By Carolyn Lee
The Imperial Republican

Administrators and teachers were enthusiastic about the ongoing process of curriculum revision when discussing progress with the Chase County Schools board Jan. 13.

Evaluating the curriculum is something the district has done every year. However, a new process is in place now that involves more teachers, more study and more changes.

About two hours was spent at the board meeting discussing the changes and advantages of the new program. Part-time Curriculum Coordinator Nicole Long, who is also an elementary art teacher, presented the program.

Teachers have been grouped into Subject Area Committees (SAC) to coordinate curriculum on each grade level. For instance, it took over two hours to create a curriculum for the kindergarten language arts curriculum, according to Secondary Principal Mike Sorensen.

The curriculums are then submitted to both the administration and a Curriculum Coordinating Council (CCC) for approval.

The CCC consists of administrators Matt Fisher, Sorensen, Nathan Vitosh, counselor Marcie Yaw and teachers Monte Burrell, Lynn Rinehart, Nancy Sorensen, Angie Dickey, Dennis Batterman, Kim Wilson, Michelle Mroczek and Sandra Silvester, and aide Kim Bartholomew.

The revised curriculums eventually make their way to the superintendent and then the school board.

State and federal standards dictate to some extent what is required in curriculums. However, Elementary Principal Vitosh said the basic elements are determined by the school district's needs.

He said one of the reasons for the revision is that "We have a mixture of things in place now in K-6. Not all teachers in the same grade level are teaching the same things."

In addition, by 2012 all schools must be able to be in compliance with state and federal standards.

The CCC has a schedule of curriculum evaluation for K-12 that stretches to 2016.

Long said work began on language and vocational areas last year. Other subjects are now being added.

"We're in a good place right now," she noted, adding "We're where we need to be."

She said some schools are further ahead in curriculum revision, while others haven't yet begun.

The curriculum revision is a part of the School Improvement Process (SIP), which is designed to ensure that every student succeeds in school.

A SIP team will be meeting with teachers from Gering Public Schools later this month to study that district's Direct Instruction techniques and Reading Mastery program.

Vitosh said that district has narrowed the gap in reading scores with the program. Asked if CCS students have a reading problem, he replied that there is room for improvement in language arts.

Sorensen added that the focus is to make students better readers. "We're not good by our standards, but maybe by the standards in other districts," he added.

The team will also be evaluating other reading programs.

Internet, laptops

Nick Colton and Jerel Fortkamp of Allo Communications updated the board on changes

made to the ESU connection and Internet service for the school. The ESU system provides distance learning capability to the school.

That program seemed to have been slowing down Internet service to CCS, among other schools, Colton said.

The distance learning program receives priority over Internet service, he noted. Allo has been working with an ESU technician to make configuration changes on the ESU equipment.

The board approved a contract with ESU#16 for the 2009-10 schoolyear for $20,400 to receive distance learning services.

The Allo employees also discussed the laptop computer program, which is approaching the end of its three-year lease.

Fifty of the 220 laptops issued to students and teachers have secondary batteries that no longer charge, 20 power bricks used to charge the laptops no longer function and 10 laptops have had motherboards replaced.

Colton recommended retaining between 40-60 laptops that are still in “above average” condition, and replacing the rest.

Allo also recommended that the board consider a four-year lease, with incoming freshmen keeping the same laptop for all four years of high school.

That would encourage the student’s responsibility for his or her own laptop, perhaps keeping them in better condition.

Twenty-six desktop computers were replaced in the elementary computer lab recently, at a cost of $12,765.

The Allo employees noted that a number of desktop computers in individual teacher’s rooms are showing signs of wear. They recommended a schedule for rotating older desktops out during a three to four-year leasing period.

Career Academy

Superintendent Matt Fisher informed the board that the school has received a $74,210 CEPA (Career Education Partnership Act)grant to be used for tuition for some students enrolled in Career Academy.

The federal grant is administered through the Nebraska Department of Education.

The money would be used to pay for college classes taken by those students training in the technology field. Career Academy enables students to take college or dual-credit classes while in high school. Those students would graduate in five years with an Associate’s Degree.

Also receiving CEPA funding this year were Gordon/Rushville, Cedar Bluffs, Deshler, ESU #14, Grand Island and Norfolk high schools.

Other business

The board accepted the resignation of ag/science teacher Matt Jablonski, effective at the end of the school year.

Jablonski is a part-time ag and junior high science teacher, FFA sponsor and 9-12 girls basketball coach.

In his resignation, Jablonski said that if possible, he would like to continue teaching seventh grade science part time and coaching basketball.

The board approved advertising for a teacher for his positions, with the understanding that if someone is not found for the science and coaching positions, that Jablonski could reapply.

The district recently began offering a morning in-town bus pickup on Jan. 12. There are five pick-up sites around town. Twenty-six children took advantage of the service on Jan. 12 and 33 on Jan. 13.

Fisher said the district will be able to assess the program after about two months.

In other discussion, the board agreed to look into changing the holiday basketball tournament tradition.

Administration will seek other season game opportunities to replace the tournament, which has consumed several days in the past at an Alliance tournament during the Christmas vacation.

The NSAA will also be contacted to see if other schools would be interested in attending a tournament in Imperial over the Christmas break.

Board President Sheila Stromberger said coaches feel that a two-week holiday break is too long to go without competing.

The board also agreed to accept bids to trade a large 1993 passenger bus for a relatively new one, as well as bids for two used 12-passenger vans to be traded for two 15-passenger vans.

The state has banned the use of 15-passenber vans by schools in the future, due to safety concerns.

Board positions set for 2009-10

By a unanimous vote Jan. 13 the Chase County Schools board elected officers for the 2009-10 year. Re-elected were Sheila Stromberger as president, Charley Colton as vice-president and Tom Gaschler as secretary. Penny Strand was elected treasurer.

Committee assignments were also approved. They are as follows:

Superintendent Evaluation—Karl Meeske, Charley Colton, Bob Milner.

Bus/Transportation—Gregg Smith, Bob Milner, Sheila Stromberger.

Americanism—Karl Meeske, Tom Gaschler, Dirk Haarberg.

Negotiations—Penny Strand, Sheila Stromberger, Gregg Smith, Tom Gaschler.

Facility Planning—Tom Gaschler, Charley Colton, Dirk Haarberg.

Health and Safety—Todd Burpo, Dirk Haarberg.

Calendar—Todd Burpo, Penny Strand.