

Boone to start over with bare bones budget

Published: Monday, January 31, 2011

http://www.berksmontnews.com/articles/2011/01/31/southern_berks_news/news/doc4d470a5f782aa042930054.txt

By Denise Larive, News Writer

Daniel Boone School Board members said the district needs a bare bones 2011-12 budget in order to avoid a future bankruptcy.

They asked Superintendent Dr. Gary L. Otto on Jan. 24 to bring back a budget that has reduced the \$6.9 million deficit to zero.

Board members and Otto said they could then begin to add some programs back into the budget (the needs versus the wants) if there was the possibility of increased revenues.

The board could also consider a tax increase to its residents.

Residents told the board Jan. 24 that it has “kicked the can down the road” long enough by not cutting more district expenditures years ago versus the necessity to now cut up to 50 classroom aides, high school extracurricular clubs and activities, reduce the full day kindergarten program to half-day and also cut another \$4.1 million of expenditures.

The board delayed its vote to curtail kindergarten until after the Feb. 3 Curriculum Committee Meeting, when it will know the full impact of the curtailment and furloughing seven kindergarten teachers.

Curtailment could affect up to 40 other teachers, as well as aides, that would be shifted throughout the district.

Parents of preschoolers spoke passionately about their child’s need for full-day kindergarten next year and the need for the aides that support them while high school students spoke passionately about the requirement of college admissions boards that applicants have high school club and extracurricular backgrounds.

High school students said their clubs and extracurricular activities have shaped who they are and are important to building stronger character.

“Chaos would erupt in the classroom without aides and it would be highly detrimental to take aides out of the classrooms,” said Jennifer Van Rockel, Douglassville. “Please don’t make the kids suffer by taking away their aides.”

“Full-day kindergarten is the best thing for kids, and with No Child Left Behind, and without the [good test] scores, how do you get the funding?” asked Jason Meyer, Douglassville. “Kids need clubs and sports. School is about that and cutting that out would be detrimental.”

The board's \$2.8 million of proposed expenditure cuts to reduce the \$6.9 million deficit to \$4.1 million include

- Reducing full day kindergarten to half day and eliminating seven full-time positions (\$424,166.33),
- Furloughing 50 of the 89 aides (\$1,109,274.30),
- Three custodial positions through attrition (\$121,247),
- Anticipated retirements (\$185,910.82),
- Staff demotions (\$365,392.64),
- Elimination of middle school athletics (\$182,620.72),
- Technology (\$185,666.80),
- Regular education placements (\$100,000)
- Transportation (\$44,123),
- Secondary music program reductions (\$9,900) and
- Extracurricular activities not tied to curriculum (\$76,699.86).

Otto said Jan. 18 that until the district knows the federal and state subsidy amounts that it could receive, the board's solutions include a tax increase up to the Act 1 index of 1.9 percent (\$540,000), that tax plus a tax increase allowed by the state-approved Act 1 exceptions (\$900,000), and \$1.3 million from the district's fund balance would reduce the remaining \$4.1 million deficit to \$1.4 million.

Board President Andrew Basile agreed with residents that the school board has been kicking the can down the road but the board needs to close the deficit gap.

"We've heard from the public — don't cut," said Basile. "Do we take money (\$1.3 million) from the fund balance? It's difficult to ask for a 6 mill tax increase. The district has contractual obligations that maybe the Meet and Discuss Committee can work with. If solutions aren't found, the district will be bankrupt. Dr. Otto, we need you to come back with a bare bones budget. The board needs to look at what they would like to have versus what they need to have. Sports is not [federal or state] mandated at all, but if it was something that was cut there would be no repercussions but public outcry."

Residents and some board members agreed Jan. 24 that the middle school sports program could continue if costs are completely covered with a "pay to play" policy.

Board Member Kevin F. McCullough said taking \$1.3 million from the district's fund balance isn't the answer and that he would not vote for a budget that digs that deep into the district's "savings account." He asked Otto to look at reducing the deficit by an additional \$1.3 million.

Board Member Alan D. Ross agreed that using \$1.3 million from the fund balance would be an irresponsible move and one that would lead the way toward bankruptcy.

"This is the sixth year that we've have had full-day kindergarten," said board Member Margaret M. Fiset. "The best practices of full-day kindergarten are recommended for half day. We need to look at the budget K-12 and will that give them the best education? My goal is to graduate people who will become productive members of society. All the graduates of half-day kindergarten are still productive members of society. There are things on this table that will have a huge detriment to their college; don't even bother applying to some colleges if you don't have some of this extracurricular. We need to think of the students when they graduate."

"It was the [test] scores that brought us to the Daniel Boone School District," said resident Becki Boyer. "It's also very family based, but our taxes are so high it's ridiculous. Have talked about taking [our] four oldest to another school district and youngest in a private school, because, quite honestly, why would we would put our children in a school district that has nothing to offer?"

In other business:

- The board did not approve the new Finance Committee as proposed by Basile, which did not include Ross.

Ross said he is a certified public accountant for 30 years, has served on the Finance Committee for seven years and has probably more knowledge than anyone on the board of the district's finances.

Basile had proposed himself as chairman to serve with board members Frank Cerminaro, Walter Sheehan and McCullough.

The motion was defeated by a 5-4 vote.

Board members Sheehan, Cerminaro, Basile and Tamara D. Twardowski voted to approve the committee as presented.