

Elida School Board OKs cost-reduction plan

Written by Stacy Taff

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ELIDA — As Elida Local Schools gear up for another levy request this May after a failed attempt in November, a cost-reduction plan has been drawn and was approved by board members, 3-2 at Tuesday's Board of Education meeting. The plan will save the district \$465,569 next year with a series of cuts that includes reducing and condensing more staff positions.

Some of the staff reduction will come from positions not being re-filled after retirements but two will come from restructuring central office positions, including the business manager.

"We've gone over the position and everything it entails, all of the responsibilities included and asked ourselves if it could be split up. The answer is, it can't," Superintendent Don Diglia said. "A lot of the position is safety-related, which is very important. We can't arbitrarily reduce salaries, so I'm recommending that we eliminate that position and create a new position titled 'Safety and Facilities Manager,' which will pay less than the current position."

Current Business Manager Mark Miller will fill the new position.

The second position will be one of the two administrative assistant positions. The current staff member occupying the position will move to the high school office when the current secretary retires. Some of the duties allocated to the position, including that of EMIS Coordinator, will fall to remaining Administrative Assistant Jo Ellen Miller. Both of these reductions will combine to

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save \$84,180.

The plan also includes savings from the following: Teacher retirement- \$176,300; increase pay-to-participate- \$46,000; retire-rehire special education officer- \$25,300; food service- \$25,000; building budgets-\$50,000; health care plan savings- \$73,716; and classified retirement savings- \$14,673.

These reductions combined will save the district \$495,169 but due to an unfunded mandate, \$29,600 of that will go to fund a half-time math teacher, putting savings at \$465,569.

"This year's junior class will need four years of math to graduate. This year's seniors only need three," Diglia said. "The only way we can do that is by hiring a half-time math teacher. One of our math teachers is retiring but he's interested in coming back in that capacity."

According to Diglia, the main cost-saving move the community is likely to take issue with is the increase in pay-to-participate. Currently, high-schoolers pay \$90 and middle-schoolers pay \$70. Next year, the cost will rise to \$200 and \$125, respectively, but will cover any and all activities throughout the school year.

"It's a big increase but all things considered it's worth it when you think about the quality of instruction and the quality of supervision you get here," Diglia said. "Parents don't think twice about spending \$300 or \$500 for a week-long camp for a sport or activity. Since this covers all activities, I think it will actually encourage kids to take part in more extracurriculars. Studies show that kids who are involved in just one extracurricular get better grades than kids who don't take part in any."

Over the last five years, the district has lost around \$2.3 million in state funding and made more than \$2.8 million in cuts, including the elimination of 29 staff positions. The newest cost-reduction plan will go into effect regardless of whether or not the levy passes in May. If it fails, the district is expecting to cut another \$700,000, which will likely include all-day, everyday kindergarten.

"At this point, we're just trying to stop the bleeding," Diglia said.

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In other news, Diglia informed the community members gathered that Elida is currently integrating more safety and security measures into daily operations and that there are plans in place to further fortify the school buildings over the summer break.

Students of the month for February are as follows: Elida Elementary - Megan Bible, Maggie Little and Brooke Reese; Elida Middle School - Molly Burkholder, Taylor Kesler, Addison Miller and Caitlyn Rahrig; Elida High School - Clay Burkholder, Katelyn Hesseling, Erica Hughes and Tyler Smith.

The week of Feb. 16-23 was recognized as National FFA Week.

The following resignations were accepted: certified- Deborah Vine, Elida Elementary teacher, effective May 31 for retirement; non-certified- John McDermid, bus driver, effective Jan. 31; supplemental - Anne Carroll, varsity/junior varsity football cheerleading advisor; Melissa Schultz, middle school assistant track coach; Tyson May, boys tennis coach.

The following individuals were approved for employment: certified - Charissa Langstaff (long term substitute Middle School guidance counselor, effective Feb. 15); non-certified- Jeff Duff (bus driver, effective Feb. 11), Jared Parish (substitute aide), Jamie Wise (substitute aide); Summer help- Lauren Diglia, Austin Etzler, Derrik Long, Bo Mathias, Tyler Sebenoler and Matt Thompson; supplemental - Dave Evans (athletic manager), Melissa Schultz (head girls varsity track coach), Chris Kelly (boys varsity tennis coach), Ashley Edward (MS asst. track coach); Beyond the Bell (after school Bulldogs program, funded by Title I grant monies) - Jan Adams, Melissa Bennett, Faith Cummings, Karen Foley, Becky Foust, Susan Glenn, Mike Graham, Marcy Halker, Aletia Hartzler, Cindy Hight, Brittany Howell, Linda Jenkins, Erin Morton, Kathy Neil, Melanie Nixon, Theresa Price, Vickie Shaffer, Shirley Shoup, Angela Spragg, Jan Wyant and Patti Camper; substitute teachers- Annetta Beauford, Michelle Kavelak, Kelsie Weber and Eric Tippie.