



THE CHARGER

Editorial | School board should continue streaming meetings

The USD 329 Board of Education has decided to no longer stream its meetings. This cut in accessibility and transparency will hurt the community and students.

The board began streaming meetings while meeting virtually at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. We commended the district for continuing to stream meetings in an editorial last semester, but the board announced a decision to end the process beginning at next week's meeting.

Wabaunsee superintendent Troy Pitsch explained the decision. "I think we've become kind of passive consumers of things that are going on instead of showing up and advocating."

"I think if people are genuinely interested and really want to be an active participant in school district affairs, they would probably show up in person," Pitsch said.

Every month, anywhere between 100-250 people watch the meeting. Fitting that many people into the board room would be uncomfortable, if not impossible.

For many people, making the trip to attend a monthly meet-

The editorial is the opinion of the Charger staff. Students discuss editorial topics as a group and write an opinion that represents a majority of the staff.

Send letters to the editor to whscharger@gmail.com.

ing simply isn't doable. Some people can't attend board meetings because they have children, siblings or even parents at home they have to care for. Activities, jobs and a thousand other events can get in the way, but that doesn't mean people should be shut out of access to the school board. Giving people the option to watch from home is more than just a matter of convenience.

"The board isn't saying we don't want people to come, what they're saying is that we prefer you come in person," Pitsch said. While bringing patrons to the meeting is a good intention, it isn't worth excluding people who can't attend in-person.

Pitsch said that the Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB) is recommending schools to move back to in-person board meetings.

"The board is considering and deciding that we probably should go with what the KASB is recommending we do," Pitsch said.

But when we asked the KASB, that was not the explanation provided.

Kristin Magette, Assistant Executive Director of Communications and Community Engagement with KASB, said that decisions such as to stop live-streaming board meetings are made by local leaders.

Magette said that local leaders may decide to do this because "Live streaming a meeting requires additional technology support from staff. Schools may need those staff to spend their time on other tasks or avoid overtime expenses."

Wabaunsee technology director Josh Nisly said that isn't an issue. "I don't think it's a problem. I usually try to attend every meeting and so every meeting I'm at I am able to take

care of it," Nisly said.

We have the equipment and capability to continue streaming, and we know it improves community engagement, so why not continue?

There are a handful of area schools that continue to livestream their meetings, including Manhattan and Topeka. If it were a legal issue, why would these districts continue to broadcast meetings?

The Charger works to cover every board meeting, and many students on staff are unable to attend in-person due to practice, activities and jobs. This means that students who may live more than 20 miles away have to travel for an hour-long meeting that they could have watched from home or at school the next day.

District Clerk Michelle Gehrt noted that minutes from meetings are published online and posted in the Signal-Enterprise, but as we noted in an editorial last year, the notes tend to be

pretty vague. It's a good way to find the decisions the board has made, but the discussion and context is often lost. No other local media regularly covers our district, and the Charger often coordinates its coverage with the Signal-Enterprise. Having a recording of the meeting also helps us avoid misquoting board members, as we can easily verify quotes.

The decision doesn't violate the community's access to public meetings, but we think it's a bad public relations move by the district. At a time when the board is asking the taxpayers to invest in a bond issue, it doesn't seem like a good idea to be more inaccessible.

If this decision affects you, please let the board know. Their email addresses are all published at usd329.com.

When we asked board members for comment, area 4 representative Jerome Hess said "The great thing about having a high school newspaper is you can attend all the meetings you wish to, and report on them for those who haven't."

We certainly intend to. We just wish the board would make it a little easier.

"The board isn't saying we don't want people to come, what they're saying is that we prefer you come in person."

