By RACHEL COLEMAN • Leader & Times As the current academic school year wraps up, it may seem too early to start gathering supplies for the next one. Yet USD 480 administrators and teachers have already begun to look ahead to 2013-2014. School board members approved several purchases and programs Monday night in order to prepare for the upcoming year. Among them: • Additional summer work hours for math teachers at South Middle School. The extra work time allows the teachers to map out lesson plans for the addition of 30 minutes per day in the math instruction block, said principal Gib Rito. Funding for the summer planning sessions comes from the School Improvement Grant (SIG) money earmarked for South. The vote tallied 6 in favor, with Tammy Sutherland-Abbott absent.

• New interactive boards for South Middle School, purchased with SIG funds at a cost of $55,859. The boards function a bit like gigantic iPad touch screens, allowing groups of students to access research information and work as a group to manipulate the subject matter. Board members expressed a bit of skepticism about the usefulness of the boards, asking if research demonstrates their results, “or if this is just a cool new thing.” In the end the vote passed 5-1-1, with Steve Helm against the purchase and Sutherland-Abbott absent. • Additional iPads for use by Liberal High School students enrolled in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) path courses. The district purchased 30 more iPads with accompanying accessories and a cart, for slightly more than $15,000. Vote was 6-1, with Sutherland-Abbott absent. • Software upgrades for the plasmacutter used by welding classes at LHS, at a cost of $11,400. Instructor Brad Evans explained that students can only use the standard templates with the present equipment. The upgrade will allow them to design their own projects. Vote was 6-1, with Sutherland-Abbott absent.

• New textbooks for the foreign language/Spanish departments at SMS, West Middle School and LHS. Instructors and the curriculum director selected texts that will serve for a total of six class levels at the three schools, including a new AP (Advanced Placement) Spanish class offered at LHS. Cost for the conventional (paper) textbooks was $42,605. Vote was 6-1, with Sutherland-Abbott absent.

• A writing program for grades kindergarten through eight, to be implemented in the upcoming school year. The “Traits Writing” curriculum was chosen after a year-long research process based on what teachers requested, said curriculum director Lana Evans. The need for a district-wide approach to teach students how to write “was the biggest thing came back loud and clear” from a teacher survey, she said. The program materials and training for all teachers through a half-day workshop cost $101,562. Vote was 6-1, with Sutherland-Abbott absent.