

Fundraising begins to save full-day kindergarten at Daniel Boone

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By Denise Larive, News Writer

Full-day kindergarten may remain in the Daniel Boone School District in 2011-12 on the condition that \$425,000 is raised by March 27 to completely fund the program.

If all of the funds are raised, the money could only be used to pay for full-day kindergarten otherwise the money would be refunded.

Craig Brown, Birdsboro, and Alinda V. Ferez, Douglassville, said they are confident with the positive response of 70 kindergarten parents within five days of the board's Feb. 8 vote to curtail kindergarten to half day, and that they can raise \$2,000 from the parents of each kindergarten student to fund the program.

They hope local businesses will also provide charitable donations to the newly established Daniel Boone Public School Initiative.

The Daniel Boone School Board approved Feb. 14 for the Daniel Boone Public School Initiative to begin raising money.

The board had voted Feb. 8 to curtail the program to half day.

The program's curtailment would reduce the district's \$6.9 million budget deficit by \$425,000.

Superintendent Dr. Gary L. Otto told Brown and Ferez Feb. 14 he was reluctant to allow the initiative to raise funds and leave the district and kindergarten parents in limbo until March 27.

"We made a commitment to move ahead with the half-day program," said Otto. He said there wouldn't be time to raise the money and the district needs to move forward on the new half-day curriculum and furlough personnel.

Assistant District Superintendent Anne Marie Traynor said she is prepared to move forward on a "Plan A" and a "Plan B."

"It would be no different if the board found money in May or June and said to put it (full-day kindergarten) back in," said Traynor.

"I have told the seven people who could lose their positions with the half day program that between now and June 30 there is nothing sacred about their job being lost or intact until the June board meeting (and the final budget is approved)," said Traynor. "It won't affect what I'm doing and it won't affect staffing because each of the board's decisions [during the budget process] will constantly affect

affect staffing because each of the board's decisions [during the budget process] will constantly affect seniority."

Brown's idea to raise funds for full day kindergarten came from the Bernards Township School Initiative in New Jersey that saved their kindergarten program by raising \$420,000 in 12 weeks.

"We're seeking the board's approval to move forward," said Brown. "We're trying to provide our kids with a good education and to learn at their own pace, whether it is fast or slow. The \$2,000 is less than what a parent pays for after-kindergarten care, which is about \$5,000."

He and Ferenz have consulted Attorney Matthew Kessler, Douglassville, to establish the non-profit organization that will accept the charitable contributions.

The board is considering accepting charitable contributions in order to keep other district programs before it votes to eliminate them, whereby reducing the deficit and balance the budget by June 30.

Otto said he will provide the board with a list of what the district may curtail and what is required in the district's curriculum.

That list will come from the state Department of Education.

"Some districts are talking about doing away completely with kindergarten and bussing, which aren't state mandated," said Board Member Walter Sheehan. "The state is saying take everything off the table that isn't state mandated."

The board is considering curtailing fifth grade band (in addition to eliminating fourth grade band) for savings of \$108,000, curtailing middle school foreign language for \$168,000 in savings, and possibly internal staff transfers for Middle School retirements for \$57,500 in savings, for a total of \$481,000 savings.

"We saw that full day kindergarten got 70 people together over the weekend and there were 750 people last year in support of fourth grade band," said Board President Andrew Basile, adding that fundraising campaigns could work.

Board members said an activity fee could be charged to programs and extracurricular activities that aren't graded, instead of eliminating or curtailing them.

Board Member Alan D. Ross said he would like to see fourth and fifth grade band funded by activity fees, although both are graded curricular programs.

"Eliminate eleventh and twelfth grade busses and eliminate \$600,000 from the budget," said Ross. "Buses leave the high school half full and arrive in the morning half full."

Otto said there aren't any high school electives that could be eliminated without "jeopardizing" students' college entrances.

"I would bring you other high school curtailments if there were more without affecting graduation requirements, but we're at the bottom," said Otto.

“The district should think about filing for bankruptcy and what that would do for you versus your inability to open up all the contracts,” said Donald E. Basile, Union Township, and chairman of the township’s board of supervisors.

“You’re bankrupting the curriculum because that is the only thing you can do,” said Basile. “The state may rescue you. Bankruptcy will take the shackles off your arms and allow you to restructure.”