

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Adding a new “life skills” segment into the Chase County School’s special education program is being considered by the Chase County School board of education.

Supt. Matt Fisher floated the idea at the board’s April 14 meeting, saying some of the school’s high needs students may need an additional program and classroom.

With the state emphasizing the importance of “inclusion” with other students in the same classrooms, Fisher said sending the high needs students back to the Wellington School would not be following the “inclusion” concept.

“But, adding a program in this building to serve their needs outside of the regular classroom and the special education room” may be something to pursue, Fisher said.

Linda Lakey, CCS’s K-4 special education teacher, said the high needs students all have different needs and can’t always be lumped together in the same rooms.

A program with more life skills activities emphasized could aid those students who are severely disabled.

“Physically, we need a Wellington-like program in this building,” Lakey said.

The high needs students are in the regular classrooms when they can, but there are times they need to be removed, she added.

Elementary Principal Nathan Vitosh said as the high needs students get older, their needs also increase.

“And, as they get older, we try to meet more specifically what the students need,” Vitosh said.

The additional program would require additional staffing. Supt. Fisher said the school could consider contracting for more of Carol Vetter’s time. She is employed by ESU #15 and is specialized to work with high needs students.

As the board discussed where this additional room might be, Fisher suggested the room could possibly be added along with an expansion of the Shorthorn gym.

“We’ve talked about it in the past, adding more seats in the elementary gym,” Fisher said.

Fisher said Chase County Schools is expecting about \$250,000 in stimulus funds, all designated for special education use.

Those funds could be used to construct the additional special education room and related costs of the program, but not for the gym expansion.

Fisher asked the board to decide by the May meeting if the program should be added.

Other school board business

- School Nurse Angie Paisley was hired for another year of service and will receive an \$800 raise for the 2009-2010 school year. Her salary next year will be \$32,400, up from \$31,600 this year. The board met in closed session for this discussion.

- The 2009-2010 school calendar was approved. One change suggested and approved that night was making all early dismissals at 1:30 p.m., to reduce confusion. Some early-outs before

vacations were set at 2:30 p.m., but those were changed to an hour earlier. Due to the way the weeks fall this year, the first semester will conclude before the Christmas break, which starts on Dec. 18.

- Gary Johnson of Tryon was hired to teach driver's education again this summer. Based on early registrations, Supt. Fisher indicated there will probably be just one classroom session in June. The youths will put in their driving hours later in June and in July.

- Specs for purchase of new laptops for the high school's one-to-one program are being developed by Supt. Fisher. He is giving consideration to a smaller laptop that would save \$350 to \$400 each. Staff has been trying out some different models to determine how to proceed on the specs, he said.

- A legislative bill on state aid, LB 545, made it out of committee last week, and it appears (based on projections) that CCS will lose about \$140,000 compared to what was received this year, Fisher said. About \$234 million in federal stimulus funds will be used to fund Nebraska state aid over the next two years, replacing the \$100 million in state funds that were going to go into the state aid formula. However, there are questions about funding after those two years, Fisher said. "There is not a lot of good news on state aid dollars here," he added.

- Part of Supt. Fisher's contract was modified to include changing the time when his contract is offered and dealing with unused vacation days. Regarding the time when the contract is offered, a recommendation from the school's attorney suggested moving it from February back two months, to December. If there is a resignation, it would give the board more time for a search. Relating to the unused vacation days, the attorney's recommendation was to add that unused leave would be paid "up to five days." That clause will also be added to other CCS classified staff members' contracts.

- The board met in closed session at the end of the meeting to discuss negotiations and personnel with no action taken.