N.Y. School Board Wants to Pay for Senior EMT Classes

By Karen Robinson - NEWS STAFF REPORTER
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Frontier School District officials are scrambling to find the money to pay for 17 seniors enrolled in a popular emergency medical training course offered through the Hamburg School District, which is facing a budget crunch.

Hamburg school officials informed Frontier in early June that Frontier students -- who previously have not had to pay a fee for the yearlong course -- would now have to pay their way. The 30-year-old program, which is believed to be the longest running of its kind in New York, costs about $1,000 per student.

Frontier School Board members Tuesday discussed the issue at length and urged the administration to determine if BOCES aid is possible or to find $17,000 somewhere in the district budget to make it work for the upcoming school year.

"I think this program has such value in it that we would be remiss in not having it available for 17 of our seniors," board President Michael Comerford said.

Board member Janet MacGregor Plarr blasted the Hamburg district for the way it handled the situation. "I think it's a shakedown by Hamburg," she said. "If they knew this was on the table, you don't wait until the eleventh hour. You don't pull the rug out from under the kids. It's like putting them out in water without a life jacket."

Board member Jack Chiappone urged the administration to find the $17,000 in the budget to accommodate the kids enrolled in the course for next year. "We did it for our girls' hockey team," he said. "Could we find $17,000 to save this for the kids?"

Frontier isn't stopping there. Administration officials and the board are leaning toward developing Frontier's own EMT program to offer it beginning in the 2012-13 school year. Developing Frontier's own program would require more intensive training and certification for instructors and buying the necessary equipment. Those potential costs were not outlined Tuesday but are being studied.

The EMT course offers students hands-on learning experiences and gives them skills that can carry over into a job in the health care field, providing a foundation for aspiring medical technicians, emergency ambulance drivers and other rescue-related jobs.

At the time it was established -- under the guidance of retired Hamburg health teacher James Cleveland -- working relationships were set up with local volunteer fire companies.

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