

# Daniel Boone considers closing Amity Primary Center

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BIRDSBORO — The Daniel Boone School Board voted 7-0 Monday to proceed with a public hearing on a recommendation to close the Amity Primary Center due to declining student enrollment.

Superintendent Gary L. Otto estimated the district could save between \$400,000 and \$500,000 savings from closing the school and consolidating its staff. A public hearing on the issue is scheduled for Feb. 4 at the Daniel Boone Middle School. Following the hearing, the district must wait 90 days before voting to close the school. The earliest a vote can be taken in May.

Kindergartners assigned to attend the primary center next year would attend Monocacy Elementary Center instead. Monocacy is in Amity Township. First- and second-graders previously assigned to the primary center would attend Amity Intermediate Center.

Monocacy Elementary would have grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Amity Intermediate would have first- through fifth-graders, and Birdsboro Elementary Center would continue to have kindergarten through fifth-grade.

Otto said the administration also recommended to not close the primary center entirely but to save approximately \$100,000 in rent by relocating the administration offices from the Matthew Brooke Building in Birdsboro to the center and running the utilities, which would also maintain the building.

The primary center facilities would continue to be rented out for basketball practices.

Board members will consider options to generate additional revenue at the primary center.

Otto said the district would also save an estimated \$86,000 by not renovating space at the Daniel Boone High School in Birdsboro to house the administration.

About a year ago, school board President Andrew G. Basile said at the Jan. 23, 2012, budget workshop that \$356,000 would have been saved if the Amity Primary Center had remained closed following the \$9 million in energy-saving renovations that were completed in 2010.

Otto said last year that enrollment figures had decreased to 2005-06 levels, and the district administration would begin studying the viability of closing one of the elementary schools, as well as redistricting, for the 2013-14 school year.

He said Monday night that the administration had recommended on March 5, 2012, that all school buildings remain open.

The administration looked at it again this year and said its study results to close the primary center met seven criteria: curtailment, attendance areas, it wouldn't minimize the district's program offerings, there wouldn't be any additional costs, it would save money, no resulting legal issues, and would negate the need to build a new elementary facility.

Following the 7-0 vote to proceed with closing Amity Primary Center, the board voted to post the current preliminary budget on Jan. 28 with the maximum tax increase allowed of 1.26 mills, the use of \$1.4 million from the fund balance, and a \$2.6 million expenditure reduction from eliminating kindergarten and all extracurricular activities including sports and marching band, eliminating two school buses, and furloughing 40 professional staff (28 full time).

A 1.26 tax levy would increase the millage rate from 28.96 mills to 30.22 mills and raise \$1.25 million.



John, Lorie and 9-year-old Jack Callander have their picture taken at the Amity Primary Center dance last year. (Photo by Donna Rovins/Journal Register News Service)

Annual tax bills on a property assessed at \$100,000 would increase from \$2,896 to \$3,022.

The district must submit ballot referendum questions to the county by March 22.

Board members said the public could decide at the May 21 primary election if they will pay higher taxes to keep kindergarten, and/or sports and extracurricular activities.

"The board has still not authorized one cut," Otto said. "I understand what you're feeling. It's a difficult time."

The board would vote to approve the preliminary budget on Feb. 11, which has eliminated the \$4.9 million deficit.

As in past years, the board has until June 30 to adopt the final budget.

"You know this is a five-month process for us; nothing is final until we vote in June," Basile said.

"We're down to the bare bones, and no one wants to vote on a budget without sports or kindergarten, but we need to put it in the public's hands if they want to save their programs," board member Walter Sheehan said.

Basile agreed that it is time for the public to see the preliminary budget and "time to make a decision."

Board members Kevin F. McCullough and Frank Cerminaro were absent from the meeting.