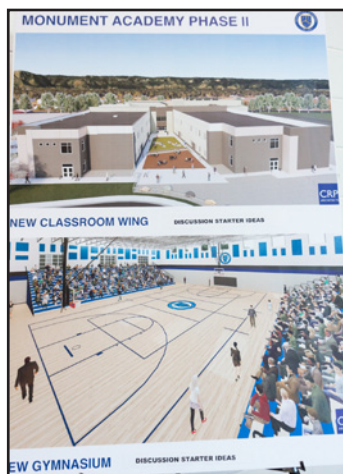


Right: At a special board workshop on Oct. 5, Monument Academy board members and staff hosted over 30 parents to solicit input on options, priorities, and ideas for its phase two build-out of its east campus.



Small groups were formed to consider and report back on how to retain more eighth-graders to high school; whether sixth grade should stay at east campus, move back to west campus, or be split based on parent choice; the need to prioritize a new academic wing; adding a full-size gym and more sports fields; adding a performing arts space and more. The current bonds will need to be refinanced and the goal is to have more space by fall 2023. *Photos by Jackie Burhans.*



The next regular board meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 11 at 6 p.m. at the east campus band room in nov only. The MA School Board usually meets at 6 p.m. on the second Thursday of each

month. For more information, see <https://bit.ly/ma-boe>.

Jackie Burhans can be reached at jackieburhans@ocn.me.

Lewis-Palmer D38 Board of Education, Oct. 18

Board hears presentation on student mental health, recognizes local partnerships, discusses staff compensation

By Harriet Halbig

The Lewis-Palmer D38 Board of Education addressed a number of important issues at its Oct. 18 meeting, including student mental health supports, local community partnerships, and a detailed consideration of staff compensation as compared to neighboring districts.

Examination of student mental health supports

Palmer Ridge High School Senior Thomas Fry gave the keynote speech at a recent meeting of the Social-Emotional Wellness Coalition. This year is the Year of the Story for that organization, and Fry offered his personal experiences in hopes of improving the district's response to mental health challenges among students.



Above: Thomas Fry, a senior at Palmer Ridge High School, provided a student voice on the state of teenage mental health and what schools and teenagers can do to help. *Photo by Jackie Burhans*

Fry emphasized that mental health needs to be thought about and taught about in schools. The stigma related to mental health must be eliminated in order to encourage students to seek the help they need.

He said that students do not seek help for a number of reasons in this district, including a challenging academic schedule, fear of being judged, concern that they may not be heard and taken seriously, unwillingness to admit something might be wrong, and unwillingness to admit they can't cope without help.

Solutions offered by Fry included increasing the number of counselors and making them more accessible as they are often hard to find and are responsible for a large number of students; offering seminars on the subject of mental health or devoting class time to discussion of the issue, creating a welcoming environment to encourage personal interaction between staff and students, and creating peer support groups

or clubs to address the subject.

Fry stated that 20% of teens suffer from anxiety disorder, 8% suffer from depression, and 23% suffer from insomnia. When one realizes this, it is apparent that it is an issue which needs to be addressed.

Strategic Plan Priority 3: Deepen professional learning culture committed to continuous growth

Superintendent KC Somers spoke of creating a program to express gratitude to the staff for their efforts and achievements and to create additional training and support for substitutes.

The district will recruit members for a new Financial Advisory Committee in order to examine ways in which available resources are used. The unofficial October student count revealed an additional 140 students over last year's count, making further funds available over the budget created in June.

Somers offered a detailed PowerPoint on the subject of staff compensation, comparing D38 with seven other districts in the area. Comparisons are challenging due to a number of factors, such as varying cost of living, provision of transportation, and mill levy override funding.

The district is among the lowest in compensation for licensed staff (teachers, administrators) and the lowest for bus driver compensation.

District 49 has a mill levy override on this year's ballot, and Districts 12 and 20 have successfully passed overrides over the past few years. District 38 last passed an override in 1999.

Somers stressed that federal funding during the COVID emergency could not be applied to such recurring expenses as salaries.

To view Somers' PowerPoint slides, please refer to boarddocs in the Board of Education section on the district website.

To address the problem, Somers said that work is being done to develop pathways to improve the situation, with projected solutions to be reported in the spring.

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