

Originally Published: 3/15/2011

Boone eyes big tax hike, program cuts

<http://readingeagle.com/article.aspx?id=294470>

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Last week's state budget announcement was dire for some school districts but was actually better news than Daniel Boone School District officials expected, the school board learned Monday.

According to officials, Gov. Tom Corbett's proposed budget would provide \$666,000 more in state money than the district anticipated.

But that and an agreement to cut kindergarten to half-day still leaves the district with a \$5.9 million hole in its proposed \$51 million budget, said Business Manager Danielle Penza.

The district hopes to narrow the gap by getting exceptions to its state tax-hike ceiling.

That would enable it to increase the property tax by 2.4 mills, which is 8.4 percent. The annual tax bill on a property assessed at \$100,000 would increase to \$3,080 from \$2,842.

Such an increase would narrow the deficit to \$3.5 million.

To close that, the district is looking at program cuts.

It has asked the state Education Department for permission to reduce or eliminate elementary band and the middle school foreign-language program. The board has not made a final decision on these proposals.

School board President Andrew Basile said Monday that the board also is asking employees to accept a voluntary pay freeze.

The board agreed 9-0 to offer an early retirement incentive for members of Daniel Boone Education Association, the teachers union, who have more than 25 years of teaching experience. If they agree by March 28 to retire, they will get an extra \$20,000 in their retirement plans, board member Alan D. Ross said.

And the board's revenue enhancement committee is creating a program in which people can donate to particular activities.

Meanwhile, a citizens group calling itself the Daniel Boone Public School Initiative is trying to raise \$425,000 by the end of the month to keep full-day kindergarten. Group leaders have attended kindergarten registration to sign up potential donors. They're asking for donations of up to \$2,000 from kindergarten parents.

The school board last month agreed to reinstate full-day kindergarten if the group raised enough money to fund seven teachers.

The group is now asking the district to contact parents to learn more about next year's kindergarten enrollment, which would affect the number of teachers needed.

The board agreed to place a link to the group's web page on the district website, but it did not agree to contact parents.

Birdsboro resident Monica E. Hamill told the board she has been bombarded with fundraising requests in addition to a possible tax increase.

"I just feel like I'm being overwhelmed with what you're proposing here," she said.

Basile said Daniel Boone parents will have to pay higher fees and higher taxes.

Dr. Gary Otto, superintendent, said the district's state funding was cut by 10 percent, or about \$1 million.

"It's bad," he said. "Ten percent's a lot of money."

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