

## Dallas

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\$372,729 (2.5-3.5 percent) for personnel salaries and the removal of \$2 million from the fund balance for renovation to Dallas Elementary.

"These are the areas we have very little control over. If we wanted to go in and look and recap the budget, it wouldn't make a difference unless we want to cut into school programs. We are at a stage right now where we are outdistancing our revenues and now we have to make up for it," said Gil Griffiths, superintendent, explaining the need for a tax increase.

Melone said the district has historically "enjoyed two to three percent more revenue than the budget says." Assuming it will happen again, Melone already took a three percent tolerance into account because there is a possibility of spending more than the district has.

"We are playing our best trump card forward if there is to be a millage increase. We think our revenue figures are realistic," said Melone.

The district used \$3.5 million of its \$5.3 million fund balance last year to cover school renovations, some salaries, benefits and maintenance. Because of the increases in insurance and salaries, the district does not anticipate any surplus, said Griffiths.

"The fund balance won't be building up again," said Karen Kyle, board member.

"We were able to not have a tax increase for seven years because our recurring debt was paid off by recurring funds," said Griffiths.

The 1997-1998 budget was \$20.9 million, which included the one-time allowance of \$2 million for renovations to Dallas Elementary. Griffiths said that \$2 million was put into a separate building fund this year, making last year's budget \$18.9 million.

*"We are at a stage right now where we are outdistancing our revenues and now we have to make up for it."*

Dr. Gil Griffiths  
Superintendent of Schools

## Walk

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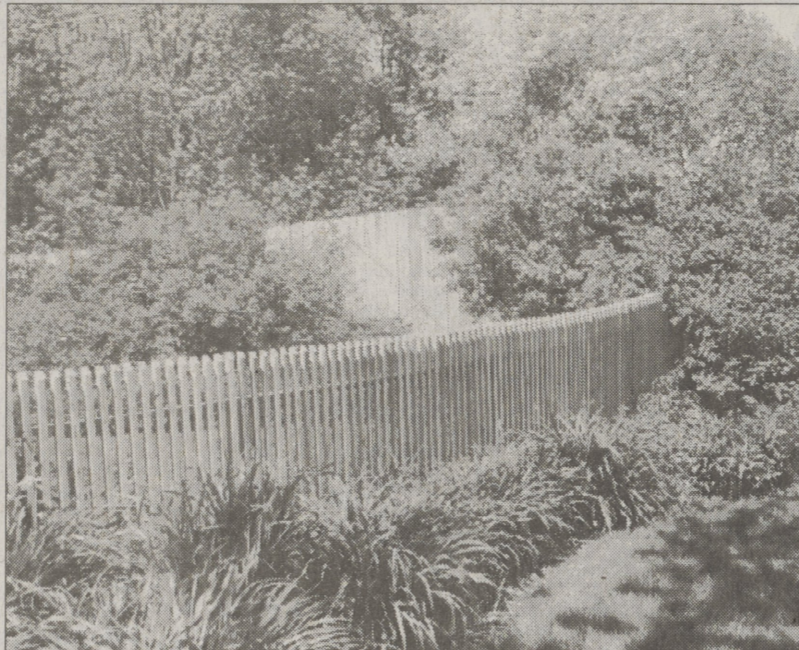
ently, communications lines were crossed and only one neighbor joined the board on their walk.

Board members John Litz, Ernie Ashbridge, Karen Kyle and Frank Natitus were joined by superintendent Gil Griffiths, Mark Kraynak, superintendent of buildings and grounds and Sterling Lamoreaux, a Westminster Drive resident.

The board will walk the ground again on Wed. May 20 at 6 p.m.

Kraynak pointed out different encroachments, many of which have been taken care of by property owners.

*The property will be walked again Wed., May 20 at 6 p.m.*



POST PHOTO/KYLIE SHAFFERKOETTER

This is approximately 30 ft. of William Strausser's fence and perennial garden that go over onto Dallas School District property. The Straussers have told district officials they'll remove the fence if the district asks them to do so.

# Public negotiations nixed for Lake-Lehman teachers' contract

## Basketball coach, assistants not reappointed

By KYLIE SHAFFERKOETTER  
Post Staff

**LEHMAN** - Lake-Lehman School Board members were informed May 12 that teacher negotiations will not be held in public. The board voted in April to hold negotiations in public, but Atty. Bruce Campbell said no party can be forced to bargain in public and that the teachers' union would file charges if the board insisted they do so.

