

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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School Board appoints Smith as newest trustee

The Comal Board of Trustees on Tuesday appointed Stephen Smith, a retired certified public accountant who lives in New Braunfels, to fill the unexpired District 1 seat vacated by Carolyn Miller in April.

Smith will be sworn in at the July 13 regular meeting and will remain in the position until it is up for election in May 2012.

In other action, the school board endorsed the elimination of exemptions for final exams at the secondary level, beginning with the 2011-12 school year, as part of several modifications to grading requirements.

"We have been phasing this out over the past two years in anticipation of the implementation of End-of-Course Exams (EOC)," said Dr. Jodi Duron, assistant superintendent for academics and student services. Middle school exemptions were completely eliminated two years ago, and high school exemptions have been phased out in terms of number and course type over the past two years.

"One of the challenges at the campus level is managing the exemption issue," Duron told the board. "It has become a time management and tracking issue for the principals in terms of exemption eligibility."

One of the concerns raised regarding the elimination of exemptions was the potential for higher absentee rates. However, Duron indicated that through the phasing out over the past two years, the district has monitored the attendance rates at the high school, and attendance has remained constant during that time period.

“After discussion with the principals, they are in favor of eliminating all of the exemptions at the same time instead of a further phase out,” she said.

Another component of the new grading changes is the decision to exclude the EOC assessment from students’ grade point average (GPA) and class rank.

“A student who passes a course but fails the corresponding EOC exam will earn course credit for the class but will be required to take the EOC exam,” Duron told the board. “We will not get the results (of the EOC assessment) until well after our last day of school. Therefore, in order to meet the requirements of the law, a separate grade calculating EOC as 15 percent of the final grade will be reflected on the transcript but it will not be a determining factor as to whether or not the student passed the course.”

She said that since there are still so many unknowns surrounding the state’s new assessment system (called STAAR), Comal ISD administration is working to put basic guidelines in place that are consistent with neighboring school districts.

Much of the discussion on Tuesday surrounded the projected budget shortfall over the next biennium, which is “substantially less than we initially thought but will still get progressively worse,” said Dr. Marc Walker, superintendent of Comal ISD.

The discussion took place within hours of the Texas House of Representatives’ approval of a state budget bill.

“They (the Texas Legislature) did nothing to fix the tax structure and our budget will get progressively worse over the next three years,” Walker said. District projections show a decrease of 6 percent, approximately \$6.9 million, in revenue each year for the next two years.

The real impact, however, is the difference in revenue from current formula funding, he said. “The total loss from formula funding for Comal ISD is \$11.4 million over two years.”

In early 2011, the district’s projected budget shortfall approached \$17 million, but there were a number of question marks because the Texas Legislature had just begun discussing the state’s budget and education’s share.

Walker recommended to the school board the “recapture” of about \$4.2 million—based on the school board and administration priorities—that include the following areas:

- A “reserve” of 15 teachers to address enrollment growth
- The return of 37 positions, including librarians, school nurses, security guards, warehousemen and plumbers
- \$1 million to the purchase of buses
- \$800,000 to capital maintenance projects
- \$600,000 to technology
- \$125,484 to the campus allotments

“This next year is the best-case scenario,” Walker said. “In 2012-13, we’re going to have 1,350 more students to keep up our services at the current levels. We are going to have to get used to setting a new baseline on teacher-class ratios.”

He said that the Texas Legislature of 2013 will begin the budget biennium with a \$9-11 billion gap.

“Two years from now we are going to have to make up \$9, \$10, \$11 billion just like we have this year,” Walker said. “There is no tax structure in place to get the money.”

The school board will continue budget discussion until the regular meeting on Aug. 24, when it will vote on a final budget.

Also on Tuesday, the school board discussed the feasibility of contracting with a San Antonio firm to place advertising on school buses. For a fee, local businesses would be able to place ads on the back, left side of the school buses. Comal ISD would receive 70 percent of the fee and the company, Creer Advertising and Marketing, would receive 30 percent. Ads could be “zoned” and targeted for certain bus routes. Ad content would be reviewed by a committee of district employees. Creer Advertising estimates that the district could make more than \$375,000 per year, nearly the equivalent of three new buses, for running three ads on 100 buses.

The board will formally consider this proposal at the July 13 meeting.