

Policy

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said. "It's not an issue of getting a diploma as every kid is still required to pass all state requirements, it's a ceremonial issue, period. There were six students that were not allowed to participate this year and all it did was single them out and place them in a situation where they could be embarrassed, and that's wrong."

The issue at hand, Smith said, is empathy.

"The job of a school board is to represent its constituents and put parameters in place to nurture these kids" he said. "We have to ask ourselves if we are nurturing our kids by excluding them?" Smith said the policy was written 12 years ago, and with all the changes in the state's testing requirements made during this same period, not constantly rethinking policy to be in line with these changes would be a mistake.

Stone's argument was quite the opposite.

"It's hard to argue with Sam when he asked in the last board meeting, 'Who does it hurt?'" Stone said. "To answer that, I would say it diminishes the accomplishments of those students who reached the ultimate goal."

Stone said it's a time to be introspective.

"Graduation ceremonies should be for graduates," Stone said.

The two policies in question, read as follows: "Students shall meet all state and local graduation requirements, including all applicable exit-level testing, to be eligible to participate in commencement activities and ceremonies;" and "the District shall not issue certificates of coursework completion to students who fail to meet all state and local requirements for graduation."

Smith and Alexander wanted to change the written policy

to allow students who meet the local requirements of the district to participate in the ceremonies. These students would receive a letter of completion for all courses required by the School District, but not receive a diploma until they passed all State mandated requirements for

graduation. This would be similar to the way most Texas Universities conduct graduation ceremonies where students are allowed to participate in the ceremony, but receive their diplomas later upon confirmation of the completion of all requirements to graduate.

Alexander - during the meeting - said even state agencies had a different take on graduation.

"When we went to school board training last month, the Texas Education Agency's spokesperson - over and over - defined graduation as a social event."

Alexander also thanked Wanda Bailey - a Bullard parent, whose daughter Ashley, didn't participate in graduation ceremonies this year - who sparked the debate on the policy in the first place in May.

Bailey spoke in the open forum portion of the meeting - both thanking the board for hearing her request in May and for the myriad and comprehensive help her daughter and the others taking summer tutorials are receiving under the guidance of new Bullard High School Principal Scott Franks.

Alexander also said his views directly reflect that of many parents and teachers.

"The kids requested it, many parents are for it and a lot of the staff is too - that's how I base my argument," he said. "I would like to see this done in the best interests of the kids."

He did, however, say he wasn't single-minded.

"I see all sides, but the ceremony should not be an issue," he said. "We're here for the kids and families."

Johnson and Dotson both disagreed.

"I commend the students who are taking the tutorials," Johnson said. "I still feel like regardless of the goals you set, sometimes you are disappointed."

Dotson concurred.

"It was a struggle," he said. "I reiterate what Tony said. We should stay the way we are."

After the meeting, Bailey was circumspect.

"I fought for what I believed in, and if it's helped one child, then I'm happy," she

said. "My hope now is that this doesn't happen to future kids - that they get the tools they need to succeed at the test."

In other business the board: * heard a detailed report of phase II of bond construction - which will be reported completely in next week's edition of the Bullard Banner News; and

* gave an across the board raise of \$2,000 - instead of the \$1,000 planned for the 2007-08 staff. "We've spent a lot of time and money with buildings," Stone said. "Teachers and staff

are precious resources, it's a one-time expense and well deserved."

According to Superintendent Jim Wright, a first-year teacher with no experience before the raise made \$28,327. Total cost to the district for the raise will be \$260,000.

BISD trustees meet at 7 p.m. the second Monday of every month. The public is welcome to attend meetings.

WANDA BAILEY SPEAKS:

The Bullard Banner News received permission from Bailey to print the speech she prepared:

"I would like to apologize for any conflict or controversy I might have caused at the May meeting. My emotions got the best of me. Sometimes it takes those things to get change. Since I have talked to you last there have been some changes at the high school. Mr. Franks was a great start. He and I have been in contact all summer. I truly think he is going to be a great inspiration to our high school. There are changes in play that will benefit our students tremendously.

One thing Mr. Franks did to help my child was he got her the help she had been looking for. Ashley and her fellow classmates attended summer tutorials at Bullard. They are waiting to take the test this week. They got individual help and their weaknesses were worked on. So if I accomplished that for our students, then all the controversy was worth it. Out of six students, five are retaking the test. Although they did not get to celebrate in graduation ceremonies - I believe that graduation is just that - a ceremony to celebrate the end to a chapter in your life.

When our seniors were in elementary, intermediate and junior high they were given an awards ceremony at the end of the school year, certificates for attendance, honor rolls, principal awards, etc. Why should it be any different when these students are seniors?

I feel that they should walk across the stage for recognition of completion of 13 years of local requirements. I think we should keep district requirements separate from state. The state is changing our requirements all the time - so much that it's hard to keep up.

Our seniors are fully aware they will not receive their diplomas until they meet state requirements. So if the state can change, why can't we?

I think my daughter said it best when she said that when she applies for a job or enrolls to a college, they ask her for her diploma - not if she walked across a stage at graduation. So she's working hard to get her diploma for her future. I truly hope you give this matter a lot of consideration. I pray that this gets changed for the great kids of Bullard. I don't want this to happen to any more kids or to their parents. I wish I could change these policies statewide that are affecting our seniors.

Again, I thank you all for allowing me to express my feelings and views on this topic.

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