

News

## Upper Darby School District budget calls for tax hike, saves arts and music programs

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UPPER DARBY — Upper Darby School District officials presented the long-awaited 2013-2014 tentative budget, in which the music and art programs, including the band and theater extracurricular activities, have been retained.

“Budget reductions and changes have been recommended, which, if implemented, maintains the integrity of our instructional programs, reduces staff through attrition and modifies portions of our after-school activities,” Business Manager Ed Smith announced at a meeting Tuesday.

The \$165.5 million tentative budget calls for a 0.965 mill increase, from 32.85 mills to 33.915 mills, a 2.94 percent tax increase.

An average homeowner with a \$100,000 assessment will pay \$3,391 in taxes, an increase of \$96.50.

“No school district programs will be cut, no employee will lose a job and kindergarten, art, music and sports will all remain intact while still reaching our goal of \$9.7 million (shortfall),” district Superintendent Lou DeVlieger said.

DeVlieger discussed how the public’s input through the Penn Project for Civic Engagement affected the recommendations of the administration.

“I hope you will leave this evening feeling that we applied the values to the reductions that are being proposed and that this process gave you a voice unlike ever before in the budget decision-making,” he said. “We get it loud and clear that in making all of these recommendations that the students should come first and that we should especially not make cuts to those programs that we hold so dear in this community, (including) kindergarten, the arts, music and sports. I am pleased to say that all of these areas will remain intact for our students for the upcoming year.”

The announcement drew applause from the estimated 100-plus people in attendance.

DeVlieger noted that the community’s interest in redesigning for efficiency, effectiveness and savings is evidenced in the budget.

“You recommended attrition wherever possible as opposed to laying people off,” DeVlieger said.

According to DeVlieger, the administration supported the recommendation to reduce secretarial help on the superintendent’s floor through attrition and redistribution of duties. The administration recommended one instead of two late buses at the middle and high school levels and a redesign of district bus runs as cost-saving proposals.

The budget calls for reducing the elementary teaching staff by seven instead of the 10 recommended at the forum in order to

have the least impact on class size, and four positions at the high school instead of 10 to ensure equity and have a minimal effect on student learning.

“One area that stood out due to the reduction of elementary librarians last year is the integrity of our elementary school libraries in the checking out of books, collection of books and restocking the books,” DeVlieger said, recommending the shift of the Computer Lab Assistants to the libraries of their schools.

DeVlieger said the district will reduce the maintenance staff by one person through attrition and reduction of three assistant coaches at the high school.

“We are able to balance the budget without materially affecting our instructional programming,” Smith said. “We have also worked very hard to minimize the impact on students.”

The board will vote on the budget at the May 14 meeting. A public hearing on the budget is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. May 28 with adoption prior to June 30.

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