

USD 251 board members presented with charter school proposal
TAGAN TRAHOON 27 MARCH 2018



A new charter school and education strategy may be in the works for USD 251.

During a special USD 251 North Lyon County School Board meeting, teachers of Reading Elementary offered a presented the possibility of a charter school. The proposal included a new education strategy emphasizing specialized curriculum, including extra help for students with dyslexia. The presentation follows recent proposals by board members to close down Reading Elementary as a cost-saving measure amidst dwindling enrollment numbers in the district.

Board President Matt Horton believes making Reading a charter school could help it stand out from other schools in the surrounding area.

A major discussion point among board members is whether or not the funding for the program is possible, or if enrollment numbers are high enough to warrant a trial period for the charter program. Horton says this topic will continue to be a major point during future talks on the subject.

Along with the new education model, presenters offered several benefits to the charter program such as increased enrollment and awareness of USD 251.

Also on the agenda was a discussion on the superintendent search after Aron Dody announced he would be stepping down last month to take the superintendent position at Council Grove.

One executive session was planned and no action was taken on any items. A second special meeting is scheduled for Wednesday to discuss the Reading Elementary closure proposal. That meeting will take place in the board meeting room at 7 pm.



Reading residents voice overwhelming support for charter school at special meeting
CHUCK SAMPLES 29 MARCH 2018

Judging from the responses Wednesday, a proposal to turn Reading Elementary into a charter school may have struck a nerve across USD 251 North Lyon County.

A special public hearing was held at the board office in Americus, and close to 50 people turned out. Most sat quietly, but the people that spoke up -- including Reading resident Heather Jones -- said a charter school model could be something that sets Reading apart after years of study and effort towards that end.

The idea of a charter school geared towards students with dyslexia was first outlined to the public at a separate special meeting on Monday. One of the presenters, Reading teacher Amy Crawford, said the idea was put in front of fellow Reading teacher Shari Beatty by Cradle to Career Literacy Center co-owner Angie Schreiber.

While many people gave their unqualified support to the charter school approach, others like Nancy Wells said the district had to keep the bottom line in mind.

Crawford said there could be enough students to make a dyslexia-based charter school viable with possibly up to 10 percent of students dealing with some degree of dyslexia.

The future of Reading Elementary has been in question for better than 20 years. Last month, the school board gave initial approval for starting the legal process of closing the school, potentially by the end of June if that is the ultimate decision of the board. School board members and current Superintendent Aron Dody have said the district needs to trim about \$200,000 for the upcoming school year due to declining enrollment and the potential for a significant loss in revenue now that block grant funding has been eliminated. The closure of Reading would provide close to \$220,000 in savings.

No action was taken. The next discussion about the future of Reading Elementary will be at the board's next meeting April 11.