— superintendent Troy Pitsch

Nutrition class provides snacks for athletes

Ava Meinhardt | staff writer

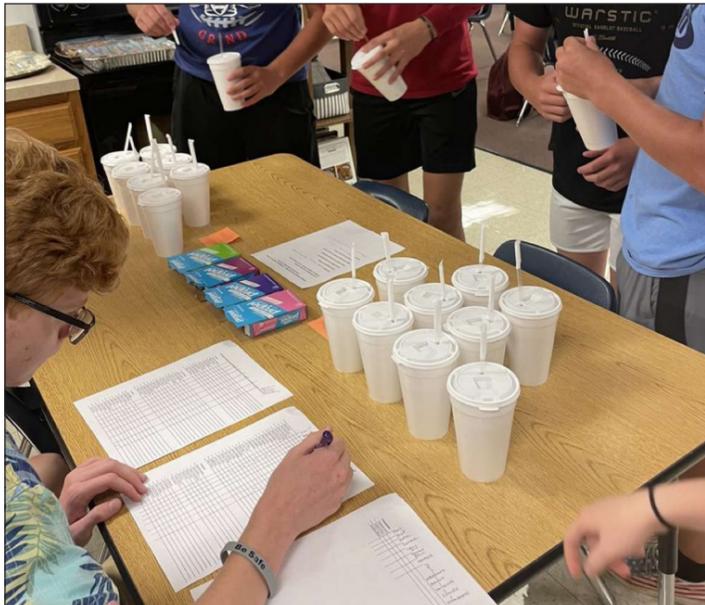
Athletes get very hungry throughout the day. It can be at least 5-6 hours before athletes even have a chance to eat between lunch and supper.

Family and Consumer Science teacher Diane Breiner oversees a nutrition bar for the current fall athletes every afternoon except Fridays. "I was talking to Mr. Miller one day about how a lot of his students and others come in and get pop tarts from him. It got me thinking about how long students have to wait to eat from lunch to when they get home after a long practice," she said.

The idea started in nutrition and wellness class. The class sent a list of foods students would want to eat from the nutrition bar. Everyone voted on their favorite options from the list. "They decided on the options of PB&J, PB&Banana, bagels with cream cheese, trail mix, peanut butter with fruit or a smoothie. We don't do smoothies all the time since it's time consuming to make and they are gone in an instant."

Football player Mauricio Hernandez expressed how much he likes the nutrition bar. "I like it, and it keeps me energized and more focused for a game or practice than I would be if I was really hungry," Hernandez says.

All of this food can be very expensive, especially when almost every athlete participates. Thanks to the donations



Senior Robert Potter distributes smoothies during 6th hour. Athletes can place an order each morning for snacks in the afternoon. Photo by Ava Meinhardt.

from the Booster Club, fall sports, fitness club and the FCS, there has been enough money to buy everything the nutrition bar needs.

"Another person I would really like to thank is Karen Wright. She picks up our groceries for us, because there is no way I could get to Sam's Club every week and get the things we need without her," Breiner said.

Some of the fall sports teams also donated to help out with providing the food. Breiner hopes some of the parents or athletes can chip in.

"It's been hugely successful. There are 81 fall athletes in football, tennis, volleyball, or cross country. We have an average of 50 or more a day

attending the nutrition bar," Breiner said.

Having food in your body can also have other benefits besides staying energized for sports. "Not only does it help me with staying energized for sports, it also keeps me focused in my afternoon classes," tennis player Macy Alderman said.

More than 60 percent of fall athletes use the nutrition bar each day. "We have provided snacks 15 times so far this fall. 734 fall athletes have taken advantage of the free food items for an average of 49 students per day," Breiner said.

Breiner plans to continue this program and these numbers throughout the year for each sports season.

Yellow Ribbon, FCA promote Suicide Prevention Awareness

Payton Wurtz | staff writer

September is Suicide Awareness and Prevention Month. This year, Yellow Ribbon and Fellowship of Christian Athletes clubs put together a week of activities and events to promote mental health and bring attention to suicide awareness.

Tuesday, secretary Jeanne Parry played inspiring music over the intercom during passing periods to celebrate Wellness Week. The music was supposed to be played Monday for "Music Monday" but due to teacher inservice day, there was no school.

Thursday, mental health liaison Sarah Eckstein and counselor Wendy Leenerts addressed the entire school in a short assembly. They played a series of short interviews of people who have had a family member commit suicide, or have attempted it themselves.

"I really enjoyed the videos and it gave me a fresh perspective on suicide. The videos gave us something to relate to. One of the people who had attempted suicide was a professional football player, and it really helped me realize that even though someone has a seemingly glamorous life, they can still struggle," sophomore Taryn Maike said.

After seeing the video, senior Kwinton Willier said that he is going to pay closer attention to warning signs and red flags from peers and

family members and not dismiss something he may have thought just to be weird.

"I always try to stay on the positive side, but there are things that will kind of sometimes bother me. I just have to remember that there are people around me who love me and a community that supports me," junior Miguel Hernandez said.

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