

SYNOPSIS
URBANA SCHOOL DISTRICT 116
BOARD OF EDUCATION
BUSINESS MEETING
AUGUST 16, 2005

The Board of Education returned to work last night after a summer hiatus. Good and bad news awaited them.

For the good news, the Urbana and the Champaign Unit 4 School Districts have been working together over the summer on a cross-district initiative for school volunteers. Urbana Middle School Mentor/Volunteer Coordinator Barbara Linder, and her Champaign counterpart Brenda Koester, worked with the human resources directors in both school districts to create consistent volunteer applications, screenings, school sign-in processes, handbooks, and volunteer orientation. The handbooks will be school specific, but since policies and training issues will be the same, the content will be consistent throughout both districts. Linder said that as a result of a U.S. Department of Education mentoring grant to the Urbana School District last winter, both school districts have been able to hire site coordinators for all elementary and middle schools. The coordinators will, in addition to providing the training for volunteers in each building, also track volunteer hours. At Urbana Middle School alone last year, there were 300 volunteers who gave the school over 5,000 hours. That's considerable monetary savings to the school district, in terms of services provided that the district does not pay for, not to mention the benefits to kids in knowing there are abundant caring adults around them. Other school buildings simply did not have anyone to provide the same tracking last year, but that will change with the presence of the site coordinators.

Urbana's volunteer policy is no one can volunteer for the district who couldn't get a job with the district. This means volunteers must undergo many of the same "risk management" procedures as potential employees.

For the bad news, upcoming teacher retirements will cost the district significantly in terms of wisdom and expertise. Thirteen teachers are retiring at the end of this coming school year and 10 have announced plans to retire at the end of the 2006/07 school year. Last night the board approved the retirements of five teachers for the end of this school year, in addition to eight previously submitted. Just those five teachers in last night's board action have a combined 143 years of service to Urbana schools. The ten 2006/07 retirements approved last night have a combined 279 years of experience.

Coming up: Thursday, August 25, first day for staff; Monday, August 29, first day of school for half of the kindergarteners-9th grade; Tuesday, August 30, first day of school for remaining kindergarten students and 10-12th grades; Monday, September 5, Labor Day holiday, no school.

