

Lack of teacher review plan threatens some aid in Grand Island

By Laura E. Winchester

The Grand Island School District could lose more than a half million dollars in state aid if it doesn't have a teacher evaluation plan in place by Jan. 17.

Grand Island is one of 200 school districts in the state that has not yet submitted a performance review plan, interim Superintendent Robert W. Christmann said at this week's Board of Education meeting.

Negotiations on the performance review plan, mandated by the state, are ongoing with the teachers union, "with good results," said Christmann.

"We're optimistic an agreement will be reached fairly soon," he said. The plan must be approved by the School Board before being forwarded to the state, which has final approval.

Districts that don't meet the deadline will forfeit their share of the additional state aid approved by the State Legislature last June.

For Grand Island that means \$530,000, which Christmann said "would be devastating."

In other business at Monday night's meeting, Joseph Giarrizzo, finance director, reported that the district refinanced the last four years of a bond issue at an interest rate of 0.74 percent, which will save the district about \$341,000.

Christmann also clarified the confusion that occurred over last week's school closing because of Hurricane Sandy.

Stating the decision was solely his to make, Christmann said he decided about 10:30 p.m. Oct. 29 after checking the weather forecast, consulting with superintendents of other districts and school personnel to cancel Tuesday's classes.

The information was communicated to a Buffalo TV station, which broadcasts closings and posts them online. Its system includes a time period for postings, which apparently had expired between the time Christmann reported it Monday night and the Tuesday morning broadcast. So some people were unaware that school was canceled.

Also, Christmann said, the station inadvertently sent out a text message to subscribers of

that service incorrectly stating the Grand Island schools would not reopen until Nov. 5, which triggered a flood of calls to district offices and postings on student Facebook pages.

“We sent out a message that this information wasn’t true,” said Christmann, “which triggered a whole batch of more calls.”

The board also approved creating a committee to devise a process for naming rights for school facilities. It will be seek volunteers, including parents and students, to serve on the panel, which will report back to the board. The board has not yet decided how many members the panel will have.

There have been some specific naming requests, including one to name the high school auditorium for the late William and Marion Pinkow, who were both music teachers.