Written by Carol Pomeday
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But high school teachers support current approach that rewards top students

The value of the A+ grade was debated last week by members of the Curriculum and Policy Committee, teachers and administrators in the Cedar Grove-Belgium School District.

Students will also weigh in on the subject through a survey conducted by Wayne Paulus, student representative on the board. He will present the student results at the Dec. 9 School Board meeting.

Board member Aileen Dahlke led the charge against the A+ grade, saying no other high school in the conference uses the grade the way Cedar Grove-Belgium does.

“Other school districts treat their highest grade as 4.0 and we treat it as 4.34,” Dahlke. “We also have the lowest grade to be on the honor roll.”

Principal John Hocking said he discussed the issue with teachers and they want to keep the A+ grade.

“We think it’s worked for us. It’s met our needs for 12 years,” Hocking said. “Before, we had a number of ties for valedictorian. We do have those students who strive above and beyond and they should get extra recognition.

“You asked for our recommendation and we gave it. We also understand that you’re the board and if you say we’re not going to keep the process, then we won’t keep it.” Dahlke criticized the band department for giving too many A+ grades, saying 80% of band students get the high grade.

“If you don’t take band in this district, you’ll never be valedictorian,” she said.

Band director Tom Paulson defended his grading system.

“I’m the one who’s giving the A+’s because the students have worked hard to earn them,” he said. “Anytime you hear the band, you realize that. At Disney, they ask, ‘What college are you from?’ We have a Grammy Award.

“The students from Cedar Grove-Belgium have gone on to be in bands at (the University of Wisconsin) Madison, UWM and Marquette. These are non-music majors who audition and make the top bands.

“That’s because I work with the students and move them up. Isn’t that what ‘no child left behind’ is all about — having students reaching goals we have set?”

Hocking said 80% of the A+ grades were given to students in more subjective courses, such as band or physical education, while only a few students in math and advanced chemistry earned the top grade.

“The staff is working to address that,” he said. “We’re in the process of setting some criteria.”

Supt. Steve Shaw said, “Whether you have an A or A+, what I’m concerned about is that the same standard is used for the grade.”

“I don’t think we give the kids false high grades and they have a problem when they go to college,” Hocking said.

History teacher Dave Claerbaut said his students must get at least a 99 to earn an A+.

“This year’s senior class is an exceptional group of students,” he added.

Chemistry teacher Tina Stauber said, “I think our staff works really hard to grade our students based on the effort they put in in class. I teach advanced chemistry. I believe those who get an A in my class would get an A in college.”

Board member and committee chairman Jim Lautenschlaeger said he wants to hear from students before making a recommendation on the grade.

“This is a good discussion,” he said. “We’re not looking to change anything this minute.”