

NESHAMINY

Board debates options for deficit

Up for consideration are closing the district's two swimming pools and increasing class size. Parents want a deal with the teachers before the district takes other cost-cutting measures.

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Charge community groups to use buildings. Eliminate or reduce lead teachers. Decrease the number of bus routes.

These are just a few of the suggestions that the Neshaminy school board debated during a strategic action committee meeting Monday night as members combed through a portion of a 70-plus-recommendation list from the public to cut the deficit.

Officials are trying to find ways to fill a potential \$14 million budget gap, which could mean a \$500 average tax increase.

The board voted 7-2 to let administrators further pursue charging community groups a to-be-determined utility fee to keep the heat and lights on in larger areas like gyms and cafeterias.

The payments could save the district roughly \$100,000, according to business administrator Joseph Paradise. He added that some groups, such as the Scouts, could be moved to classrooms and not charged.

But board members Frank Koziol and Richard Eccles voted against the motion. Koziol said the idea was tantamount to imposing another tax on citizens. Eccles pointed out that many parents, especially of Catholic school kids, won't be able to afford the fees. He said certified staff members should find the \$14 million through union concessions and by asking teachers what programs they don't need.

Board member William O'Connor, though, called the fees the lesser of two evils since officials may need to eliminate programs. William Spitz agreed, saying it's the board's decision, not the teachers', to make cuts.

The majority of the board agreed to investigate the option of eliminating mid-day kindergarten bus runs, an \$85,000 cost.

The directors also deliberated eliminating or reducing the number of lead educators, who teach fewer periods and craft curriculum.

Koziol described the positions as a luxury. But Spitz said the district wouldn't function without their leadership.

Board President Ritchie Webb asked acting Superintendent Lou Muenker to provide the board with more information on the lead teacher spots, including possible savings and a recommendation.

The board could also save another \$100,000 by closing the district's two remaining school pools, although officials said they would have to discuss that further in the future.

Administrators said they're also looking into increasing class sizes, and reducing facility work orders that aren't education related.

Paradise also asked the transportation department for an in-depth study on cutting the number of daily bus routes and eliminating late buses. The latter could save \$400,000, he said.

While the board briefly discussed eliminating or charging for specific extracurricular activities, most members said they don't support singling out one club. Parents also asked the board to negotiate a contract with the teachers first, then they'd be willing to pay. Otherwise, it feels like unfair punishment, they said.

Webb said the district will continue to bargain, but officials still need to get the budget on track.

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