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OPS cancels GED program

By [Jonathon Braden](#)
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

It was more of a wake than a last gasp for the Omaha Public Schools' GED program Monday night.

Before the Omaha school board voted 10-1 to cut the program through a two-year process, about 20 GED administrators and teachers entered the board room at the Teacher Administrative Center, 3215 Cuming St.

OPS officials have said cutting the program is a budget-trimming move. The district is expecting a cut in state aid.

The district spends about \$267,154 a year in school funds on the GED program. OPS receives an additional \$290,000 in federal grants to help fund it.

Six people asked the board to keep the program, as about 20 people had done at previous meetings.

On Monday night, they cited the same reasons others had before them: The GED program is such a small part of the budget, find something else to cut. OPS has a budget of \$474 million this year. "There must be more to it than a cost savings," said Sam Brower, an Omaha lawyer.

Absent was the applause that followed Brower's remarks about the GED program at last week's OPS board committee meeting. Board President Sandra Jensen had asked the audience not to applaud after public comments.

Speakers told the board that the community needs a strong GED program. The program has enrolled an average of 835 people a year the past three years.

And the public questioned how transitioning the GED program to another institution would work. "A transition program has never existed," Donna Stevens, the district's adult education director, told the board.

Indeed, Vicki Bauer, the adult education director for the Nebraska Department of Education, was unaware of any other transition program that has taken place.

"I don't know what the transition program would be yet. I would need to see it in writing," she said Monday.

Board member Mary Morrissey recommended the board vote to transition the GED program to another metropolitan-area institution. Board member Freddie Gray quickly seconded.

Board member Justin Wayne again asked his colleagues to reconsider. He proposed a motion that would have delayed the vote.

Silence. The motion failed.

Wayne was the only opposing vote. Board member Marian Fey, who voted against the cut in a committee meeting last week, was absent.

After the 10-1 tally, the GED teachers and administrators gathered in a circle around the corner from the board room. They spoke in quiet tones, thanking Stevens, the district's adult education director.

"You guys are so great," she told them.

Others clung to the future.

"You still have time," someone said.

Another teacher asked: "Is next year an election year?"

Contact the writer:

402-444-1074, jonathon.braden@owh.com

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