

No tax hike for district

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Neshaminy

It's only the fourth time since 1994 that the district has had a zero tax increase, according to business administrator Joseph Paradise.

Zero - that's how much more Neshaminy School District residents will be paying in their school tax bill next year.

To crowd applause, the Neshaminy school board Tuesday night unanimously approved the \$161.6 million 2010-11 budget with no tax increase and without cuts to educational programs.

"On behalf of the many seniors in this district, I want to thank ... all those involved in this year's budget," said Solis Basen of Middletown. "You'll make us all happy with no increase. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

It's only the fourth time since 1994 that the district has had a zero tax increase, according to business administrator Joseph Paradise, who commended the community and the board's efforts. He added that next year's budget will actually be less than the 2006-07 school year spending plan, which Paradise called "phenomenal," and an "achievement of incredible proportions."

"It's important to note progress, but that doesn't mean we don't have more progress to make," he said. "We still need to look at consolidating facilities."

The board's recent agreement with the support staff union that includes contributions to health care and no salary increases for three years helped Neshaminy come down to no tax increase, said Paradise.

Since revenues are projected at \$160.5 million, administrators suggested using \$886,000 from the district's fund balance, or savings account, to balance the spending plan. Under Act 1, Neshaminy could have raised taxes by \$3.4 million. The value of one mill in the district is \$736,526. Homeowners with an average assessment of \$27,626 have an average tax bill of \$4,199. The current millage rate is 152, Paradise said.

Board members Kim Koutsouradis and Susan Cummings credited Paradise, the support staff and board President Ritchie Webb for the zero tax increase.

Webb said he was happy, but that the district still has financial issues.

"We're only doing what capital improvements must be done and delaying that which can be delayed the same way many families are doing with their own budgets at home," he said. "We heard from so many of you writing to tell us of your hardships that we felt it was our duty to pass this budget without a tax increase. The board does hear your concerns. We hope the economy gets better. I'm not sure we'll see a zero increase next year without some help."

Webb also updated the public on negotiations with the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers, who reportedly canceled a bargaining session tonight citing the need for more time to prepare. The board's lawyer is reaching out to the state-appointed mediator to try to reschedule, said Webb.

"We'd like to have as many negotiation sessions as possible over the summer," he said. "Hopefully, we can get back to what we're here for, the children. But it takes two to negotiate."

Teachers union President Louise Boyd previously has said that the educators won't be bullied by the board's take it or leave it position, but she did not comment on the canceled meeting.

Concerned over the continued work to contract by the educators when the students return in the fall, parent Cyndie Bowman asked if the board would be willing to pursue an injunction against the teachers for violating past practice. Webb responded that the board would have to wait and see what the district's attorney recommends.

Superintendent Lou Muenker also notified the public that a recent anonymous mailing that included teachers salaries and the district's return address was not sent or condoned by the district.

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"No tax hike for district" Bucks County Courier Times 30 Jun 2010: A1