Call to Order
Board President Clark called the April 1, 2019 Special Meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Roll Call
The following members were in attendance: Kurt Buchholz, Bruce Currie, Erica Nelson, and Stephanie Clark. Mrs. D’Ambrosio arrived at 6:02 p.m. Mr. Loebach arrived at 6:06 p.m.

Mr. Buchholz stated that he was recusing himself from the Board’s discussion and left the meeting at 6:01 p.m.

Also in attendance: Dr. Paul Gordon, Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Marci Conlin, Chief Communications Officer Erika Krehbiel, and Director of Technology, Mike Wood.

Public Participation
Parent Michelle Coles addressed the Board with her perspective on special education decisions for next school year. She stated her concern about the policy to remove self-contained classrooms. She feels the IEP teams have been forced to ignore needs in the interest of moving students to a general education classroom, making the IEP team ineffective. She believes the self-contained classroom program is working and requested this policy be changed before it is too late.

Adjourn to Closed Session
Board members Bruno motioned and D’Ambrosio seconded to adjourn to closed session under Section 2(c)1 The appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees, Section 2(c)2 Collective negotiating matters between the school board and its employees, and Section 2(c)11 Litigation, when an action against, affecting or on behalf of the school board has been filed and is pending before a court or administrative tribunal, or when the school board finds that an action is probable or imminent, in which case the basis for the finding shall be recorded and entered into the minutes of the closed meeting.

On a roll call vote:
Nay: None.
Abstain: None.
Motion passed.

Return to Open Session
The Board returned to open session at 7:33 p.m.

Approval of Leave of Absence for a Teacher
Mrs. Clark read the following statement prior to the vote:
We’ve made a concerted effort to resolve this in discussion with union. Each side made proposals that were unacceptable. This isn’t covered by the collective bargaining agreement so the board is going to move forward granting a leave. A majority of the board views this is as an opportunity to recognize a significant achievement and award. This is something that we would like to encourage and reward for any of our teachers. We
had hoped the union would see it that way too and would want to encourage all members in the same way. We offered that approach with the union but they wish to treat it only as a sabbatical leave which requires the cost of a substitute to the teacher. We were hoping we can work with GEEA moving forward to capture this in further negotiations.

Board members Nelson motioned and Currie seconded to grant Lincoln Elementary School teacher Lisa Buchholz a leave of absence, with full pay and benefits, for the remainder of the 2018-2019 school term to take courses through Northwestern University as part of her Golden Apple award, with the expectation that she will work with the Superintendent and her Principal to share the benefits of the course work with the District and her colleagues during the 2019-2020 school term.

Dr. Gordon invited each Board member to explain their stance on the action item and how they would be voting.

Mr. Currie noted that the paid leave of absence is not provided for in the collective bargaining agreement with GEEA. He compared the Board’s current action item to one the Board had already approved, allowing another teacher to work one extra day to qualify for retirement. Mr. Currie stated every Golden Apple winner has been able to participate since the inception of the award and the district needs to honor that. He would grant this paid leave of absence to any future Golden Apple Award winners and will vote yes.

Mrs. Nelson noted the difficulty of this conversation because a special request is being made that differs from the contract language. She hopes the collective bargaining agreement will be adjusted to accommodate similar awards and situations. Mrs. Nelson stated that she is excited Mrs. Buchholz has the opportunity to bring back new knowledge to the district, but she will be voting no on the paid leave of absence.

Mr. Loebach stated there is no provision for a paid leave of absence in the collective bargaining agreement and it is a disappointing and unfortunate limitation. Given the cost the district might incur in a uniform grievance filed by IEA, he will be voting no.

Mrs. D’Ambrosio stated that the Board has granted benefits for staff in other situations. She is comfortable with the paid leave of absence, but will be voting no because of the possible costs the District might incur in the case of a uniform grievance filing.

Mr. Bruno stated the district has a collective bargaining agreement with extensive language under the sabbatical provision. Mr. Bruno does not believe the district would win a legal challenge and cannot justify the cost. He noted it would also burden the incoming superintendent with a lawsuit and her relationship with the union and teachers. Mr. Bruno concluded that if the Board is interested in looking at sabbatical leave within the contract, it should be addressed when the new bargaining agreement is negotiated. He will be voting no. Mr. Bruno noted that under the current provisions in the collective bargaining agreement, Mrs. Buchholz can take a sabbatical and she will not be prevented from participating in the fellowship. Mr. Bruno stated he would support the request for a sabbatical as currently written and would further support engaging the union around the sabbatical language at the next round of bargaining.

Mrs. Clark stated she is disappointed that two board members would grant the leave, but have decided to vote no because of the threat of a lawsuit from the union. Mrs. Clark noted that GEEA should represent its members, not threaten to sue when a benefit is being offered to them. She believes this same opportunity should be offered to anyone who wins the Golden Apple Award. Mrs. Clark also noted that since 1985 District 41 will be the first district to not allow a teacher to participate in the classes as part of the award and finds that embarrassing. Mrs. Clark will vote yes for the paid leave of absence, just as she would for any teacher because the professional development is positive for the district.

On a roll call vote:
Aye: Currie and Clark
Nay: Bruno, Nelson, Loebach and D’Ambrosio
Abstain: None.
Motion failed.

Adjournment
Board members Bruno moved and Nelson seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:57 p.m. Motion carried on a unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,
Kate Schillinger
Administrative Assistant
Finance, Facilities and Operations
(on behalf of Nancy Mogk, Board Recording Secretary)

Stephanie Clark, Board President

Minutes approved: April 22, 2019