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By JESSICA CRAWFORD

- Daily Leader

Eighty percent of Liberal High School students have voiced their opinion according to results gathered from a recent survey as to whether graduation should be conducted in the Big House or Redskin Field. However, after 400 votes were counted in a class of a little over 200 – it was hard to determine accurate results. LHS Principal Keith Adams has made the decision that graduation will occur at 3 p.m. on Sunday, May 23, inside the Big House.

“On Nov. 9, I presented a proposal as information to the board concerning moving graduation outdoors to Redskin Field on May 22,”

Adams said during USD No. 480’s Monday evening board meeting. “That night we heard from some students that were present concerning some opposition for that proposal.

“Since that time I have received some more feedback,” he continued.

“I have talked to some parents, got some feedback from the students.

Since the calendar was set, there is not uniformity among the senior class. My official stance now is to leave graduation the way it was originally set on May 23 which is a Sunday, at 3 o’clock in the afternoon in the gymnasium. Maybe we can look forward to moving it to Redskin Field perhaps in the future or we can set it with the calendar, then we can have it ahead of time so everyone can make plans accordingly. At this point, my official stance is to leave it as it was

originally planned.”

Vice President Dr. Jim Jury inquired as to how a possible disagreement between students in the junior class can be avoided in the near future and handled more efficiently.

“If we set it now on the calendar, it will be in place so people can plan accordingly,” Adams responded. “That would have to be done by Mr. Stout. The calendar goes to the board in March.”

According to deputy superintendent Lance Stout, a calendar could be available for the board’s review as early as January.

Jury then asked Adams if opinions would be gathered from junior class members regarding their impending graduation date.

“We will speak to the junior class officers and I really think that was some of the breakdown, not keeping it with the class officers of the seniors,” Adams said. “I personally think that is why they were elected, to make those kinds of decisions.

“Whenever we started allowing a lot more input from the seniors, it was just kind of all over the board,” he added. “So, if we stay with the junior class officers input, I can bring that to the calendar committee, Mr. Stout and Mr. Welch.”

Board member Reid Petty was unclear as to why graduation will be conducted indoors when both groups of students addressing the board during the Nov. 9 meeting did, in fact, agree graduation should occur outdoors at Redskin Field.

“Some of the groups, I think they stated that night that they would like to have it outside,” Adams responded. “Some of the feedback we received since that time was not unanimous. Some students wanted it inside on Sunday, some wanted it outside on Saturday, some wanted it

outside on Sunday. But, there just wasn't much of a consensus among the senior class."

Board member Tammy Sutherland-Abbott felt Adams should have taken the poll results into consideration, regardless of the questionable number of responses. She also commented that the way the polling was done could have been more effective if handed over to the government teachers.

"It was my understanding that the way that the support for it was not done very effectively," she said. "Maybe if we would have used our two government teachers to do some kind of voting process, it would be like here in America instead of some Afghanistan thing that was misinforming, I guess.

"We had over 400 votes and there is only 200 and some seniors," she continued. "I just think we should have handled that a little bit different. Not that we should necessarily use the students as our final basis for your decision, but maybe just as some information to base your decision on."

Adams replied that the polling process was only to gather more information, not for basing a decision.

"That would have been a really cool thing for the government class though," Sutherland-Abbott said.

Adams expressed disappointment in the dishonesty displayed by students who voted more than once during the polling process.

"What we did, for your information, was conduct a student survey," he said. "The results were almost instantaneous. Somehow you had to lock in the IP address for each computer to make it just a one response, so the students figured it out pretty quick and started to respond multiple times. It is kind of disappointing, you ask them for honest feedback of their own opinion then they take advantage of it.

“Mr. Diepenbrock told me it was my decision based on feedback,” he continued. “I am trying to make an informed decision based on the information that we have gathered since that time. This seems like the best choice.”

Sutherland-Abbott expressed her view of utilizing the stadium and the added seating such a venue would include.

“I just hope next year we can have this outside to utilize the athletic stadium for just one more thing,” she said. “And to invite more of the community, more family members. I just think it should be a huge celebration for our whole community. That is what we are in this for is to see these kids graduate and that should be for everybody and anybody, whether you have kids in school or not. They should be able to come witness it.”

Again, Petty felt the voice of the students simply was being accounted for by administration.

“My main concern is that we had two groups come here, and it was my understanding that it was going to be outside either way – your decision would just be Saturday or Sunday,” Petty said. “I know both groups leaving here thought it was going to be outside and they were excited about it. Now, you are saying it is going to be inside.”

Adams informed the board that he felt it would be uncomfortable to be outside at 3 p.m. during what he referred to as “the heat of the day.” Adams again informed the board that his decision was to leave graduation as is, changing nothing – time or venue.

“The consensus we gathered from that point to today, shows that it wasn’t unanimous even with those groups,” Adams said. “There were some that actually wanted it inside. About 20 percent that responded wanted it inside.”

“So the other 80 did want it outside then?” Petty asked.

“At different times,” Adams responded. “Some of them wanted Friday night, Saturday night, Saturday morning, or Sunday afternoon. So it was kind of all over the board.

“Please don’t take this disrespectfully, but I have been involved in a lot of graduations,” Adams explained. “I never have provided input from a student’s perspective. I told them here is graduation, here is when it will be, you can show up and participate. So, I think it is good to consult the officers of the class for input, but I think if we open it up for everybody, we get several different opinions.”

Petty again expressed his concerns to his fellow board members and administrators.

“I guess I just don’t understand why we would take a survey where at least 80 percent of the people say they want it outside, then we don’t do it,” he said.

President Dan Diepenbrock quickly said administration must make the final decision, not a poll.

“I don’t want to make decisions about graduation by a survey,” he said. “I want the principal to make the decision. If you think he makes a bad decision, you tell Mr. Welch, if Mr. Welch doesn’t handle it the way you want it to, you get somebody else’s decision. I think what Mr. Adams is saying is that he has been checking into this.”

“I am saying why do a survey if we aren’t going to listen to it,”

Petty responded.

Sutherland-Abbott felt all involved had lost sight of the reason for graduation.

“We need to concentrate on the main reason of graduation – the students that achieve it, the

families and the community that support the graduates,” she said. “Those are the parties we should consider in making the decision – that they all can attend. I am just saying, it is our biggest celebration, that is what we work for from kindergarten to high school.”

Petty again expressed his opinion. He again said there should not be a polling process if results would not be taken into consideration.

“I don’t want to do surveys,” Diepenbrock said. “Why do we need a principal if we are going to do it by a survey – we could have his secretary do that.”

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