"I don't know of any agreements made in public. In my opinion it is not a good idea. It antagonizes the other side. Neither party has the right to insist that the meeting is in public," said Campbell, who was retained by the district to negotiate the contracts at \$135

per hour.

Liz Siehler of Lehman asked the board how negotiations were going. "Certain members of the board said they would keep us updated and they haven't been doing that," she said. Dr. William Price, superintendent, said there has been no progress with negotiations.

Campbell said the Lake-Lehman parties have held 15 bargaining meetings with no fruition.

Siehler emphasized the point that she was disappointed that "certain" board members who promised to keep the community posted on the negotiations were not doing so.

Lois Kopcha, board president, responded to Siehler. "You're just jealous because I beat you (for the

position on the board)."

In other business, Rodger Bearde, boys basketball head coach, and his four assistants were not reappointed for the 1998-1999 school year. Ed Kern, board member, said he voted against the coaches because they only had two wins last year and that Bearde makes too much money.

Bearde would have earned \$5,729 for the year. Pat McCue, entering his second year as head coach at Dallas, is paid \$4,540.

Currently the district provides insurance for all sports. Kopcha asked if it would be possible if the district only covered football. The board will discuss her proposal more at its next meeting June 2 at 7:30 p.m. at the Lehman-Jackson multi-purpose room.

## Lake-Lehman

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Discussions about class sizes in the elementary grades and remedial education in grades 4-6 took up much of the meeting. "We struggled desperately with class size last year," Whipple said. "A lot of parents are having a fit right now (over large classes)."

Kopcha agreed that some classes are too large. "You can't cut education," she said. "This is what we're here for." When Williams asked where budget cuts should be made, Kopcha suggested athletics and activities, building and grounds, and non-teaching personnel.

The budget calls for five additional teachers, although a smaller number may be needed once next year's enrollments are determined. Dr. William Price, superintendent of schools, said he'll go over staffing with principals near the end of this term, and have a final figure by June 1.

Price also suggested that an "itinerant" science teacher for grades 4-6 could provide better science instruction while freeing up classroom teachers to offer remedial reading to their students. He said the state provides funding for remedial education in grades 1-3, but not in older grades.

One major cost increase is for Blue Cross/Blue Shield insurance, which is scheduled to go up by more than 14 percent. Price said the district is planning to join a consortium of school districts in order to negotiate for lower rates, but it would be at least one year before the group was formed.

The tentative spending plan also includes a new alarm/security system for all buildings except the middle school. The system would have a central locking control for doors, and an intercom connecting visitors to the office so they could be cleared for entry. The middle school is not included because the office in that building looks onto the entrance door.

"We have a tremendous number of parents coming into the elementary schools," Price said, noting that there have been two incidents in recent months when the schools had to be closed because of potential risks from outside.

The tax rate in Luzerne County would rise to 231 mills under the plan; in Noxen, Wyoming County, the rate would increase to 43 mills.

Allardyce questioned the need for teachers, and asked where else the budget could be reduced so that no tax increase is necessary. That would require a reduction of about \$300,000, since each mill of taxation accounts for about \$32,000 in revenue. He again brought up the long-distance phone bill, which cost \$700-\$800 last month for 1,800 calls.

Kathleen Williams, business manager, pressed to have the budget adopted Monday, so a final plan can be hammered out by mid-June. She said last year's last-minute passage delayed mailing of tax bills until July 17, but if a budget was completed on time the bills could be mailed July 1.

## Board to interview solicitor candidates

The Lake-Lehman School Board will interview candidates for solicitor at a special work session June 1. Some board members are dissatisfied with Peter Savage, who has been the district's solicitor for 12 years.

At Monday's meeting, board members agreed to interview John Aciekewicz, Sally Steel, Kenneth Pennington, Mark Singer and Savage for 10 minutes each. The four new candidates were selected from a list of 14 applicants because they appeared to offer the lowest rates.

"Financially, we have to look for the person who will give us the best deal," said board member Robert Allardyce.

Some board members did not want to consider Savage, but Tom Williams suggested he be included, and Karen Whipple contended he had performed well for 12 years, and was the only candidate who lives in the district.

Dr. William Price, superintendent, suggested a solicitor with special expertise in school law is needed, or the district could make costly mistakes.

**Q:** Where do you find the most Back Mountain news?

**A:** Only in The Dallas Post

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