

Daniel Boone's round 1 cuts \$2.8 million

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By Denise Larive

Daniel Boone School District Superintendent Dr. Gary L. Otto recently said it is a painful reality that \$2.8 million in expenditure cuts won't reduce by half the district's expected \$6.9 million budget shortfall for 2011-12.

The board met Jan. 18 and outlined its first round of cuts to 2011-12 budget of \$53,892,425.

Otto said reducing the district's full-day kindergarten program to half day and eliminating seven full-time positions would save \$424,166.33.

The other proposed cuts within the \$2.8 million include

- The elimination of 50 of the district's 89 aides (\$1,109,274.30),
- Three custodial positions through attrition (\$121,247),
- Anticipated retirements (\$185,910.82),
- Staff demotions (\$365,392.64),
- Elimination of middle school athletics (\$182,620.72),
- Technology (\$195,666.80),
- Regular education placements (\$100,000), transportation (\$44,123),
- Secondary music program reductions (\$9,900) and
- Kindergarten to grade 12 extracurricular activities not tied to curriculum (\$76,699.86).

Programs that won't be cut include middle school and high school band and chorus, yearbook, and the high school musical.

Board Member JoAnn Hartzell was absent from the budget meeting.

"This to let you know how serious the problem is," said Otto. "We begin in October with building requests and project salaries, debt service and project revenue with millage rate and expected revenue from the state. Solutions have to occur on both sides of the equation."

He said the state has recommended to all public school districts in Pennsylvania that they use a

conservative state subsidy amount to calculate their budgets.

“All indications are that Pennsylvania’s new governor, Thomas Corbett, will cut funding,” said Otto.

The district has estimated a 20 percent reduction in basic education subsidies instead of the \$8,794,546 it received in 2010-11.

Otto said the district’s 2010-11 budget amount of \$49,980,958 resulted in a \$5 million deficit that the board reduced to zero last year with \$3.4 million in cuts, a tax increase of almost .8 mills (to 28.42 mills), and \$766,931 from the district’s fund balance.

“All of that came with a lot of pain and suffering including 14 demotions and laid off clerical staff,” said Otto. “Last year it was stuff before staff, but there’s not a lot of stuff left. We can’t walk away from the process — we need to balance the budget by June 30.”

Otto said proposed revenues are \$46,958,552.

Until the district knows how much it will receive from the state, Otto said the board’s solutions for this year include a tax increase up to the Act 1 index of 1.9 percent (\$540,000). That tax plus a tax increase allowed by the state-approved Act 1 exceptions (\$900,000), and \$1.3 million from the district’s fund balance would reduce the remaining \$4.1 million deficit to \$1.4 million.

The board may also choose to put the question of a tax increase to voters with a ballot referendum to raise taxes above the index and above the exceptions.

Otto said the district can’t do much to reduce its contractual responsibilities that comprise 65 to 70 percent of the budget, but that it will enter negotiations with the administration, hourly employees, the teacher’s union, and transportation companies to see if it can “get some help there.”

He said the district pays \$34,434,497 in 532.5 employee salaries, \$9,008,849 in contracted services which include transportation, \$6,953,350 in contracted debt service, and \$3,495,000 in other contracted services. The current teacher contract expires in 2014.

Some audience members were confused about the list of potential cuts and asked the board to retain items that were not on the proposed list of cuts. The board said it will provide bus transportation to and from school for the half day kindergarten students and it will also retain the 39 special education aides tied to Individualized Educational Programs.

“What does this do to education?” asked board Member Alan D. Ross. “How can we achieve the educational goals if we eliminate all of those aides?”

Otto said the district would re-write its kindergarten curriculum and prepare first, second, and third grade teachers to teach to the new half-day kindergarten students.

He said the district would also maximize its classroom teachers and refocus its programs for the demotion of 20 staff from full time to part time that will include elementary basic skills teachers and middle school encore positions.

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“We will rearrange schedules and program offerings,” said Otto. “The high school remedial math program put in place last year because of low high school math scores will be refocused instead of eliminating it. Reducing that program will affect test scores but we will do the best we can. None of this puts a smile on my face, but there isn’t much more we can cut in programs without compromising what we do.”

“We’re not finished in trying to find additional cost savings in terms of stuff but I don’t have anymore \$100,000 stuff to bring you,” the superintendent said. “We will evaluate it the best way we can, but we don’t have \$1.4 million of cuts left.”

Approximately 20 audience members responded to the potential cuts with suggestions of cost savings and that many of them are willing to “pay to play” instead of losing the middle school sports program.

Otto said the district’s “Pay to Play” committee will begin meeting again; the district has determined that it can charge fees on a program only when the program isn’t tied to academics.

Lori Hoag, Douglassville, said her family is willing to pay to play.

“The kids enjoy the sports but other districts have kept the music room open after school and parents pay for the music teacher,” said Hoag. “I realize that \$30 to pay to play isn’t going to cover it. If that’s what I need to do to have my middle-schooler play, I’m willing to do it to make it happen for my child. Could parents volunteer to be advisors to clubs if they pass background checks?”

“We could implement tomorrow a transportation surcharge,” said Basile. “The money has to come from somewhere. We could talk about how to lower the expenses of the current programs. But at this point we haven’t reduced the gap, how can we take things off the table?”

One resident said that people won’t want to move into the Daniel Boone School District if the kindergarten program is half day.

People may move out of the district, and that she is considering a private kindergarten for her child.

“Do I really want to send my children to Daniel Boone?” the parent asked. “You’re cutting out kindergarten’s core curriculum.”

EDITOR'S NOTE: The article has been corrected from the printed version. The printed version stated "He [Otto] said the district pays \$34,434,497 in 532.5 employee salaries, \$9,008,849 in contracted transportation, \$6,953,350 in contracted debt service, and \$3,495,000 in other contracted services." That part of the statement that is incorrect is the \$9,008,849 in contracted transportation. The \$9,008,849 represents the total of all contracted services, which includes transportation.