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By VICTORIA WATT

- Daily Leader

Cell phone usage among students and how school officials should deal with them was a hot topic at Monday evening's USD 480 Board of Education meeting. Stats showed for this past school year, more than 300 cell phones were confiscated from students for the first offense and 75 for the second offense.

The first time a student is caught with their cell phone in view, it gets taken away for the day. The second time, the principal confiscates it for the rest of the year or if the student refuses to hand over the phone, it results in out of school suspension.

Members debated on what to do with the students using cell phones during class. Suggestions came up to use scramble boxes to scramble the cell phone frequencies so they cannot be used in the classroom.

Discussions took place as to whether to use five large scramblers, one on the top floor, one on the bottom floor, one in the annex and one for each middle school. Or if they should get small scramblers for each classroom so the hallways and the annex are free for the use of cell phones.

Some suggestions came up that students should put their cell phones in boxes at the beginning of class and then get them back at the end of class.

Board member Dr. Jim Jury said, "The problem with that is ... that kids are going to work around it."

Members agreed cell phone usage does not help improve students'

education. The reason they would like to keep cell phones out of the school is to stop cheating.

A suggestion from the audience proposed the board let the students use them as a resource instead of banning them.

Other devices were talked about: I-pods and music devices are used when teachers allow them.

Having a live T.V. broadcast was discussed, brought up by technology director Terry Adams, it would be on Channel 16 on cable just like the rest of the school news. They have everything for this to happen but microphones.

Finding ways for the students to get physicals for athletics, who cannot afford it was something the board members were willing to work on.

Board member Cliff Abbott said students might be able to travel to Garden City for free physicals.

"If that is something where we can load them up on a bus and take them to Garden City, and a kid is willing to do that," Abbott said.

Abbott said he would investigate those options further.

The board looked at plans to add four classrooms to the high school to accommodate projected student increases. If the board decides to go with the four additional classrooms, further additions could be approved, if necessary.

Buying more laptops for the school was brought up for the students.

Abbott thought maybe each student should get their own laptop, but if something happens to the laptop, it is the student's responsibility for it. They also had to find a way for all the laptops to work while being beside each other. They also discussed having the classrooms that are wired get desktops for each desk and that it would be cheaper. Those ideas would be looked at further, also.

They also talked about needing a place for testing 90 students at one time.

Updating of the phones was also brought up. The existing provider

will not update the equipment for free, but switching companies would cost more, so the board agreed to update now with the existing company.

The system used for class ranking should be modified to include National Honor Society. Some students are getting into NHS with a GPA of 3.5 but not taking advance classes. Students who are taking advance classes are not getting in NHS with a GPA of 3.4. Abbott thinks students who take advance classes should have a better chance at getting in NHS.

"I'm not trying to limit a kid for getting into NHS ... but the way it is set up, we are cheating kids who are trying to achieve to get in,"

Abbott said.

The board asked Liberal High School Principal Keith Adams to look into working with the faculty advisor of NHS to see if that system can be changed.

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