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PCM EXPLORER

PCM Legislative priorities set



Preschool, supplemental state aid and mental health and safety are the three topics selected by the PCM School Board of the 2023 legislature. Jamee A. Piersons/PCM Explorer

PCM School Board selected priorities for the 2024 legislative session

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The PCM School Board selected its top three legislative priorities for the 2024 session. The priorities remained the same as the previous year: preschool, supplemental state aid and mental health and safety. The Iowa Association of School Boards had 21 topics for the 2023 legislative session. They

included student achievement, preschool, early literacy, English learners, school safety, dropout/at risk, mental health, special education, sharing and reorganization, area education agencies, teach recruitment and licensure, teacher professional development and retention, supplemental state aid, school funding policy, property taxes, tax base, bond issues, unfunded mandates, local accountability and decision making, public school innovation, private school choice and home school education.

For the topics selected by PCM, the IASB said:

PRESCHOOL

“Research demonstrates that children who take part in early childhood education are more

likely to succeed in school.” The policies supported by the IASB are to ensure all school districts have the capacity to serve all 4- and 5-year olds, allow districts to provide services such as full-day programming transportation and wraparound care and additional support and resources to provide the necessary behavioral and education services to 2 to 5 year olds.

SUPPLEMENTAL STATE AID

“The school aid formula is the biggest driver in providing resources for a high-quality education that translates to a successful future for our students and economic growth in our state. A school’s general fund supports a high-quality teacher workforce, critical for student achievement.” Policies supported include sufficiently support the ability of local districts to met parent and community expectations and provide a world-class education to all students, provide the resources to recruit and retain a high-quality teacher and staff workforce and incorporate inflation and cost-of-loving increases to minimize the negative impact on a district’s general fund from these increased costs.

MENTAL HEALTH

“Student mental health issues are increasing and impacting student achievement.” To address those concerns the IASB support

SCHOOL BOARD • 3

JASPER COUNTY Veterans affairs office needs more help to meet demand

Cases are successful but there is not enough time in the day, administrator says



Jasper County Veterans Affairs Administrator Alyssa Wilson speaks with the board of supervisors during the July 25 meeting at the courthouse. Christopher Braunschweig/PCM Explorer

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To keep up with the influx of veterans seeking financial assistance and compensation, Jasper County Veterans Affairs Administrator Alyssa Wilson told the board of supervisors on July 25 that she may need her veteran service officer (VSO) to transition from an hourly position to a salaried position.

While presenting the quarterly report for veterans affairs, Wilson said the office is “definitely” at a point where it needs two full-time workers on hand. Keith Thorpe, who works as a the VSO, recommended Wilson change his position to salaried. County documents show the office is putting in the work.

In the past fiscal year, Wilson said her department has handled 1,042 veteran appointments. Within the past quarter, there were a total of 328 appointments between scheduled visits, walk-ins and home visits. Veterans affairs has also brought in more than \$2 million this past quarter for veterans.

“Between the volume of appointments and walk-ins

compared to the actual case work that goes in to making sure these cases are successful just isn’t there with only one of us full-time,” Wilson said to the Jasper County Board of Supervisors. “Other than that, we’re busy.”

Jasper County Supervisor Doug Cupples remarked that Wilson was handling a lot of appointments. Wilson nodded her head, saying she is tired. She said the veterans affairs office averages about nine to 17 veteran visits a day. The most she has seen in one day is 23 veterans.

Veterans will be coming from outside of the county for case work soon, too. Wilson said a retirement from an individual in the Marion County veterans affairs office has directed veterans to Jasper County. While Wilson and Thorpe can assist those veterans, she is prioritizing Jasper County veterans first.

“If they’re outside of the county, I’m sorry I would be willing to help you but I’m looking to probably schedule two to three weeks out. My calendar is still for actual scheduled appointments is still scheduling a week to a

VETERANS • 3

JASPER COUNTY

Jasper County wrangles with too much saved up vacation time

Supervisors are working on revising policy to avoid huge payouts

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In order to curb an overabundance of vacation hours accrued by Jasper County employees and avoid enormous payouts, the board of supervisors are working with the director of human

resources to update policies that would establish an across-the-board, 280-hour cap on all employee vacation time.

But that still leaves roughly 21 employees who have more than 280 hours of vacation saved up, which could lead to budgeting issues. Jasper County Auditor Jenna Jennings told Newton News this affects a wide range of employees, from department heads to union employees with differing rates of pay.

VACATION • 3

JASPER COUNTY

Jasper County teams with IDALS for soil and water improvement projects

Landowners interested are encouraged to call Soil and Water Conservation District

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The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship formed a formal agreement with Jasper County last week that will effectively kickstart the search for bioreactor and saturated buffers projects between farm fields and local watersheds in an effort to protect water quality and reduce nutrient loss in soil.

Jasper County Supervisor Brandon Talsma said IDALS has been trying to work with landowners to implement soil conservation and edge-of-field practices. But participation has



Jasper County Supervisor Brandon Talsma speaks during a past board meeting about the 28E agreement between the county at the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. Christopher Braunschweig/PCM Explorer

been slim. By forming a 28E agreement with the county, Talsma said the hope is to get more landowners and farmers on board.

Using the county as a government entity and doing what IDALS calls “batch-and-build projects,” landowners do not have to worry about finding

contractors to install bioreactors or saturated buffers. The county is not running the program, but will instead use its bid processes to find the con-

tractors. “If there are individual landowners who are interested in this, they need to reach out to the Soil and Water Conservation Districts or the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship,” Talsma said. “That is who is coordinating the program and who will get them signed up for the program.”

When that list of projects has been completed and IDALS believes it has a sufficient number of projects in that package, it will come before the county board of supervisors to bid out. Talsma said the county just gets

SOIL AND WATER • 3