

SYNOPSIS
URBANA SCHOOL DISTRICT 116
BOARD OF EDUCATION
REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING
DECEMBER 19, 2006

The Board of Education wasn't the least bit concerned about Braggin' Rights last night in a meeting that lasted into the late night hours. So while Weber and crew were working on Missouri, the 3+ hours here contained vital and vast information.

Undoubtedly the most important element of a presentation by our secondary schools staffs was the statement made by Urbana High School Principal Laura Taylor, "We are putting an end to remedial courses at UHS."

Effective next year, everything will become college prep, including a lot of daily supports in the form of ALS - Academic Learning Support. (For those of us with some medical background, ALS stands for Advanced Life Support, and the two terms aren't that far apart.)

The UHS staff said that even though we don't have final PSAE results, the data is very clear that we need to teach what is being assessed. And that isn't happening at Urbana High for students enrolled in remedial classes. Students will enter UHS prepared to take Algebra I, and not a remedial math class. Literacy and reading will have a much higher emphasis as well.

The drawbacks? Fewer elective choices for students, eliminating an Urbana High graduation requirement that a student take speech, and postponing foreign language possibilities until the beginning of the junior year.

Urbana Middle School staff also presented their school improvement initiatives. ISAT results show phenomenal results among the UMS students in math. Overall the school showed a gain of 49% on the 2005 ISAT to 72.7 in 2006. The African American scores in math went from 21.2 (2005) to 58.7 in 2006. They've managed this in some part to a summer achievement math program that has focused on minority enrollments. Those kids are getting excited about math, and they're taking that excitement, along with their newly learned skills, to Urbana High. Also, the increased staff collaboration time on Wednesdays has had a significant impact on test scores.

As Taylor said, "We're a 6th-12th grade campus in two buildings, but one campus and we work on curriculum together."

ARAMARK was on the hot seat for a bit last night due to some parent complaints about menus, food offerings, and nutrition. ARAMARK explained how menus are prepared and the various federal guidelines that dictate that process. Students in Urbana schools are getting meals that far exceed the various USDA minimum daily requirements. No foods served in our schools are fried. But the bigger issue is one of what children will actually eat, as opposed to what their parents want served and therein lies the problem. ARAMARK local director Piper Harvey is actually out in the cafeteria at UMS everyday, talking with students. She has never heard some of the complaints voiced to the News-Gazette in a story that ran on this topic Monday, Dec. 18.

The board is also considering a funding source to create the capital needed to repair and maintain our school buildings. Things might be moving very quickly on this issue, starting with the January 16 board meeting. Board member John Dimit wants a revenue stream to fund these projects and this particular method involves selling/repaying bonds every three years. The plus is obvious: well-maintained and attractive buildings. The negative is that taxpayers will see an increase in the bond indebtedness in the school district tax levy. However, the bond portion of our levy has been steadily decreasing since 1984 and is now at an all-time low.

Three significant retirements were announced last night, culminating in an even 100 years of service to the school district: Yankee Ridge LD teacher Jonell Hastings, 41 years; Wiley School Principal Joan Forschner, 30 years, and Human Resources Director Carmelita Thomas with 29 years of service.