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Students invited to meet new principal at Stevens Middle School

Richland School Board lists impact fees, all-day kindergarten as top priorities

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By Ty Beaver, Tri-City Herald

Construction impact fees, all-day kindergarten and the possibility of a magnet school were identified as top priorities of the Richland School Board at a workshop meeting Monday afternoon.

The impact fee proposal was recommended by board member Phyllis Strickler. The fees are used by school districts in Washington to defray the cost of young families moving in and overcrowding schools,

For example, the city of Pasco instituted a \$4,700 building fee on single-family homes and a similar fee on multiple-family units last year, at the request of the Pasco School District.

Praised by some as a way to ease chronically crowded schools, others criticized the move and said it would depress growth.

"I think it's a good idea," Strickler said.

She told the Herald it's an issue that interested her when she joined the board nearly two decades ago. There was strong resistance to the idea by local government leaders at the time, but she feels the idea is more accepted now.

Former Richland board member Jim Peterson spoke in support of Strickler's suggestion at the beginning of the meeting. Instituting an impact fee would tell the district's older residents that families moving to the area should pay more for any schools needed because of growth, he said.

"If you've got an impact fee out there it does help establish a sense of fairness," Peterson said.

Board Chairman Rick Jansons thinks all-day kindergarten should be at the top of the board's list and wants to investigate offering it at all the district's schools in time for the 2014-15 school year, he said.

State education officials provided money for Jefferson Elementary School to offer all-day kindergarten this year. The state is expected to offer all-day kindergarten statewide by 2018 to comply with a Washington Supreme Court order requiring proper state funding of K-12 education.

Jansons suggested a tuition-based model to speed up implementation of all-day kindergarten ahead of state funding, but that district staff should consider any way it could work.

Strickler opposed a quicker implementation schedule, saying it's not clear there is room for full-day kindergarten until four new school buildings open in two years. Board members agreed to leave it a priority but not specifically push for next year.

Jansons also suggested the board look at starting a magnet school -- a public school with a specialized curriculum. He cited the recent founding of a new Montessori grade school in Richland as motivation for the idea.

"There's a demand for things other than regular schools," Jansons said.

No action was taken Monday. The impact fees, all-day kindergarten and magnet school were suggested as "Tier 1" issues, meaning they will be discussed at multiple future board meetings.

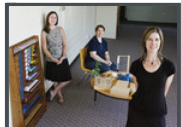
Other top issues identified by the board:

- Renewing the district's maintenance and operations levy, due for renewal in the spring.
- Implementation of the Common Core State Standards and their associated standardized exams.
- Delta High School, a science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM, high school jointly operated with the Pasco and Kennewick school districts.

District staff will review the board's priority list and are expected to follow up with reports on feasibility and next steps in the coming weeks.

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