

Daniel Boone School Board approves half-day kindergarten

Published: Thursday, February 10, 2011

http://www.berksmonthnews.com/articles/2011/02/10/southern_berks_news/news/doc4d5446818d20d132328635.bt?viewmode=fullstory

By Denise Larive, News Writer

After discussions on the possibility of half-day kindergarten, Daniel Boone School Board recently made a decision about the program.

The Daniel Boone School Board unanimously voted on Feb. 8 to reduce its full day kindergarten program to half-day for 2011-12.

Curtailing that program will reduce the district's \$6.9 million deficit by about \$450,000.

That is one of the expenditure reductions the board has proposed to chip away at the remaining deficit instead of several residents' previous recommendation to the board to cut programs and reduce the budget to a zero deficit.

Board members said they could then add programs back in when the district knows the amount of its basic education state subsidy amount.

Superintendent Dr. Gary L. Otto said the state has recommended that the state's 500 school districts use 2006-07 and 2007-08 funding amounts to calculate 2011-12 budgets.

Business Manager Danielle Penza said the district received \$6,446,001.83 in 2006-07 and \$7,034,519.28 in 2007-08.

She said the 2006-07 amount is an additional loss of \$588,517.40 than was presented to the public at the Jan. 18 budget meeting and could be a \$2.3 million reduction in state subsidy from the 2010-11 amount of \$8,794,546.

"Revenue from real estate taxes is down, we lost some block grant funding," said Board President Andrew Basile. "No stone will be left unturned to reduce costs. All the programs are important to the curriculum and we need to come together as a community to figure out how to keep those programs going. You're preaching to the choir because all the programs are important to us."

"We don't yet have the bare bones budget," said Basile. "We will find out what the core curriculum requirements are."

Otto said he would have a list on Feb. 14 of the district's programs (electives) that would require approval from the state Department of Education to reduce or eliminate.

Basile said he wants the board to vote as soon as possible on additional curtailments or elimination.

"With the fixed contracts and the debt service the school district will be bankrupt," said Donald E. Basile, chairman of the Union Township Board of Supervisors. "You have to look at the 67 percent of the budget you don't want to talk about — you have to look at the contracts. You're gutting programs to balance the budget because you're not facing the major issue of contracts."

The board approved by a 5-4 vote a new Finance Committee chaired by Andrew Basile and with fellow board members Walter Sheehan, Tamara D. Twardowski, and Frank Cerminaro, which ousted accountants and previous committee members Alan D. Ross and Kevin F. McCullough from serving on the committee.

Sheehan said the district is negotiating with all of its contractual obligations in an attempt to reduce those expenditures.

The teachers' contract expires in 2013-14.

Board Member Margaret M. Fiset said charging high school and middle school students a \$150 for each student's first sport, \$75 for the second sport with a family cap at \$500, and provisions for those with financial needs and who receive free and reduced lunches, would fund the \$182,620.72 middle school sports program.

"It will be the highest in the county but the goal of the committee was to come up with something to sustain the program," said Fiset. "We either cut it or supplement it with fees."

Traynor said she is seeking a solution to make up the support time that would be lost with the possible staff demotions of elementary basic skills teachers.

Otto said the staff demotions would save the district \$365,392.64.

Jen Bonetz, Douglassville, a teacher at Monocacy Elementary Center and mother of a student who needs learning support asked what will be done to help the students who need basic skills math.

"We're brainstorming anything to find as much contact time as possible for those students," said Traynor, adding that the district is considering the once very successful classroom volunteer training.

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"How can we maintain a level of best?" asked Tim Glass, Douglassville. "Four of the nine board members participated in the discussions. We have to stick to our guns and provide the best for our students. I hope you keep in mind that the best is what we expect from our students."

Otto recommended that the public start writing letters to congressmen about the impact of reducing the state's basic education subsidy.

"They need to feel the impact from a family standpoint," said Otto. "It has to come from you and your heart. There are 500 school district across the state. They have to listen to you. We're doing what we can with what we have. I'm pleading for your help. We really do need it. State funding hasn't been designed yet, so now is the time to write the letters."

Penza said the health care costs that were anticipated to increase 13 percent were reduced to 8.9 percent and approved at a two percent increase, which reduces expenditures by \$253,000.

