

NESHAMINY

Board searching to trim \$14M gap

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As carefully as families are clipping coupons these days, the Neshaminy school board Monday night continued to comb through the rest of a 70-plus item list with suggestions from staff and residents on cutting spending to balance the budget.

Officials are trying to find ways to fill a \$14 million gap and avoid a possible \$500 average tax hike. The board asked administrators for more information on ideas ranging from limiting substitutes and going paperless, to increasing advertising at sporting events and sharing principals among schools.

One person recommended limiting substitutes for teacher training, which costs about \$1.3 million a year, and improving staff attendance. But business administrator Joseph Paradise pointed out that if an educator or bus driver is absent, their job still needs to be done.

Another suggested that elementary schools share specialist teachers for art, music and gym. Herbert Hoover and Albert Schweitzer elementary schools are already doing so, and administrators are looking at consolidating even further, said Jacqueline Rattigan, director of elementary and secondary education.

Officials will also be finding out more on increasing advertising at sporting events. One item that administrators and board members wanted to push to a back burner was splitting principals among schools.

Acting Superintendent Lou Muenker pointed out that a different level of support is needed at each school level, especially the alternative program. A few board members, including President Ritchie Webb, said that they're sure principal swapping can be done, but they'd rather use that option as a last resort.

The board also discussed reducing the pre-first program, which costs \$80,000 per course, and eliminating three safety aides at the high school for almost \$140,000 since that facility will have an updated security system.

Answering the suggestion of reducing the work week to four days, Paradise explained that while other districts have done so, Neshaminy hasn't because of the way attendance is kept.

Responding to another concept, administrators said they're already working on going paperless by soliciting e-mail addresses from parents. Officials will also be using Global Connect, an automatic call alert system that costs roughly \$2 per child for Neshaminy's almost 9,000 students.

Board members also asked for principals' recommendations on having students either bring supplies to school, or purchase kits from PTOs.

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