

USD 115 Patrons Question Proposed Closure

The potential closure of Saint Benedict Elementary School was the focus of a special meeting of the U.S.D 115 Board of Education Wednesday night.

Although a crowd gathered in the gymnasium of the B&B Junior/Senior High School, in Baileyville, for what was intended as a time for public comments to be heard, no one signed up to speak.

Instead, as had been planned to follow the comments, a question and answer session was held.

Both Superintendent Darrel Kohlman and Board President Gary Niehues fielded questions, ranging from possible ways to keep the school open to future plans for transportation.

Prior to the first question being asked, Kohlman outlined for the crowd the three key reasons why closure is being considered: cost per student, enrollment numbers and budget projections after consolidation incentives(Play Audio :19 seconds)

The incentives given by the state that followed the past consolidation leading to the formation of U.S.D. 115, and how that plays into the possible closure, as well as other future aspects of the district, garnered some attention from the public.

Kohlman says the board is working to secure the district's future while that so-called "frozen period" remains in place(Play Audio :19 seconds)

Patrons questioned why the board is using 30-year-trends to make their decisions, instead of looking to the near future, including the possibility that other closings, in other districts, could send students to Saint Benedict, and bring the enrollment numbers up(Play Audio :30 seconds)

Patrons also looked to the future, questioning the district officials about possible changed usage of school facilities, in order to spare them from potential closure.

Kohlman says the only definite, regarding student placement, is what would happen should Saint Benedict be closed, with any other changes impossible to predict(Play Audio :24 seconds)

The Board of Education, during their regular meeting of March 12th, will address the proposed closure, with a vote possible on the future of Saint Benedict.

However, to hear school officials put it, nothing is yet set in stone, and the fate of the school is not yet sealed.