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School district receives 21st Century grant funds

By Tom White
Editor

The Crossett School District has received \$660,000 in grant funds for operating after-school programs at Crossett Elementary and Crossett Middle School.

Interim superintendent Barbara Garner discussed the grant award with the Crossett School Board about the grant at the board's Monday night meeting.

According to the program's Web site, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to afterschool pro-

grams.

The No Child Left Behind Act reauthorized 21st CCLC in 2002, transferring the administration of the grants from the U.S. Department of Education to state education agencies.

Each state receives funds based on its share of Title I funding for low-income students, according to the site, which added that grants support afterschool programs that provide services to students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools.

Garner said the \$660,000 grant is for a five-year period and will fund after-school pro-

grams for students in grades 2-6 as well as offer additional educational resources for students in afternoon activities at the Boys and Girls Club.

She said interim superintendent Tommy Tyler, who resigned last month, was instrumental in writing the grant application.

In other business, the board approved the establishment of a salary for the district's alternative learning program director after a lengthy discussion.

Garner told the board that the position of ALE teacher-director was not on the district's salary schedule, and recommended that the salary be

set based on the director's years of experience and degree.

In May, the board approved the transfer of Kevin Strunk from Crossett High School dean of students to ALE teacher-director for the 2013-14 school year.

Strunk appeared before the board to discuss the salary measure.

Garner recommended that Strunk be paid \$47,247.34 to serve as ALE teacher-director, plus his coaching stipend, for a total salary of \$51,497.37.

Strunk contended that when Tyler first discussed the position with him that he was given the impression that he would

be paid more, citing the past school year's ALE teacher-director salary of more than \$59,500 and would be inline with the middle school assistant principal's salary.

Garner said the previous director had a Master's degree and more than 30 years of teaching experience.

"Why is it being reduced?" Strunk asked. "All I want is for it to be fair across the board."

Strunk also asked that the number of days for the position be increased to 220, saying that he would need more time to schedule conferences with students and parents and ALE staff to assign slots for

the alternative learning classes. Garner said Strunk would probably have time to set up those meetings once he is established in the position.

After further discussion, board president Glenn McIntyre made a motion to approve the salary schedule and number of days for the ALE teacher-director as recommended by Garner.

After a second by board vice president Keith Carter, the measure was approved 4-0, with board member Robert Cornelius absent.

In other business, the board approved several policy changes inline with state law, includ-

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Nickelson appeal dismissed by state Supreme Court

By Tom White
Editor

One of three people convicted in connection with a July 2010 murder and bank robbery in North Crossett has lost an appeal to the Arkansas Supreme Court.

Kendall Clifton Nickelson, 29, was convicted in August 2011 of aggravated robbery and theft of property in connection with the July 1, 2010 robbery of the North Crossett branch of First National Bank.

Peter Keith Harvey, 44, entered a guilty plea to shooting North Crossett resident Donna Woodberry, 58, and received three live sentences plus 20 years for Woodberry's murder and the bank robbery as well as related crimes.

A third suspect, Adrienne Green, 33, pleaded guilty and received 60 years for her role in the planning effort and the purchasing of items used during the robbery.

Nickelson, the only one of

the suspects in the incident to go to trial, was sentenced to a total of 1,080 months in prison, a sentence upheld by the Arkansas Court of Appeals.

Nickelson subsequently filed a post-conviction relief petition, which was denied by the trial court, which he appealed to the state Supreme Court.

"As it is clear from the record that appellant could not prevail if the appeal were permitted to go forward, the

appeal is dismissed, and the motion is moot," the high court's ruling stated. "An appeal from an order that denied a petition for post-conviction relief will not be permitted to proceed where it is clear that the appellant could not prevail."

Nickelson's petition contended that he was not afforded effective assistance of counsel and that there were a number of errors in his trial. He filed a pro se verified peti-

tion for post-conviction relief pursuant to Arkansas Rule of Criminal Procedure 37.1, according to the Supreme Court's ruling.

"With respect to the claims of trial error, the claims did not state a basis for granting a Rule 37.1 petition," the Supreme Court ruling stated. "Allegations of trial error that could have been raised at trial and on the record on direct appeal are not cognizable in Rule 37.1 proceedings."

Nickelson's petition also claimed several irregularities on the part of his counsel.

"A defendant making an ineffective assistance-of-counsel claim must show that his counsel's performance fell below an objective standard of reasonableness and that this deficient performance prejudiced the defense," the Supreme Court ruling stated. "Appellant did not provide any factual substantiation for his conclu-

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