

Crowd gets wish as Daniel Boone School Board tables closing Birdsboro school

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AMITY —Daniel Boone Area School Board members responded to the voices of the Birdsboro community, canceling the hearing to close the Birdsboro Elementary Center and unanimously tabling a vote to realign students.

The board also tabled the vote to replace two failing boilers at the Birdsboro Elementary School.

Concerned parents, many of whom brought their children to the meeting —some with signs to “ save our school” —filled the auditorium of the Daniel Boone Area Middle School on Monday and described to the board the love they have for their communitys school.

The crowds applause was deafening at times as residents said Birdsboro Elementary School has been a pivotal part of their upbringing, and one they want for their children and their small towns future.

Birdsboro Borough Manager Aaron Durso said there has been an elementary school on the current property at 400 W. 2nd Street since 1890.

Durso presented a framed document from the Library of Congress indicating the date and said it is a legacy which has taught millions and millions of students, and is a “ stalwart in our community.”

“ It is a legacy, a part of our community, a part of who we are,” said Durso, encouraging the board to not close Birdsboro Elementary School.

The school district will continue to pay a monthly rental fee of \$550 for the use of one boiler to heat the school this spring.

Board member Andrew Basile said the district has \$500,000 in capital reserves and \$4 million in its general fund from which it can pay for two new boilers estimated at \$385,000.

Although no one disputed the fact that heating is needed at Birdsboro Elementary School to keep the building functioning, a two-building or a three-building realignment were under consideration by the administration to retain Birdsboro Elementary School as a school.

Board President Richard Martino said the two building realignment would save the district \$600,000 annually by closing Birdsboro Elementary School and redistricting kindergarten through second grade students to Monocacy Elementary Center and third through fifth graders to Amity Elementary Center.

Martino announced at a Parent Teacher Council meeting on March 18, the recently conceived three building realignment with Birdsboro Elementary School.

That plan would send all kindergarten and first grade students to Monocacy Elementary Center, all second and third graders to Birdsboro Elementary School, and all fourth and fifth graders to Amity Elementary Center.

Martino said the board should vote that night on one of the realignments.

“ We should study the budgeting and benefits to the education,” said Basile. “ Study from an educational perspective. Is it the best thing for our kids? We have an obligation to study it. This is the first time we’re seeing it as a group. I don’t know what a vote tonight accomplishes.”

Board member David Rathgeb agreed that he didn’t see the time-sensitive need for an immediate vote.

“ The community is in full force here to ask for a partnership —don’t close Birdsboro Elementary School and no realignment,” said Amy Hicks, president of the Daniel Boone Education Association. “ If you approve, you are ignoring the wishes of the people in this room and it seems like you have a personal agenda. That may not be true, but the way it seems. This shows no evidence of educational research whatsoever.”

“ It is by years of teaching that you close an educational gap,” said Hicks, adding, “ not by moving the students to another building.”

Nicole Wagner, Birdsboro, said the realignment plan hasn’t addressed busing and the length of elementary bus runs, or whether the left turn lane at Route 422 westbound and Monocacy Creek Road could handle mid-day kindergarten traffic.

Emily Olsen, a fifth grader at Birdsboro Elementary School, said more than 200 people supported Birdsboro Elementary School at a recent rally to save the school.

“ Some kids think the classrooms are already crowded, and no one in their right mind could stay in a school district where it takes two hours to get to school. Before you decide to close, you should come to our school and see us trying our hardest.”

Board member Tamara D. Twardowski said that due to all of the public comments, the board should table the votes on the boilers and the realignment and study and discuss the issues at future meetings.

The board also voted 5-4 to rescind the motion to study moving the district offices to the high school; district staff will resume moving the offices to the former Amity Primary Center.

Board member Carol Beitz voted against the motion, saying that the board should table it to continue studying the relocation to the high school, in order to find another leaser for Amity Primary Center.

“ We can’t table it again,” said board member Suzanne Dungan. “ It was wrong on my part to consider the move to the high school. It was a good thought that we might rent that space (Amity Primary Center, but there are a lot of other empty rental spaces that aren’t being rented. We should be glad we have someone renting it now with River Rock Academy & Day Treatment.