrus, Catherine Griffin, Julie Meyers, Lindsay O'Hair, and Gerald Roethel and Ryan Stubrud

Blair-Taylor seat is currently vacate.

Also present: Paul Fischer, Wayne Pollock, Jim Wright and Michelle Kotek

PUBLIC INPUT

None

OATH OF OFFICE

Paul Fischer administered the Oath of Office to Micaela Conlon-Bue (Black River Falls) and to Ryan Stubrud (Alma Center-Humbird-Merrillan).

Paul Fischer recognized Jim Wright (Alma Center-Humbird-Merrillan) with a clock for his 13 years of service to the Board of Control.

APPROVAL OF MEETING AGENDA

Julie Meyers moved to approve the agenda as distributed. Jim Bagniewski seconded the motion. Motion carried.

READING AND APPROVAL OF APRIL 2, 2025 MEETING MINUTES

Lindsay O'Hair moved to approve the minutes of the April 2, 2025 meeting. Larry Cyrus seconded the motion. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF VOUCHERS AND FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR APRIL

Sara Cook moved to approve the vouchers and financial statement for April 2025. Kevin Bauman seconded the motion. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

Approval of Health Insurance Renewal 2025-26

Sara Cook moved to approve the Health Insurance self-funded renewal effective July 1, 2025 with an 11.58 percent increase in premium. Ryan Stubrud seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Approve Resignation

Julie Meyers moved to approve the resignation of Megan Bagniewski, OT effective June 4, 2025 (the end of her 24-25 contract). Jim Bagniewski seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Discussion Board member terms and seats up for election at Annual Meeting

A handout of the term expirations for all the Board members was reviewed.

AGENCY ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT TO THE BOARD – PAUL FISCHER

CESA 4 Activities and Regional News

1. We will be hosting our final PAC meeting this Friday, May 9th. While there are no retirements, it will be Tom Burkhalter, the Superintendent of the Viroqua Area School District, final CESA 4 meeting. He took a position in Reedsburg as their Superintendent. We will also recognize and thank Fran Finco for serving the Onalaska School District since January. To end the year, we will be having Dr. Joe Sanfelippo come to speak to the group. He is the former Superintendent at the Fall Creek School District. Currently, he travels throughout the United States doing keynote presentations around “Changing the Narrative” and “Hacking Leadership.” He has authored several books, including his most recent, “One Minute Walk to Work.” He will bring great energy, as well as a great message, as we look to close out our PAC meetings for the year.
2. The Legislative Listening sessions have recently wrapped up throughout the state. The Joint Finance Committee will now start meeting in Executive Session to vote on various provisions of the state budget. In terms of education related topics, there were two that dominated at all four of the sessions throughout the state. The first was the increase in Special Education Reimbursement from 30% to 60%. The current year reimbursement statewide was actually 29%, not even meeting the 30% threshold. Numerous districts shared how that increase would impact their district. The second item that was heard regularly throughout these listening sessions, is the need to properly fund our school districts. Several stories were shared in regards to how districts have had to go to referendum to adequately fund their schools, which in turn impacts local taxpayers. We are seeing firsthand the impact that the failed referendums in CESA 4 is having on school districts as they look to make major cuts to their budgets.
3. The expansion of the school choice and school voucher program remains a top priority, within our state, as well as nationally. With school districts being impacted by a lack of funding, the impact of expanding the school choice and school voucher programs is being revisited by opponents of this expansion. I was recently made aware of three areas at the Federal level that will be focused on in terms of grant funding. Those three areas include Civics Education (Patriotic Education), School Choice, and Career Pathways. The funding that was available for potential grant funds around mental health have been removed in terms of grant funds available. At the state level, voucher funding has reached a new high in terms of per pupil funding. In 2013-2014, voucher participants received \$6,442. That figure is now greater than \$10,000 in 2024-2025. What also is worth noting is that the \$12,371 per pupil voucher price tag for high school students is greater than the per pupil limit in 359 of the state's 421 school districts. All these funds

continue to be put into the voucher program, and there is still no research to suggest that it improves student achievement. Finally, the voucher program is getting attention nationally, with some states moving away from the funding of vouchers. One student has even referred to vouchers as “welfare for the wealthy” due to the fact that upper class families are receiving voucher funding, when all along they have been meant for low income families who could not afford private school tuition.

State/Federal News

1. Over the past several weeks there has been much discussion around the certification letter that the Department of Education was asking states for from the Department of Public Instruction. The purpose of the certification letter, according to the DOE, was for states to indicate that they were in compliance with Title VI regulations encompassing DEI practices. As you are aware, Dr. Underly submitted a letter to the DOE that indicated that they would not be sending such a letter. The reasoning for that was not initially communicated to districts and so it left for a lot of uncertainty. We have now learned that the State Superintendent chose not to send a certified letter due to the fact that they had reached out to the DOE, asking for further clarification on several occasions, and never receiving a response.

Once word came out that federal funds could potentially be withheld, some districts throughout the state became more and more concerned about the fact that Dr. Underly was not sending a certified letter. Through a WASDA member zoom meeting, DPI did respond and indicated that after conferring with legal counsel, they were told that there was no need for the LEA (school district) to send a certification letter as they had not been directly solicited. Ultimately the message was for districts to consult with their own legal counsel and determine what was best for their local district needs. I did forward a legal memo that was put together by attorneys Renning and Lewis, to our CESA 4 Superintendent's that had not received it as part of a WASDA email that had been sent out. This matter is not over and I am certain we will continue to get legal updates. I will be sure to keep the Board of Control, as well as our district leaders, aware of any updates.

Sara Cook approved the Administrator's Report as presented. Jim Bagniewski seconded the motion. Motion carried.

CRACKER BARREL

Larry Cyrus said that WASB continues to look for board members with interest on serving on the Policy and Resolution Committee

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Next meeting: Wednesday, June 4, 2025 -- We will have Annual Meeting at 6:30 p.m. and the organizational meeting to immediately follow at CESA 4

ADJOURNMENT

Ryan Stubrud moved the meeting adjourn. Jim Bagniewski seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Next meeting: Wednesday, June 4, 2025 at 6:30 p.m. at CESA 4, West Salem.

Respectfully submitted,
Michelle Kotek