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FUSD is hoping to avoid layoffs

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In recent weeks, school districts in Casa Grande and Maricopa announced decisions to implement substantial personnel layoffs for the upcoming school year. Casa Grande is laying off 32 teachers, while Maricopa may lay off as many as 80 employees.

For now, the Florence Unified School District is hoping not to follow that lead, Superintendent Dr. Gary Nine said Tuesday.

"We'll know more after May 18," Nine said, referring to the proposed one-cent sales tax to be voted on. "If the sales tax passes, we'll be OK. Sure, we'll have to make some cuts, but it won't affect our people."

However, Nine pointed out that if the sales tax doesn't pass, the Florence district is looking at a \$2.9 million deficit.

"We've hired 17 people for next year and have stopped hiring," Nine said.

At its regular meeting on April 14 at the FUSD offices, the board voted to accept 15 letters of resignation from certified personnel, and six from classified personnel. The positions will remain open, depending on results of the May 18 election.

"If we were to just cut teachers, for example, it would be the equivalent of needing to cut maybe 32 to 35 staff members," Nine said. "Now, we wouldn't do that. Instead, it's like, 'What would we cut if we offered a 3 percent salary reduction?' We're looking at all of those things."

Nine said he's been in a series of meetings to discuss possible cuts in case voters reject the sales tax increase.

"We have two committees – classified and certified – that meet every Tuesday, so if May 18 turns out badly, we know what we're going to do," Nine said. "It's a healthy dialogue, everything is on the table, and we remind each other that there's got to be a way to work through this positively."

McVicker retires

Nick McVicker, FUSD truancy officer, is retiring from that position at the end of the current school year.

"I think 37 years in this business is probably enough," McVicker said. "I have grandkids playing in little league that I want to watch, and, after having a heart attack a few years ago, my health hasn't always been the best."

McVicker worked in the Apache Junction district for many years before coming to FUSD to serve as a principal for six years.

"When I left AJ, coming back to this district was like coming home," McVicker said. "These last seven years have been the best seven years of my career."

McVicker plans to reside in Florence and acknowledges that the extra free time he'll have "is the one thing I'm a little worried about. But you have to quit sometime."

"And of course, I'll miss the kids, Dr. Nine, and working with all of the principals," McVicker said. "There's a lot to be said for truly enjoying what you do. There wasn't a day where I couldn't wait to get to work."

New student recruiting

Since initiating its campaign to accept at least 300 out-of-district students to help avoid next year's budget cuts, the Florence district has received 96 student applications.

"I thought that when we got 75 to 90, there would be more, but it's slowed down a little bit," Nine said. "It might pick up a little bit more, but who knows? We've never done this before."

In her April board report, Dana Hawman, FUSD director of construction, said efforts to recruit new out-of-district students have included:

- An enrollment page on the district Web site.
- Newspaper and radio ads.
- Billboard-sized banners on the ends of the classroom wings at Poston Butte High.
- Radio interviews which started on April 9.
- A booth at the Pinal County Fair
- Bulk mail postcards to San Tan Valley and Coolidge residents.

Hawman added that approximately 60 volunteers worked the booth at the Pinal County Fair without pay or compensation.

New calendar

The board approved two district calendars for the upcoming school year – one is for a 175-day school year and the other is for 180 days.

The only difference between the two is the final day of school, which is May 19 on the 175-day calendar and May 26 on the 180-day calendar. All other dates of importance remain the same. The first day of school will be July 20.

Once the Legislature determines the length of the 2010-11 school year, the district will utilize the appropriate calendar.

Mold briefly reappears

Small amounts of mold were found in a classroom at Anthem K-8 on April 9 by one of the district's volunteers behind one of the laminated posters that was being removed prior to AIMS testing.

Since mold was suspected, Mark Lamas, FUSD director of support services, was contacted and discussed the situation with Principal Kathy Brown. Lamas called Extreme Remediation and Water Damage, the company used to successfully remediate a mold situation at Walker Butte K-8 in 2008.

ERWD found that "minor" mold growth was caused by laminated posters attached to an exterior wall. After all other exterior walls were inspected, two similar areas of mold were found. Over the ensuing weekend, the areas were cleaned with an antimicrobial agent and air scrubbers.

Dr. Nine said at that point, the decision was made to have every classroom in the district with an exterior wall examined. One similar mold growth was found at Skyline Ranch K-8 and two more were located at Copper Basin. By the evening of April 19, ERWD remediated the problem at both schools.

Derrick Denis, vice president of indoor environmental quality for Clark, Seif, Clark Inc., reported that the outdoor airborne fungal counts at Anthem totaled 1,200 and 1,600 counts per cubic meter, "which typifies this area." He added that the total indoor counts from the rooms tested ranged from 13 to 124 counts, or around 18 times lower than the outdoor total counts.

In his report, Denis said the visible mold was "minor" and can be addressed by custodial staff in the future. He added, "The cleanup of this minor amount of superficial mold could easily have been handled by housekeeping staff. They could have wet-wiped the painted block wall clean with the district's approved cleanser and disinfectant.

"The district chose a more cautious approach and had a professional mold remediation firm perform the wall cleaning."

CSC tested the air quality at Skyline Ranch and Copper Basin and came up with comparable results.

New business

The board approved the following agenda items:

- Promoting Meara Verna to assistant principal at Poston Butte High for the 2010-2011 school year. Verna, a graduate of Northern Arizona University who also teaches social studies and coaches freshmen girls basketball at PBHS, will earn \$58,700 as per step one of the assistant principal salary schedule.
- Entering into a cooperative purchasing agreement with U.S. Communities government purchasing alliance, a purchasing cooperative designed to give the district access to a broad line of competitively solicited service contracts. The agreement includes maintaining compliance with Arizona procurement requirements.
- An intergovernmental agreement (IGA) for provision of services by the Pinal County Recorder and Elections Department. In order for the county recorder's office to supply election and voter registration services to the district, an IGA form must be completed.
- Travel for Florence High law enforcement students Erika Chavez, D.J. Buttelman and Macie Swanson to attend the National Police Memorial event in Washington, D.C., from May 12-16, at no cost to the students. CAVIT is providing the travel expenses, and a Pinal County Sheriff's Department officer will serve as chaperone.
- The comprehensive benefits package for 2010-2011. Life, accidental death and dismemberment, voluntary life coverage is now carried through The Hartford, and short term disability switches to Lifewise Assurant. COBRA administration, dental and vision remain through the existing carriers.

Students of the month

FUSD students of the month for April include: Anthem K-8 – Alexis Johnson and Jeffrey Mervin; Circle Cross K-8 – Alia Rathell and Ashton Ortiz-Kissinger; Copper Basin K-8 – Jillian Walker-Ruiz and Jacob Vath; Florence K-8 – Ashley Martinez and Matthew Ramirez; Magma Ranch K-8 – Brianna Keller and Silas Saunders; Skyline Ranch K-8 – Hannah McElroy and Brandon Hatfield; Walker Butte K-8 – April Meadows and Gabriel Gurule.

Florence High – Michelle Nicoletti and Frankie Difranco, Alyssa Taylor (Elks); Poston Butte High – Hannah Greer and Ralph McNeal, Brittney Willis (Elks).

Next meeting

The next regular board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 12, at Poston Butte High School in San Tan Valley. Pre-meeting work session begins at 6 p.m., the meeting begins at 6:30 p.m.

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