

NESHAMINY

Business administrator gives bleak financial outlook

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So far, the New Year has brought no new money to the Neshaminy School District.

A little more than a month after his first public budget report, business administrator Joseph Paradise Tuesday night once again emphasized a bleak forecast with no sign of relief.

Mirroring the dire financial state of the nation as well as businesses and families across the country, Paradise projected that while expenses continue to rise, revenues are flaccid.

Although he did not reveal specific dollar amounts, Paradise said the 2009-10 spending plan is expected to increase by roughly 4.9 percent over the current \$163 million working budget. The jump is mostly due to growing health insurance costs and that's without a new contract for the teachers, officials said.

Revenues, though, including property and business taxes, are down about \$2.7 million, Paradise said.

"Revenues are weak to say the least," he said. "[They're]...falling through the floor...the faucet kind of stopped a month or two ago. I'm not saying it's going to be challenging in July — it's challenging now. We know we're not going to get rescued in any way shape or form from the state."

Last year, the board voted to use \$3.5 million of the district's fund balance, or savings account, to balance the budget. That would leave around \$1.2 million — if that — to help this year's so far estimated \$14 million hole, according to Paradise.

Neshaminy could see monies from renting the Tawanka Learning Center to the Bucks County Intermediate Unit No. 22 and Neshaminy Middle School. Both of those possibilities will be discussed later this month.

The district could see potential savings when the ninth grade moves up to the high school this fall, but it's too early to tell, said Paradise.

"It's a work in progress," Paradise said. "It's messy at times. We've got a lot of work in front of us."

So far, officials' suggestions to fill the gap include possibly requiring students to pay for extra curricular activities, and eliminating lead teacher positions.

According to state tax law Act 1, Neshaminy is allowed to raise taxes by 4.1 percent, officials said.

Board member Frank Koziol asked for the public to provide feedback. Administrators will discuss ideas during a meeting next week. Board member Rick Eccles asked that the district implement a hiring freeze, consider an earned wage tax, and ask the bargaining units to voluntarily provide "give-backs."

Louise Boyd, president of the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers, was present at the meeting, but declined to comment on Eccles' request.

While the budget data currently remains confidential, the information must be made public on or before Jan. 29, administrators said.

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