

By VICTORIA CALDERON

• Leader & Times

Even though the school year is over, the USD No. 480 Board of Education is staying as busy as ever.

At the meeting Monday night, numerous items were discussed. They started off with old business, passing 6 to 0 a flooring bid to get new flooring on the second floor of Liberal High School and in Southlawn Elementary School. The bid by Flooring America and Furniture Outlet was for \$59,450.

Once they voted on the flooring bid, Seward County Community College/Area Technical School President Dr. Duane Dunn spoke to the board about a new development at Dodge City Community College.



Recently, plans have started to form regarding a merger between Fort Hays State University and DCCC. Although it is well known that this merger will bring a 4-year degree program to Southwest Kansas, Dunn wanted to focus on the stipulation accounting for the formation of a technical school on the DCCC campus.

Dunn and other board members at SCCC/ATS are concerned about the negative impact a new technical school nearby could have on this community. In response to these plans made by the Kansas Board of Regents to merge DCCC and FHSU, SCCC/ATS has written a letter of concern to Gov. Sam Brownback, and they want the school board and local council of governments to support their concerns.

“Our college and our board is really supportive of anything that will bring a four-year degree program out in this area,” Dunn told the school board. “But the emphasis moved from a 4-year degree program into creating an institute of technology. Our concern is if that was to go into place, then the emphasis would be to move our technical programs from Seward, Garden, Pratt and Colby all to the Dodge City campus, which would all be part of Fort Hays.”

Dunn explained there is a problem with the research that went into deciding where the new technical institute would be formed.

“Our real issue is not the four-year degree. I’ve had people in the community ask me if we’re opposed to a four-year degree. No, we are very supportive of that,” Dunn explained. “But we are concerned that there has not been any research, no visit to our campus, any of those activities that typically would go into starting an entirely new technical institute.

“The discussion was to put \$10 million into a new facility in Dodge. We’re just not sure how they found the starting line to do this when they did not do the research,” he explained.

According to Dunn, the tentative plan laid out by the Board of Regents allows for the technical institute in Dodge to start programs in diesel, welding, auto tech, auto collision, and business, “ones we already have in place.”

Dunn brought up the history of Liberal’s technical institute. Originally, Dodge City had a technical school, until the early 1990s, when they gave their technical facilities to Dodge City High School. The community college there did not want to continue the technical programs, so the technical institute moved down to Seward County. He noted “it does not make a lot of sense to put additional funds” into a community that rejected the technical programs.

The negative impact of creating a technical institute at a nearby school with a bachelor's degree program not only affects SCCC/ATS, but the entire community and surrounding communities as well.

"I'm a firm believer that industry will go where a well trained workforce is. And so, from our perspective, if we were to lose these programs, we think that will have a huge impact on our community," Dr. Dunn said. "It will affect Sublette, Satanta, Hugoton and Southwestern Heights, but probably not to the immediate nature that it will affect Liberal as a community. That is why I present it to the council of governments, for the economic welfare of our community as well."

The board passed the resolution to support SCCC/ATS 6 to 0.

Another important funding issue concerned the replacement of outdated computers at Liberal High School.

The staff at the high school have computers from 2007, which "negatively impact student learning, staff productivity, and IT support efficiency due to older technology and slower processing."

The school board received a bid from Twotrees Technology to purchase 92 laptops, docking stations and business cases for a total of \$104,696.

The appeal of the laptops versus simply updating the desktop computers is portability. Not only will teachers be able to take their laptops and work around the school with them, but they can take their work home whenever they need. The docking station adds on to the ease of access for the teachers; the laptops plug into the stations, which connect to the overheads, speakers, etc.

"To me, it is one of those tools that if you're going to do it, you're going to do it right, and you have to allow (the teachers) to have the mechanism that will do the job effectively," board member Matt Friederich said.

The board accepted the bid for new laptops and accessories 6 to 0.

Towards the end of the meeting, the board had to fill the vacancy left by Tammy Sutherland-Abbott. They interviewed two candidates who had been interviewed before, when Crystal Clemens left. Both candidates spoke briefly to the board, since they previously had a proper interview, and then the board voted. Stewart Cauble won, 4 to 2.

"I believe in the common sense approach, progressive thinking," Cauble told the board. "Why I'm running for this position is because I believe in education. One thing somebody cannot take from you is your education."

The position is only for the year, because Sutherland-Abbott's term had not expired yet when she resigned. Cauble has the option to run again once the year is over.

The board accepted Cauble filling the vacancy 6 to 0.