

12/08/04 - Posted from the Daily Record newsroom

Mtn. Lakes district mulls pact with Boonton Twp.

Board to discuss school contract to continue sending-receiving plan

By Minauti Davè, Daily Record

MOUNTAIN LAKES -- The school board is going to vote Monday night on working out a nine-year contract under which Boonton Township would continue to send students to Mountain Lakes High School.

The school district sent a letter to parents Tuesday informing them of the meeting at which negotiating the contract is to be formally acted upon.

The school board meeting is in the cafeteria of Mountain Lakes High School on Powerville Road. The Boonton Township School Board also is scheduled to vote on the proposed contract.

"I know we believe that this will be a good thing for both districts," Dr. John Kazmark, superintendent of the Mountain Lakes School District, said on Tuesday.

Four years ago, the Mountain Lakes School District petitioned the New Jersey Commissioner of Education to end its contract with Boonton Township for fear the township's population growth would prompt an enrollment increase at Mountain Lakes High School.

"The situation that initiated our desire to separate really kind of went away," said Kazmark. "The projections had decreased."

Kazmark said even with the Boonton Township students, enrollment in the Mountain Lakes school district is going to steadily decrease.

For example, currently there are 701 students at the high school, which will decrease to 681 by next September, Kazmark said. This year there are 276 students from Boonton Township attending Mountain Lakes High School.

Although the Mountain Lakes school district is confident that enrollment at its high school is in a steady decline, in his letter to parents, Kazmark said the proposed contract with Boonton Township would have both districts exploring the idea of a new high school in Boonton Township.

The proposed contract requires both school districts to conduct a study to investigate the benefits of building a new high school in Boonton Township to accommodate the possible growth of student population in the school district, Kazmark said.

The letter also explains the advantages of Mountain Lakes renewing its contract with Boonton Township.

"First, the proposed negotiated contract reflects the desire on the part of both boards of education to maintain the small size and character of our high school," Kazmark wrote.

The current average class size at Mountain Lakes High School is 20 students.

"The intimate culture of our high school creates an important sense of belonging for students that we wish to see continue regardless of potential future growth in Boonton Township," Kazmark wrote in the letter.

If the contract is approved by both school boards, this would be the first year of the new contract, which has been negotiated at the per pupil rate of \$12,000.

The renewal of the contract would avert years of litigation and save both districts thousands of dollars, Kazmark said.

Both school districts have spent approximately \$300,000 in litigation, Kazmark said.

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