

By LAUREN VINCENT • Daily Leader Half of Monday night's two-hour USD No. 480 board meeting focused on the possibility of cutting the Dual Language (DL) Program, and reallocating funds to cushion the hurting English as a Second Language (ESL) Program.

Two options were discussed on the matter. First the district could continue the DL program and grow vertically to the fifth grade, requiring a fifth grade teacher be hired this year. The second option was to cut the DL program completely and use the funds to boost effectiveness of the current ESL program.

Laura Cano gave a 15-minute presentation on why this cut may be made and how it will impact district students.

"I want to, first of all, point out that the effectiveness of the program is not in question," Cano said. "There is support by all members; board of education, administrators, teachers, parents and community members support the program. What is in question is if the funding we're utilizing is being used to the best of our ability to reach the most number of students."

The DL program costs substantially more per student to run than does the ESL program. The DL program serves 119 students in the district each costing near \$2,200. The ESL program is substantially less, costing under \$650 per student.

The dollar difference comes mainly from the need to hire two teachers and two paraprofessionals per grade. DL teachers may only have 14 students in their class while ESL teachers have close to twice as many.

The main reason given on why this cut is even being considered is that academic goals are not being met, which could cause a further loss of funding.

"USD 480 is facing challenges in our academic achievements and ESL is one of those areas," Cano said. "We have to look at programming and we have to make changes to meet those annual goals in order to avoid federal sanctions."

Board member Nick Hatcher spoke up concerning assessment scores of the DL program.

"Can't we look at this program as something that we're investing in our community?" he asked. "Personally, I think starting up this program is by far one of the better things that has happened in USD 480. It's hard to put measurable levels on the effects that it's had on our children since they've only gotten to the fourth grade.

"For Sunflower to find 42 bilingual teachers, that's hard, we barely have a handful," Cano said.

"But you just answered what I'm trying to reference to," Hatcher said. "It has to start somewhere. And for myself, I would love to have my children in this program. I just think with this program, we can't afford not to continue."

Along with the mentioned monetary benefits, the cutting of the DL program will also allow teacher reallocation.

"If we look at Dual Language, I have five teachers and five paras that yields one staff to every 13 kids," Cano explained. "When you look district-wide, I have one staff to every 55 kids. If we did come to the conclusion of reallocating the funds we could potentially improve our ratio to one staff member to 44 students."

"Yes it only serves 119 kids, but it's an intensive instruction on learning the second language," argued Dan Diepenbrock, president of the board. "Abandoning that program and shifting the ratio from 1-to-55 to 1-to-44 doesn't sound like much of a gain to me."

"Well, it does for the teachers who are serving 100 extra students at Sunflower," Cano responded. "If the teachers were able to divide 300 students between three teachers verses two, that would even the playing field for those teachers."

"Until we get them to be proficient in English, until we get them to have good comprehension and a good understanding of the language, we really can't expect anything else to happen," Cano said. "So in essence, for the students that are lagging behind in their language skills, we have to provide a package A and a package B in order to succeed. Right now, we're doing package A for everyone, and we are not getting the results we want."

The discussion ended with a clarification that the DL program is not currently set to be cut. Monday evening's discussion was a presentation of information to the board as step one in Cano's plan. Step two is to provide the information to parents and allow for questions and concerns to be addressed. There will be an opportunity for parents to hear more on the topic at 6:30 p.m., Thursday at McDermott Elementary. Thirdly, Cano expects to prepare a new plan and present it for approval at the next USD 480 board meeting.

Later in the meeting, the board voted to approve the purchase of four Talk and Listen kits. These kits would be useful during conferences and open houses. Each kit would allow 25 people to listen as a translator speaks into a microphone. This simultaneous translation would cut down on meeting lengths, not needing to pause for the a translation after each statement. The four kits will total \$15,481.

The board received two letters of retirement and two letters of resignation.

Patricia Ann Lamon, Title 1 Reading Teacher at McDermott, and Gerald Mann, 6th grade teacher at Sunflower ,have submitted their letters of retirement effective at the end of the current school term.

Shaina Benefield, Science teacher at Liberal High school and Jason Cline, Assistant Principal at Sunflower, have submitted their letters of resignation effective at the end of the current school year.

After approximately 25 minutes in executive session, the meeting was adjourned with no further action.