

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS
Minutes of the Northern Local Schools Board of Education
Special Meeting – May 22, 2025

The Northern Local Schools Board of Education met in special session in the District Office Board Room.

The Pledge of Allegiance was said.

Call to Order - President Dale DeRolph called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

Roll Call – Treasurer Jennie Clifton called the roll:

Members Present:

Sharon Cains
Dale DeRolph
Levi Dupler
Patrick Hogan
Megan Miller

Members Absent:

Public Hearing to consider the reemployment of the following retirees:

Angela Gussler, Superintendent
Michael Rodich, Middle School Assistant Principal
Mark Paxton, High School Science Teacher

The following guests were present:

Clint Rhodes
Krista Trent
Jessi Boring
Ashley Hall
Kahley Wilkins
Melissa Brofford
Amy Woodside
Amanda Lackey
Casey Cordray

Mr. DeRolph opened the floor for guests to speak regarding the reemployment of retirees for the 2025-26 school year.

Amy Woodside stated that she has some questions and concerns as this is the first that she recalls the district having a public hearing for retire/rehires; and if anyone had been told that they could not retire/rehire and if so, does that set the district up for future litigation. Mrs. Clifton explained that the requirement for a retire/rehire hearing only applies when an employee is retiring and being rehired into the same position. It does not apply if someone is retiring and being rehired into another position, or if a retiree of another district is being hired, and that to best of her knowledge, a retire/rehire public hearing had not been held in the recent past because there have not been recent retire/rehires that qualified. Mrs. Gussler added that the last retire/rehire that would have been subject to a public hearing was retired high school principal Rick Caldwell and retired superintendent Jack Porter. Ms. Woodside asked if a public hearing was done at that time, to which Mrs. Gussler and Mr. DeRolph stated that they were unsure and could look back at old board minutes to determine this. Mrs. Gussler stated that there were two employees who inquired about the possibility to retire/rehire, both being physical education teachers. Mrs. Gussler explained that positions considered for retire/rehire are typically hard to fill positions,

and not positions such as physical education where there are multiple candidates, whether internal or external, that are readily available to fill those vacancies. Krista Trent asked about board policy regarding retire/rehire. Mrs. Clifton advised that there is not a board policy as the determination of offering retire/rehire is an administrative function.

Ms. Woodside asked why the board was not seeking outside candidates for superintendent who have experience and the ability to work with budget cuts. Mr. Hogan stated that Mrs. Gussler does have that ability and that she successfully led the district through two levy attempts, a reduction of staff, and significant budget cuts.

Krista Trent shared that she feels that the community and staff were disappointed in the scheduled time of the meeting and that the impression is that the board doesn't want the community's input. As the NLEA President, she also stated that she was asked to survey the certified staff about their thoughts on the rehiring of Mrs. Gussler. The survey included 3 questions and received about 50 responses. She stated that there was a lot of positive responses stating that the staff feels that Mrs. Gussler supports students and that they think she handles her responsibilities well and would like to see her continue. However, some also felt that it was time for the district to have new leadership with new ideas and cited low staff morale. There were also concerns expressed that Mrs. Gussler was not present at district events such as athletics or visible in the buildings, and there are feelings of mistrust and a lack of communication.

Mrs. Trent asked about the potential negative effects of rehiring Mrs. Gussler. Mrs. Gussler addressed this concern stating that she feels this question stems from the current investigation surrounding a former employee of the Treasurer's office to which she is being associated with. Mrs. Gussler reiterated that no other District employee, including herself, is tied to, or apart of the investigation, and that her duties as superintendent are separate from the day-to-day operations of the Treasurer's office. Ms. Woodside asked about board oversight of the Treasurer position and their review of the audit reports. Mrs. Clifton stated that the issues and transactions under investigation were presented in any of the past audit reports. Amanda Lackey asked if Mrs. Gussler is involved in any of the district purchasing. Mrs. Clifton outlined the purchasing and payment process and the multiple layers of approvals.

Ms. Woodside asked what steps were being taken to improve morale and that some good teachers have left because of low morale. Mrs. Gussler stated that she believes that teachers left during the district's financial struggles for better pay, or for personal reasons, and not due to morale. Kahley Wilkins mentioned the departure of Bart Smith for a neighboring school and that she herself wasn't given a choice but to resign. Mrs. Gussler stated that Ms. Wilkins statement about her departure wasn't accurate.

Ms. Wilkins asked if we should look from within for qualified administrators if physical education teachers are being told the same. Ashley Hall stated that there was a qualified internal employee who applied for a principal's position that did not get the job. Mrs. Trent stated that she feels that being a family and taking care of our people is preached but that is lost.

Mrs. Cains provided her unique perspective having been on both sides as a teacher and now a board member. She shared that she is hesitant to change superintendents with the ongoing investigation and school funding issues. She stated that by allowing the retire/rehire, it provides a savings to the district which will help staff with insurance as the self-insurance fund needs balanced. She also stated that when Mrs. Gussler was hired, the board did conduct outside interviews and were not pleased with the candidates and that it is difficult to get qualified candidates, especially for superintendent positions.

Mr. Dupler stated that there are districts nearby that have had interim superintendents for a couple of years because the positions are hard to fill and that he feels fortunate to have a superintendent that wants to stay.

Mrs. Trent asked about the savings associated with retire/rehire. Mrs. Clifton stated that retire/rehires of NLEA will be moved and held at Step 10 of the salary schedule. Administrator contracts are negotiated individually and have not yet been board approved, but the estimated savings is at least \$80,000.

Jessi Boring commented on communicating with Mrs. Gussler and that she was reprimanded by her building principal for emailing a question to Mrs. Gussler. Mrs. Gussler stated that Ms. Boring was reminded of the hierarchy of questions, but it was not a reprimand.

Mr. DeRolph asked if there were any other comments, and hearing none, asked for a motion to adjourn.

Adjournment – Mr. Hogan moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Dupler seconded the motion.
Roll call: Mr. Hogan, aye; Mr. Dupler, aye; Mrs. Cains, aye; Mrs. Miller, aye; Mr. DeRolph, aye.

President DeRolph declared the meeting adjourned.

ATTEST:

President

Treasurer