

SYNOPSIS
URBANA SCHOOL DISTRICT 116
BOARD OF EDUCATION
STUDY SESSION
APRIL 4, 2006

Last night's study session dealt with two totally unrelated issues: Our bilingual program for Latino students and our self-insured program for Workers' Compensation.

The Bilingual Committee (which concentrates on the Latino programming, not all bilingual programming) began in 2003/04. Its charge is to focus on leadership, staff, special education needs, and family communication for our district's 194 Latino students. (Right now there are 89 Spanish speakers attending grades K-5 at Leal School.) Countywide, our Latino population makes up about 3.6 percent of the total and it's the fastest growing population in Champaign County. In the City of Urbana, that percentage is a little higher than countywide.

The committee presented some information about the challenges Latino families face in our schools, including lack of bilingual staff in special services (social workers, psychologist, LD teachers, speech pathologists), lack of bilingual staff in academic counseling, kindergarten transition programming, Title I staff, and an overall lack of interpreters. The committee would like to see other needs addressed as well, including additional ESL staff at Urbana Middle and High Schools, increased Spanish-speaking classrooms at Washington Early Childhood, recruiting efforts expanding to a much broader geographical area, and the addition of a Heritage Language Spanish Class at UHS. Also, the committee recommended that the Bilingual Program Coordinator become an administrative-level cabinet position.

There is no price tag for the staff and programming requests. Superintendent Gene Amberg told the group, who asked for an April 18 board agenda item, that realistically we can't begin to look at shifting budget priorities until sometime in June. Our budget is built upon what the state gives us and that doesn't happen until the General Assembly adopts a formal budget.

Business/Finance Director Carol Baker gave the board an update on our self-insured status for Workers' Compensation. We began the self-insured program in 2002/03 and we have seen both our claim numbers and our costs gradually going down year by year.

We work with a third-party administrator who provides us with on-site audits of our facilities, quarterly meetings to review loss experience, participation in our own District Safety Committee, risk reminders for staff education, ergonomic assessment of employee workstations, accident investigation, and videos and/or other materials for staff training.

In addition, Baker and Human Resources Director Carmelita Thomas have established a "return to work" committee, which works with employees returning to work after an injury. They hope to transition employees back into the work place gradually and concentrate on what the employee needs to make the transition easier.

So far, we have saved approximately \$485,000 over more traditional Workers' Compensation plans.

Also, for the Prairie folks, the district has been working with the city to rectify the traffic problems that arise with the parent drop off/pick up area there. The city has borne all the planning and design costs of this project. Expenditure to do the work, which will eventually line up with the development of Weaver Park, will need board approval.