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Parent protest forces School Board to rethink enrollment minimum

A strong showing by parents of Ozaukee High School students at Monday's Northern Ozaukee School Board meeting prevented advanced placement calculus from becoming a budget-cutting casualty.

According to guidelines established by the board, classes must have at least eight students enrolled to be offered in the upcoming school year.

When only seven students enrolled to take AP calculus next year, the board was faced with a hard choice.

Number crunching by district administrators showed that offering the course in a traditional classroom setting to the seven students would cost $15,700 in salary and benefits for a part-time math teacher.

Several other less-costly options were outlined, but each had its drawbacks.

Officials said students could take the course at neighboring Port Washington High School, if space is available, at a cost of $1,600 a student — or $11,200 for those currently enrolled in the class. However, the class schedules at the two schools do not
align, making it difficult to accommodate an off-campus schedule.

The Youth Options program, which allows high-school students to take college courses, would cost about $7,000, but there is no guarantee the required placement test would put a student in the equivalent of an AP calculus class.

The final option mentioned was taking the class through Wisconsin Virtual Learning, the district's on-line virtual program. That approach would cost $4,200 for seven students, but officials were uncertain a qualified calculus teacher would be available
through the program.

Parents of all the students enrolled in the class said their preferred approach would be to continue offering AP calculus in the classroom.

Julie Gensrick said eliminating the class because it failed to meet an arbitrary enrollment threshold would be a mistake.

"I understand you don't think it is fiscally responsible," Gensrick said, "but we are going to become known as a district that doesn't offer advanced classes."

Another parent, Dawn Hartnett, said dropping the class would be a huge disservice.

"Because of open enrollment, we would run the risk of losing our best and brightest students," Hartnett said.

Parent Brent Neis said that the district needs to be cautious about perceptions.

“With School Choice out there, it is like a competition and we are going to lose our better students to other districts,” Neis said.

Kristin Petersen said AP calculus should not be viewed as a “luxury class,” because it is a prerequisite for many college-bound students.

“I think what you have to do is examine why we don’t have the numbers today. We used to have them. That is the bigger question,” Petersen said.

The support for the class was not ignored by the board, which vote 8-1 to offer the course next year. Kendall Thistle cast the lone vote against offering the class.