

Graham Wright resigns from Mounds View



photo by Diana Zhu

Members of the school board at the Dec. 12 regular meeting.

by Diana Zhu
news editor

During the last week of October, a string of daily substitute teachers taught Graham Wright's chemistry students. On Oct. 27, Wright was present, and the students attended a routine day of class. The following Monday, they were greeted by Principal Stephanie Bruggers, accompanied by long-term substitute teacher Dale Swanson, who would replace Wright for the remainder of the year. After a six week administrative leave, Wright—chemistry teacher, marine biology club advisor, boys track and field coach and cross country coach—officially resigned from his position at Mounds View High School on Dec. 12.

Swanson, a recently retired high school teacher, took on the role of chemistry teacher after receiving a phone call from Bruggers for a long-term substitute teacher. Swanson rose to the challenge of standing in for the teacher. "I look at all my students as being my sons and my daughters and I always try to teach as if they were," said Swanson. "I think there's big shoes to fill for him... I thought [the transition] would be easier than it is, but because of Mr. Wright's

popularity and because of how highly people think of him, it's made the transition more challenging."

The students have also struggled with this transition between teachers. Though Swanson says the freshmen students weren't as affected other classes have experienced difficulties. "The Honors Chemistry [class] has been a little bit more rock and roll, up and down, ebb and flow and so to speak," said Swanson. Despite the obstacles, the substitute teacher firmly believes that the students have remained very respectful toward the situation.

While he was able to cover for the chemistry classes' lesson plans, both Swanson and his students were left without an explanation for Wright's reason of absence. "Mrs. Bruggers said that Mr. Wright was on administrative leave," said Swanson. "That's all they could tell me." When reached for comment, Bruggers did not disclose any specifics but confirmed that Wright voluntarily resigned.

In hopes of gaining a better understanding of the situation, several parents, students and alumni appeared at the school board meetings on Nov. 14 and Dec. 12. Larry Rieke, the father of

a 2014 Mounds View graduate, commended Wright's work ethic and spoke his personal opinion during the open forum portion of the meeting in Nov. "Students are being short-changed, but maybe more importantly, I think Mr. Wright's reputation is being tarnished by assumptions that are made with the lack of information," said Rieke. Due to the essence of an open forum, the school board is not obligated to respond to or debate issues in the forum, and the meeting proceeded according to the agenda

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Justin Reiling, 11

without interruption.

Wright's current students wished for more clarity as well. Justin Reiling, 11, was one of the students who attended the Dec. 12 meeting, which included a supplementary handout of personnel changes; Wright's name was listed in a table along with the reason "resignation" and Dec. 12 as the effective date. Reiling spoke in the open forum: "We went through two weeks, including during conference, sections and state with limited or no coaches. In the classroom, our classes struggled. We had no lesson plans and no idea what was going on," said Reiling. "We just wonder: what is going on and where is our teacher?"

Other students chose to approach the board members once the meeting was over. School board member Bob Helgeson stayed back to talk with them. Laken Hairston, 10, asked, "Would it be worth at least addressing the student body—just acknowledging that something happened—because rumors were spreading like wildfire? We don't know what happened, and we're wondering and confused."

Assistant Superintendent and former Mounds View Principal Jeffery Riddlehoover replied, "I think that this information, as much as possible, can eventually be shared on that topic, but that's site-based." The school administration did not provide an official statement regarding the motivation behind Wright's administrative leave.

Helgeson later said, "We're living in an era where there are difficult decisions being made; in some cases, the outcome is something that you might cheer, and [in] other cases, the outcome is one you probably don't." Despite his statement, Helgeson did not expand on the "difficult decisions" he referred to. "There are different ways of looking at [Mr. Wright's case] because given the nature of the situation, people's rights to privacy take precedence to the population's curiosity. I think this [case] followed a reasonable course of action where people involved weren't denied an opportunity to speak

"People's rights to privacy take precedence to the population's curiosity."

Bob Helgeson, school board member

up," said Helgeson. "While I'm tempted to speak more to the issue, I'm bound by regulations or law."

Wright was unable to comment on the case, but left well wishes for his pupils by email. "To my former students young and old, I would say that while I miss you all very much, you need to take advantage of every day and minute that you are in the classroom," said Wright. "I was very lucky to be a part of that for many years, but because I valued education I have always been able to move forward with direction and purpose, and so will you."

School board members elected

by Jenna Stellmack and Liam Curry
staff reporters

On Nov. 7, the Mounds View School Board held their biennial election. Shauna Bock and Diane Glasheen were newly elected, and Marre Jo Sager was re-elected to the School Board. Their terms begin on Jan. 1, 2018, with the first regular board meeting on Jan. 9.

The district holds a school board election for a portion of the members every two years due to the overlap of the board members' four year terms. Even though each of the candidate's goals vary from year to year, they all have one thing in common—they want to make the Mounds View School District a better place.

A Mounds View alum, Sager went on to work in the federal government as an administrator for the U.S. Geological Survey. When Sager's son was in elementary school, she decided to run for the school board. "There were a lot of things that the district was having trouble with—class size issues and things—so that's originally why I ran for the School Board," said Sager.

During her years as a board mem-



photo courtesy of Ballotpedia

Left to right: Marre Jo Sager, Diane Glasheen and Shauna Bock.

ber, Sager has worked to reduce class sizes and solve other problems that she feels are important to district. In the upcoming year, she hopes to help the new board members get acquainted with their new positions and responsibilities.

One of the new members, Bock, entered the Mounds View district so that her children could have a good educational experience. Bock knew from early on that she wanted to go into education. In high school, she was a teacher assistant for her elementary school, and later on, she worked as a substitute teacher and a special education teacher.

In her term, Bock hopes to work on several important changes, especially focusing on school start times. Though the plan has already been accepted, it must be implemented properly so that the students and staff can transition smoothly into the new schedule. In addition to start times, Bock wants to focus on the new tax referendum, which was passed at the same time as the school board election. With the bond, Mounds View will have extra funding to work on new classrooms and improve learning environments as a whole, according to the district. Even though she is focusing on certain issues,

Bock sees other opportunities to develop the district as well. "I think there is always room for improvement," said Bock. "Looking at what other people are doing is always a good way to see how you could do things more effectively."

Glasheen, also a new elect, has two children who go to Mounds View schools. Glasheen worked on the facilities task force for the expansion of the district last year and has been an active part of the community for years. Her primary focus now is on getting to know the policies and workings of the district this year, as well as helping to facilitate the changes that will be brought about by the expansion bond.

The school board strives to represent the community's hopes and goals. Meeting around once a month, the board takes in community feedback and discusses what topics should be addressed. It is also the board's job to hire and guide the superintendent, which ensures that board members' visions are implemented. With the help of its new members, the Mounds View School Board will continue to work on ensuring the progress of the district in the years to come.