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# Southeast Delco School District OKs tax hike

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FOLCROFT — The Southeast Delco School Board recently approved the budget for the 2009-2010 school year calling for a 5.7 percent tax increase and a change in school hours.

As indicated in the proposed final budget last month, the operating budget for next school year assumes total expenses of \$58,140,596 and revenues of \$56,870,296, which leaves about \$1.2 million in deficit spending. The budget and tax increase were approved in a 5-4 vote.

“I want everyone to understand that the increases in our expenses are things that are out of our control like health care, retirement, salary increases, fuel,” said Superintendent Dr. Trudie Bennett. “The administration worked the budget to the barest bones.”

Even so, district residents will see a 1.7 mill tax increase, or 5.7 percent, which means that households assessed at \$70,000 will pay \$119 more in school taxes.

“We are concerned about taxpayers,” said board President Donald Young. “We didn’t raise taxes last year and even with the increases, homeowners will still pay less than they did in 2006 because of Homestead exclusions and gambling revenue.”

“It’s impossible to run the school district and keep programs that tax dollars already help to put into place without raising taxes,” said Vice President Ron Cubbage.

One money-saving measure the board approved was for changing the operating hours of the school day, which will help in transportation expenses by allowing the administration to consolidate and rearrange services.

Starting in September, all four elementary schools and the Kindergarten Center will start the day at 8:40 a.m. and end at 3:20 p.m. — a time difference of 35 minutes.

Assistant Superintendent Jeffrey Ryan presented the transportation plan at the meeting and showed how the district will save about \$1.3 million in outside-contracted

transportation services.

By changing the school starting time, the district can stagger vehicle start times, consolidate routes and reduce the number of stops that will allow drivers to make quicker runs and enable them to expand their runs to additional school locations.

The district has 40 vehicles that transport students to 85 schools because they are obliged to provide the service for district taxpayers who don't attend their fleet of schools.

Ryan and district Business Manager Rick Henderson further explained in a telephone interview after the meeting that in the 2008-09 school year, the district was consistently short 16-18 drivers, which necessitated the use of outside contract services and contributed to the high expense.

To address this problem, they also proposed and were approved to offer a driver incentive program. Under the program, the district will continue to offer free CDL training, which is required for the special bus-driving license, as well as waive PennDOT testing fees and background clearance fees.

For this, drivers are obligated to stay with the district for one year.

A handful of residents who attended the meeting expressed their opposition to changing the school hours. They were angry that they had not been told about it before and that it would impact their children's schedules.

Young rebutted that the district mentioned this change at its initial budget meeting a couple of months ago at the high school where one resident attended. He also said that it has been posted on the district's Web site.

One parent expressed concern for her child who has after-school tutoring.

Mark Davis Jr., a fifth-grade student from Sharon Hill, read a letter that addressed everything from the district's neglect of stakeholder feedback to the affect the time change will have on students who play sports.

More debate ensued among the board when Robert Dieter, of Media, was approved to become the new district business manager.

The board voted 8-1 in favor of the decision. Byron Mundy opposed it and complained that the board and administration should work to hire people at lower salaries.

Dieter was hired for an annual salary of \$114,000. He will replace Henderson who resigned the position.

