

Outlook is bleak in Boone budget

Raising taxes, layoffs, program cuts all on table to close \$5 million shortfall

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Brian and Jenni Noecker wanted their children to have the same memorable experience in high school that they did at Daniel Boone.

The Amity Township couple even left their home in the Exeter area to return to the Boone district.

However, the couple is reconsidering that decision after Boone officials recently announced that the district is facing a \$5 million shortfall in the proposed \$55.1 million budget for 2013-14, which could mean drastic cuts to staff and extracurriculars.

"Who wants to live here and come to Daniel Boone if we don't have anything?" Jenni Noecker asked at a recent school board meeting.

Boone officials agree that the outlook is bleak, but they said there are not many options for closing the budget gap.

Dr. Gary L. Otto, superintendent, said there are "four levers" that can be pulled: Raise taxes, spend reserve funds, get more money from the state or reduce expenditures. Cutting costs would include asking for concessions from teachers and other employees under contracts.

The administration's tentative plan involves tugging on all four levers, some as far as they can go.

Property taxes would be raised the maximum the state would allow for Boone, 4.33 percent. That would result in a 1.25-mill increase, raising the tax rate to about 30.22 mills. The move would bring in about \$1.25 million more in annual revenue.

The plan also calls for using about \$1.44 million from the fund balance, or reserve fund, knocking it down to about \$1.2 million.

The district does not expect to get any additional state funding, which has remained level for four years.

As for reducing expenditures, tentative plans call for laying off about 40 employees and eliminating kindergarten and all extracurricular activities.

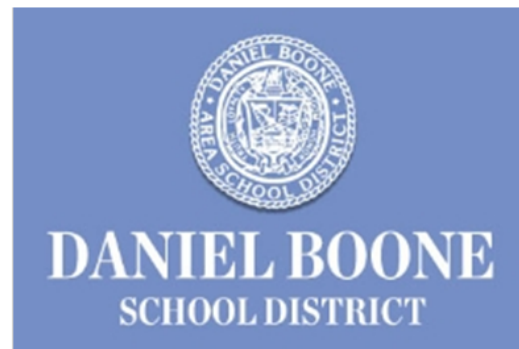
Eliminating sports also would mean cutting the athletics staff, including the athletic facilitator, trainer and secretary, and all coaches.

The school board hopes to meet with teachers, support staff and administrative staff to ask for concessions. All three have stepped up in the past.

"Unfortunately, we have to go back to that well again this year," board President Andrew G. Basile said.

Board member Michael D. Wolfe said he understands exactly how parents feel when they see the list of possible cuts.

"I have three daughters - two that graduated and one that's a sophomore - and everything she's involved in would be completely gone." Wolfe said. "That's a tough thing for me to swallow. But at the end of the day, we have to be



at zero. There is no simple solution or magic bullet for it."

Board members agreed that the current problem could easily be attributed to bad financial planning in the past.

The district is roughly \$94 million in debt, thanks to several building projects and renovations in the 2000s, including the high school stadium and middle school.

"The methodology was to do it one year at a time, even though we were signing all these obligations and contracts for multiple years," Basile said. "We maxxed out our credit card, and now we're trying to figure out how our revenue is going to catch up."

However, with a school district filled with housing developments, the only way to increase revenue is to raise property taxes.

"We have no major industry, that's our problem," board member Walter P. Sheehan said. "We are the major industry."

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