Joy Swearingen

J-P correspondent

Illini West High School board has altered its Return to School plan related to requiring masks during athletic play, based on guidelines of the Illinois Department of Public Health.

* Within the IDPH sport policy, sport organizers are given several specific times when masks should not be worn during competition, and given discretion on mask use at other times.
* The IDPH policy states “… if sport-specific scenarios arise in which a face mask may obstruct a participant’s view or become a choking hazard, sports organizers should use their discretion to determine whether risk of mask use outweighs risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission.”
* Believing this to be the case, the Illini West board approved the following changes, at their meeting Nov. 17.
* The plan now states that athletes actively participating during practice or a contest in indoor sports do not need to mask.
* Masking remains in effect for all coaches and players on the bench or indoors while not competing, while on the bus, or when not actively engaged during practice.
* Spectators will be required to mask. Illini West High School teams will follow the request of any school they visit or host in order to ensure all students have a safe environment while allowing either district to use its discretion regarding masks.

**Levy hearing**

* The tentative levy proposal was approved for funding for the 2022-23 school year. The levy requests $3,350,430 from property taxes of the counties included in the district – Hancock, McDonough, and Henderson.
* A Truth in Taxation hearing on the proposed levy will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 15, before the next board meeting at the superintendent’s office, 600 Miller in Carthage. This hearing allows for public comment on the levy before final action, slated for that night.

Superintendent Jay Harnack reported on a meeting of the board’s building and grounds committee with an architect and engineer that resulted in changes to the proposed plan for the gym HVAC system. Harnack will continue to research architects for the project. The project may not be done in the summer of 2022, depending on whether materials are available.

The board began their meeting with a hearing on an Illinois State Board of Education tuition waiver. Comments were heard from Tiffany Shepler of Bowen, who works at Illini West. She requested that tuition for her three children be waived so they could attend Illini West.

The board approved a five-year waiver of tuition for out of district students whose parents are employed in the Illini West district. It will begin with the fall semester in 2022. The waiver is open to any student who meets that criteria.

**Short term investments**

The board agreed to be part of the Illinois School District Liquid Asset Fund. Harnack explained that, while district expenses are generally predictable and fixed, income comes in several large lump sums through the year. With advice from ISDLAF and at the discretion of Illini West officials, district assets can be invested at local banks or in ISDLAF funds for shorter periods of time.

“The liquid asset fund does two things,” Harnack said. “They can help with cash-flow analysis, to say when we can and should invest our money, and for how long.” The ISDLAF offers short-term investment funds for as few as seven days.

“There are groups of money that we could invest for shorter periods of time, things that local banks do not offer.

“My goal is, over the entire course of the school year, to invest our district funds safely and wisely. I hope to invest more money in local banks. This would let us use a strategy to invest in 7 days, 30 days, three months, a year – whatever can get the best return. In this environment it is not going to be much, but I’d like our money to work as hard for us as it can.”

Harnack reported the following volunteers: Larrick Allaman for band; Mackenzie Corzatt in girls basketball; and Jacob Bryan, boys basketball.

In other action, the board:

* Approved three four-year resignation notices effective at the end of the 2025-2026 school year for Nancy Barnett, MJ Palmer and Shari Shupe. The resignation of LeeAnn Lambert, effective Dec. 22, 2021, was accepted;
* Approved minor changes to the course catalog, including adding an ag biology course;
* Approved the annual statement of affairs for FY 21, ending June 30.
* Approved first reading of several board policy updates.