

NESHAMINY

Business administrator recommends layoffs

About 65 positions would be eliminated under the potential budget changes.

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With a somber tone, business administrator Joseph Paradise Tuesday night forecasted Neshaminy School District's financial future: layoffs.

After months of trying to find ways to cut the projected \$14 million deficit and avoid a \$500 tax hike, Paradise recommended many budget changes to the Neshaminy school board, which included eliminating about 65 positions.

Paradise said the administration's suggestions are made "with great sadness ... but little choice."

"Many of these cuts reduce ... spending to their bare minimum," Paradise read from a prepared statement. "It will not be business as usual next year in Neshaminy ... there will be few dollars to do anything other than what's legally required."

To fill the holes between an estimated \$167 million spending plan and \$153 in projected revenues, Paradise described how officials found more than \$10 million mostly through employee jobs.

That would reduce the average tax increase from 12.5 percent to 3.6 percent, which is under the Act 1 4.1 percent limit, administrators said.

If approved, at least two cabinet-level spots, including one in human resources, won't be filled, saving roughly \$300,000. By moving the ninth grade to the renovated high school next year, more than 27 positions would be eliminated, said Paradise.

And, so far, about 25 support staff jobs could be lost, officials said.

Administrators recommended saving \$637,000 of the \$10.6 million transportation budget by eliminating the mid-day kindergarten bus run, as well as reducing late day transportation routes and consolidating pick-up and drop-off spots.

Paradise strongly suggested that the board seriously consider establishing a committee to close an elementary school next year.

Travel and support staff 's overtime would be reduced by 50 percent, officials said. Administrators said they can more efficiently schedule music, art, and languages.

Officials also recommended increasing facilities usage fees, gather \$250,000 through establishing to-be-determined fees for extra-curricular activities to cover a portion of the \$1.6 million activities budget, saving \$114,000 by canceling the summer work program and eliminating the long term service awards ceremony.

While some residents continued petitioning the board for no tax and budget increase, others, including senior citizens, said they supported Paradise's recommendations. They also suggested forging business partnerships, being more energy efficient, creating a budget committee and seeking corporate sponsorships, specifically for sports.

Since officials used \$8.8 million of the district's savings in the last two years — more than Neshaminy's history — administrators suggested avoiding what's left of the dwindling \$1.2 million fund balance to bridge the gap.

Officials said they'd continue to review the budget.

"It's with heavy heart that we have to have this conversation tonight," said Superintendent Lou Muenker. "Every number comes with a story, a face and a family. But these recommendations don't come without a lot of sleepless nights."

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