

SYNOPSIS
URBANA SCHOOL DISTRICT 116
BOARD OF EDUCATION
STUDY SESSION

June 6, 2006

There was discussion. There was data. There was reflection. There was history and recall. There were opinions and amendments. When it was all said and done, the elementary school release time was approved with one condition – the plan will sunset at the end of the 2007/08 school year.

A packed house, made up of mostly elementary teachers and principals, attended the board meeting, held at Cunningham Children's Home. Board member John Dimit wanted an additional three minutes added to the school day in order to approve the early release, in essence, making up for the lost student contact time. But contractually that couldn't happen without impact bargaining, and that amendment was voted down. Then he put forth another amendment – the one with the sunset provision – and he made it clear that he would ask for the same contingency item at the June 20 board meeting covering the middle school and high school early release times too, unless the lost student contact time is addressed in the upcoming contract negotiations.

As we enter the 2006/07 school year, we also enter the third year of the existing contract. There wasn't a doubt on anyone's mind last night about what John Dimit wants to cover in negotiations – longer school days and a longer school year.

Dimit also wants data on teacher attendance during these days. He's voiced his concern about possible abuse of personal leave days during staff development time several times during the release time discussion. He is, however, delighted to hear that one of the goals of the proposal is for elementary buildings to work with each other, noting that in the past it's been a "do their own thing" attitude.

In the final tally, Ruth Ann Fisher was the only dissenting vote for the elementary release plan. She said she couldn't support it because of the childcare difficulties created for families who depend on an older sibling for babysitting.

The new calendar will not be available until the state approves the requested waivers, and due to the timing of the waivers, the release days will happen only during the 2nd semester of the initial year of the plan.

The meeting started out with a tour of Gerber School and that was followed by a presentation by Gerber staff. Gerber is an Urbana School District facility where children 6-21 years old are taught. Most of the students are part of the Cunningham residential program, but not all. Children are placed in the program by mental health agencies, the Department of Children and Family Services, and the criminal justice system. These students all have special needs of varying degrees. The average stay is 1.5 years, and it's not uncommon for a teacher to completely revamp her curriculum several times during the school year because her pupils' age range may gain or lose a few years chronologically due to the mobility of the student population.

Also, retired teacher Connie Minnes addressed the board about the pay for retired USD teachers who return to the district as substitute teachers. Retired teachers are paid \$95 per day, and the long-term requirement is 45 days, when a substitute can then fall into the regular salary schedule. Because of the expertise of the retired teachers, as well as competition for good substitutes throughout the area, Minnes would like to see the daily rate raised to \$125 per day, and the long-term requirement reduced to 10 days.