Board Approves Changes to Class Size Guidelines, Program Alterations

In the Spring-Ford Area School Board’s ongoing attempts to reduce costs for the 2011-12 school year, the Board agreed to allow for larger class sizes and alter academic programs, resulting in the potential furlough of seven teachers.

The Board voted at the April 28th meeting to alter class size guidelines so that targeted class sizes will be 19 to 25 students for kindergarten through second-grade classrooms, 20 to 25 for third- and fourth-grade classrooms, and 23 to 28 for fifth-, sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade classrooms. Adjusting the guidelines will enable the district to increase the average number of students in elementary school classrooms, and eliminate five class sections and the correlating teaching positions. Similarly, at the 5th/6th Grade Center, class sizes would be increased and the number of class sections would be reduced by one team, correlating to the reduction of two teaching positions.

Superintendent Dr. Marsha Hurda noted that the changes to class size guidelines are not related in any way to redistricting. Board President Joseph Ciresi agreed, saying that even if it wanted to, the district would not be able to draft a redistricting plan quick enough for implementation next year.

The Board’s vote is just the first step in the process to alter programs. The Board’s adopted motions will need to be approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education before the furloughs could take effect June 30, 2011.

Board Vice President Tom DiBello made a statement at the conclusion of the meeting acknowledging the concerns of residents who told the Board they were not happy about increases to class sizes or the potential furlough of teachers. While he is not thrilled about increasing class sizes or cutting positions, he said some unpleasant decisions have to be made to close the more than $11 million gap separating the district’s revenues and expenses in the 2011-12 budget.

“When 60 to 70 percent of our budget is made up of salaries, there are not many other places we can look,” he said. “We can’t go back to the public and keep raising taxes.”

He advised residents who are upset over the idea of larger class sizes and program cuts to take their concerns to state leaders, who are proposing cuts to public education funding.

“You need to take your anger, disappointment and displeasure to Harrisburg,” he said. “We have no other choice.”

New Student Representative Named to School Board

The Spring-Ford Area School Board bid a fond farewell to Student Representative Taylor Daily at the April 26th meeting and welcomed Elizabeth Brady to sit at the table in Taylor’s place.

Taylor, who will be attending Loyola University in the fall, did a great job of keeping the School Board informed of high school activities throughout the year, said Superintendent Dr. Marsha Hurda.

“Even more important is while Taylor was here, she was also working hard on her academics,” said Dr. Hurda. “She is the number one student in her graduating class this year.”

Elizabeth, who is a tenth-grader, will be replacing Taylor on the Board, and said she is excited to participate in the governing process.

“I’m very happy to have accepted this position and given the honor of performing this position,” she said.
Board Tables Plan with Administrators; President Seeks 5-Percent Pay Cut

The Spring-Ford Area School Board tabled a motion to approve a meet-and-discuss plan with its administrators at the April 26th meeting, after School Board President Joseph Ciresi called on all administrators to agree to a 5-percent pay cut in the 2011-12 school year.

“I’m not asking for this due to poor job performance — we have a stellar team,” he said. “But we are all being asked to take less and we need to start at the top.”

Following the approval of one-year extension of salaries and benefits for secretarial, assistant, custodial, maintenance and food service staffs, Board members agreed to table the motion that would have approved a new plan for administrators and to take the suggestion for a pay cut back to the Spring-Ford Principals and Administrators Association.

Board member Donna Williams questioned how the idea for a 5-percent pay cut could come up at the “eleventh hour” and said it should have been discussed in executive session first.

“This is not our best effort and we can do better,” she said. Board member Mark Dehnert said the Board would need to carefully review how a 5-percent pay cut to administrator salaries would compare to the highest teaching salaries.

“I think we have to be careful none of the salaries are reduced below top teacher pay,” he said.

Student Recognized for Award-Winning Science Fair Project

The Spring-Ford Area School Board honored seventh-grader Christopher Israel at the April 18th work session for winning first place in the zoology category of the Science Fair Awards for grades six through eight and for winning a Broadcom MASTERS (Math, Applied Science, Technology and Engineering for Rising Stars) Award. Seen here from left to right are Superintendent Dr. Marsha Hurda, teacher Beth Croll, Christopher’s mother, Christopher Israel, Christopher’s father, 7th Grade Center Principal Theresa “Tina” Weidenbaugh, and School Board President Joseph Ciresi.

School Board Approves 2011-12 School Calendar

Spring-Ford Area School Board members approved the 2011-12 school calendar at the April 26th meeting.

The 2011-12 school year will begin for students on Monday, August 29, and will include school closings on Sept. 29th for Rosh Hashanah and the entire week of Thanksgiving. In-service days and parent-teacher conferences will be held the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday before Thanksgiving as usual. The tentative final day for students will be Wednesday, June 13.

Board Passes Resolution Opposing Tuition Vouchers

Spring-Ford Area School Board members passed a resolution opposing Senate Bill 1, the legislation that would enable families in poor performing districts to obtain vouchers to send their children to non-public and private schools.

The Board resolution cites several reasons for opposing the bill, including that it would result in the loss of financial resources for traditional public schools and increase the burden on property taxpayers. Additionally, the resolution states that the voucher plan would cost an estimated an estimated $54.3 million in the first year, $136.3 million in the second year and as much as $1.22 billion in the third year to implement. The resolution will be shared with the district’s state legislators.

In other business, the Spring-Ford Area School Board voted to:

- Table the motion to approve a custodial services contract with Jani-King.
- Accept a state Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Community Mini-Grant in the amount of $5,000 to support the Student Assistance Program for grades 5-12.
- Purchase jackets for the 2010 Spring-Ford High School Golden Ram Marching Band in recognition of the band winning the 2010 Tournament of Bands Atlantic Coast Group IV State and Regional Championship. Funding shall not exceed $5,800.
- Approve the 2011-12 student-funded exchange program with the Coláiste Chiaráin High School in Limerick, Ireland.
- Approve Edline of Chicago, IL, to provide a year of web hosting services for all Spring-Ford schools effective July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012. Total cost of this proposal is $22,436 and shall be paid from the technology budget.
- Extend the trash and recycle bid with Waste Management of PA, Inc., for the 2011-12 school year in the amount of $51,000, a 3-percent increase over last year’s amount.

The Spring-Ford Area School Board will hold its next work session on Monday, May 16th. The next regular School Board meeting will be held on Monday, May 23rd. Both meetings will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the high school cafeteria.