IRON RIVER—With the Michigan High School Athletic Association relaxing some of its eligibility guidelines, the West Iron County Board of Education made a policy decision allowing home-schooled middle school students to take part in the district's sports programs.

At the board's Aug. 20 meeting, requests were made by two families who have junior high-aged children who wish to participate in eighth grade basketball.

Under the new MSHAA guidelines, the students may request a reduced schedule.

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"There have been changes in the way MHSAA deals with home-school students," said WIC Superintendent Chris Thomson.

Requirements state a student must take four out of seven class periods in middle school to qualify--five out of seven in high school, said Athletic Director and Middle/High School Principal Mike Berutti.

The board approved the request, and will develop a policy on the issue.

in other business:

--Board Member and finance committee chairman Rob Possanza reported the district ended its fiscal year with $1,308,000 in fund equity.

"It was a good year," he said. "The fund equity amount is a direct result of staff minding the budget."

He said the district also met its interest goal for the year.

The fund equity will take an approximate $300,000 hit in order to balance the 2012-13 budget, "but there are no staff or program cuts," Possanza said.

Another $88,000 will be needed to purchase a new bus.

The district ended the year $135,000 under budget, he said.

"It was a fantastic fiscal year."

Possanza said the business department has three goals for the next year.

These include setting policy and streamlining "agency" accounts or fund set-up for special purposes within the district.

Community schools is another area that needs to be looked at, he said, and the district needs to develop an "asset list" to determine "who has what," as far as equipment and materials.

The annual audit is set to be presented sometime in September, he added.

--The board approved its "school of choice" resolution with the Dickinson-Iron Intermediate School District.

--Courtney Busakowski was hired as a kindergarten teacher.

--A three-year contract with AHERA for asbestos abatement was approved.

Typically, the firm conducts one inspection every three years. The board directed Thomson to look into other options.

Two bids for old buses were approved; one for $1,069, a second for $1,288.

--Gas and diesel bids will be reviewed by Thomson and awarded.

--Iron County Sheriff Mark Valesano addressed the board looking for support for a statewide safe driving initiative, called STOPPED (Sheriff's Telling Parents and Protecting Educated Drivers).

Through the program, parents voluntarily register any vehicle to be driven by a driver less than 21 years old with the Michigan Sheriff's Association. An identification decal is issued for the windshield.

If, for any reason, the registered vehicle is stopped by any law enforcement and the driver is under 21, the officer will complete a notification card that will include time and location of stop, driver's name and number of passengers in the vehicle, the reason for the stop and whether any citations were issued.

This notification will be mailed directly to the parent.

The program is also supported by State Farm Insurance, Valesano explained.

"I feel it's an important program," he told the board. "It's been hard getting it on track in Iron County. There is no cost, it is a public service, and other police agencies will cooperate."

Valesano said one method of participation is for school districts to require participation for any vehicle issued a parking permit.

Although West Iron County does not use parking permits, board members thought it might be offered to the driver's education teachers.

Parents can register at home on their computers, Valesano added.

"I'm hopeful that West Iron could be a partner," he said.

The board supported the program.