

Another opts not to return after sabbatical **By Jan Schultz**

The Imperial Republican

Two more teachers at Chase County Schools opted to take the Early Retirement Program (ERP) offer and retire from teaching here at the end of the 2013-14 school year.

Resignations from longtime staff members Lynn Rinehart and Sandy Silvester were approved at Tuesday's school board meeting, as was the resignation from Connie Thompson, who was approved for a one-year sabbatical last year.

Rinehart and Silvester join Al Zuege and Beth Larson who all were determined eligible for the school's ERP offered this year.

Those four will receive a payment of \$1,000 as part of the program, which was established this year to encourage earlier notification of plans to retire so the district could start advertising for replacements sooner.

The board approved the ERP in December, and teachers hoping to take advantage of it had to notify the administration by Jan. 31 and submit the necessary paperwork.

Fifth grade teacher Silvester has been at CCS for 28 years. Her letter of resignation indicated she would like to spend more time with her children and grandchildren.

Rinehart, currently teaching grade 7-12 industrial arts and is the school's curriculum coordinator, is completing his 27th year at Chase County Schools. He is also a former head wrestling coach. Rinehart said in his letter his time at CCS has helped opened doors for future endeavors.

Zuege's and Larson's resignations were approved by the board in January.

Thompson, who had served as an English Language Learner (ELL) teacher in 2012-13 and had also taught kindergarten during her tenure, asked for a 2013-14 sabbatical last year, which was granted on a 7-1 vote.

In her letter last month to Supt. Brad Schoeppey and the board, she said while on sabbatical she was able to pursue other interests, leading to her decision not to return. She had been with CCS for 13 years.

While it was eventually approved, Thompson's decision brought forth some discussion at the meeting.

Board member Sheila Stromberger said she felt Thompson's decision was a breach of contract, and believes when the one-year sabbatical was granted, she agreed to return a year later.

"I believe it's in writing and in the negotiated agreement that they will come back for a year," Stromberger said.

"It should be noted in her file or something or sent to the state," she added.

She believes the school has no recourse if Thompson would want to come back later and the school chose not to hire her.

"We have to give her a position," she said.

She said the negotiated agreement needs to be looked at regarding this section, reworded or taken out completely.

"I for one would be very hesitant to ever do another sabbatical with the terminology in the agreement we have now," she said.

Board President Jeff Olsen agreed.

He said he'd also be hesitant to approve another sabbatical unless there are a stiffer consequences in the agreement if they don't return.

"It really puts the district in a bind," he said.

Stromberger said if they had known Thompson's position would be open, the board may have looked for someone to fill that specific position last year instead of shuffling teachers around to fill it for one year.

"To me, it was in writing that she would come back for a year," Stromberger said.

"It was a contract and she's broken the terms of the contract."

While board member Gregg Smith said he believes they have legal recourse, he didn't think it was in the district's best interests to pursue that.

Olsen and Stromberger agreed.

Board member Karl Meeske said it was his assumption that a sabbatical be used advancing the staff member's education.

Stromberger said her understanding is that sabbaticals can be granted by the board for any reason, but she voted against Thompson's sabbatical request because she felt students should benefit from a teacher's sabbatical.

Thompson had requested the sabbatical for family reasons.

Supt. Brad Schoeppe said furthering the teacher's education is "implied" in the agreement because it references graduate hours earned in some of the verbiage.

While on sabbatical, teachers do not receive salaries or benefits. They can choose to pay their own premiums if they want to continue health insurance coverage.

All of the resignations on Tuesday's agenda were approved on 8-0 votes.

Three coaches resign

Along with the staff resignations, three other resignations from coaches were approved.

Those accepted were from Angie Dickey, asst. high school volleyball; Bruce Vires, junior high girls' head basketball; and Jaclyn Paisley, cheerleading co-coach.

Supt. Schoeppe didn't think there would be difficulty filling the positions with the number of teachers they will also be replacing.

"When we look at replacing staff we'll also be looking for fill the coaching positions," he said.

He also noted the length of time Vires and Dickey have coached, saying it's time to give them a break.

More on Tuesday's meeting, which included approval of teacher and principal contracts for 2014-15, will be covered next week.