

# Preliminary Daniel Boone Area School District budget shows tax hike, cuts in programs

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AMITY — The prospect each February of a possible tax increase in June is usually only a “preliminary” step to an approved budget and is not really “news” — except this year when it most likely will occur.

Board member Andrew Basile cautioned the board and the public at Monday night’s board meeting to be aware that things change through the budget process. He added that it was his opinion that the media was reporting changes as if the school board was “flip-flopping” on issues.

His comment came after member Tamara Twardowski warned that approving a preliminary budget with kindergarten funding would confuse the public and give residents false hope.

The preliminary budget was approved by a 7-2 vote.

The board also approved two new members to fill vacancies: Larry Speed, Douglassville, to represent Region 2, and Brian D. Doty, Birdsboro, to represent Region 3.

They replace Monica Hamill and Robert D. McLaughlin, who resigned last month and whose terms would expire in 2015.

The preliminary budget balances the \$3.5 million 2014-15 budget deficit with \$2.8 million of expenditure cuts that include elementary band, half-day kindergarten, sports, extracurriculars, and 17 professional staff, as well as the use of fund balance money.

Interim Business Manager Kim Seldomridge presented to the board on Jan. 13 an Excel spreadsheet with budget projections through 2017-18 and annual tax increases of between 2.5 and three percent.

He also presented a 2014-15 budget model with kindergarten included, but no sports, extracurriculars, or 17 professional staff.

Seldomridge said kindergarten could be included if the district “opts in” to Act 1 (which it did on Jan. 27), and by using its retirement exception (a \$1.3 million 2014-15 increase) in order to raise taxes above the district’s

Act 1 index of 2.8 percent to 3.97 percent.

A 4 percent tax increase would add 1.15 mills to the current 28.9618 millage rate, for a total of 30.1118 mills — an additional \$137 per year.

A tax increase and program and staff cuts would only be approved with a final budget approval before the state's June 30 budget deadline.

Even before then-Gov. Ed Rendell signed the Taxpayer Relief Act in June 2006 (now known as Act 1), school districts across the state have been required to approve a preliminary balanced budget, which is presented to the public.

Act 1 requires that preliminary budgets must be approved in February if a board chooses to raise taxes to the index.

Before Act 1, the state didn't require approved preliminary budgets until the end of May -- one month before an approved final and balanced budget.

A budget meeting is scheduled for Feb. 27, 7 p.m., at the Daniel Boone Middle School, Weavertown Road.

The board will discuss in future meetings the two failing boilers at Birdsboro Elementary Center.

Acting Superintendent Patricia Sanker clarified that the cost of a new boiler is estimated at \$200,000, with the cost for two new boilers to not exceed \$500,000, and not the previously discussed \$1 to \$2 million cost.

Board member Suzanne Dungan said \$2 million is the estimated cost to replace Birdsboro Elementary Center's heating system, all pipes, as well as the boilers, if the board does not decide to close the Birdsboro building.

One of the boilers is anticipated to last through this winter.

Seldomridge said both boilers must be replaced this summer and the rest of the heating system replaced within the next five years.

The four-hour Committee of the Whole meeting concluded with a vote about snow make-up days, the 2014 graduation, and relocating the district's administrative offices.

Sanker said the district has had six snow days.

The make-up days for those include: Feb. 17, April 14, 15, and 16, as well as June 6 and 9, by extending the school year to Friday, June 13 for four additional snow make-up days.

If the district has more than four more snow days, the district will use Thursday April 17 and Monday April 21

The board also approved for the June 13 graduation ceremony to be held outside at the high school stadium, or inside during inclement weather.

Board President Richard Martino, who indicated at the board's Dec. 2 reorganization meeting that the board hadn't properly voted last fall to move the district's administrative offices to the former Amity Primary Center, included a motion on the agenda to move the offices to the high school in Birdsboro.

That motion was approved by a 5-4 vote.

Sanker said Buildings & Grounds Supervisor Ken Smith has already moved truckloads of administrative materials to APC.

Board Vice President Connor Kurtz asked the board to vote on the motion to enable the administration to develop a model for the high school relocation.