

Board heads to Harrisburg

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WEST NORRITON — With no state budget compromise on the horizon in early July, the Norristown Area School Board has chartered a school bus for Wednesday morning to bring district officials, local residents, teachers and school board members to Harrisburg for an afternoon pep rally.

The district sent out an e-mail blast to an unknown number of recipients on Wednesday looking for local supporters to attend the “Fund the Formula” rally.

The rally name is a play on words for Pennsylvania’s educational “funding formula” for educational programs.

School Board President Janice Pearce called the planned bus trip “an ad hoc effort coming from our personal concerns.”

“Any way we can find to put a face on Norristown is important,” Pearce said. “The school board wants to alleviate stress on the property tax. Harrisburg has still not passed the state budget.”

Pearce said that visible reminders about the district’s needs would keep legislators from cutting too deeply.

“Otherwise it is very easy to cancel out budget line items,” she said, “when you don’t know the damage that you do.”

District officials want the state Legislature to follow through on “maintaining Pennsylvania’s first funding formula in almost two decades.”

The proposed fiscal 2009 state budget, including the education budget, has been debated by Gov. Ed Rendell and the state Legislature, but no final budget has been adopted.

The state, with a Democratic governor and a Republican Senate, has missed adopting the operating budget before July 1 for the past seven years.

Pearce said the board had not approved the bus expenditure because it met in late June, and the trip was planned after the meeting.

“If we were all together, we would approve it,” she said. “I don’t believe we (the board) have to authorize the bus trip.”

“I will be going,” said Lee Speers, the president of the Education Association of Norristown Area School District.

“Education is really the future. You can’t leave the kids in school out in the cold,” said Speers, a 12th grade physics teacher. “If you don’t get everything you can when you are there, you’re in trouble.”

Speers said he is not sure how many Norristown area teachers would be participating in the bus trip.

“We (the school district) made educational plans based on the state funding,” Speers said. “We have cut 10 positions already that were grant-funded. I’m glad the cuts did not affect classroom teachers.”

Board member Denise Ashe said the school district “needs to do this. No one else is doing this. If this budget goes through as is, it will take a lot of money away from us.”

“It’s important for the district to let the state know every school district needs money,” Ashe said. “Norristown is one of the districts that needs a lot of state money. We don’t have a lot of industry and businesses, and therefore, we don’t get as much tax revenue.”

Business Administrator Anne Marie Rohricht could not be reached for comment Friday.