Buena Regional school board votes to keep AP courses

CLAIRE LOWE Staff Writer

BUENA VISTA TOWNSHIP — Buena Regional High School students will be able to enroll in AP Chemistry and European History for the 2017-18 school year after the school board Tuesday unanimously reversed a vote that did away with the classes due to low enrollment.

“I’m really happy that the board decided to pass it, and it gives me so much more opportunity,” said 16-year-old Bruno Romeo, an incoming junior.

Romeo, of Landisville, an aspiring aerospace engineer, helped lead a fight in his community to have the classes restored.

According to Board of Education President Lynda Gazzara, the school board’s education committee met in early August and was able to come to an agreement to offer the classes with no additional stipend to the teachers.

The decision comes after the school board could not garner enough votes last month to approve AP Chemistry and AP European History with enrollment under the threshold of 12 students. Six students had signed up for the chemistry class, and five had signed up for the history class.

On Tuesday, the board was meeting with packed with concerned parents, students and alumni who hoped to see the classes saved.

Buena Vista Township Committeeman John Williams thanked the board members for their vote to save the AP classes.

“We think they’re not only necessary, but they’re important to students’ future,” Williams said.

During the meeting, school board member Debra Bell asked that the board vote to exempt AP classes from a minimum student threshold, but interim Superintendent Mary Lou DeFrancisco said it was not a policy and asked the board to hold off.

Earlier this year, the school board approved a course guide that included the 12-student threshold for all classes. DeFrancisco said the board’s education committee will meet with administrators and other professionals in the near future to review the threshold and determine an appropriate path forward.

“I think everyone understands that we want to offer those courses,” she said.

DeFrancisco said the board would like to explore options — such as online courses — that allow the district to expand its curriculum and be cost-effective to taxpayers.
Advanced Placement courses were created by the College Board, a nonprofit education organization that also administers the SAT. At the end of the course, the students can take the Advanced Placement test, which gives them a chance to earn credits for college, sometimes exempting them from certain classes.

For the past three years the high school has offered six AP courses, with a 40 percent participation rate among 11th- and 12th-grade students in 2015-16. European history, English literature and composition, and chemistry have consistently had the lowest enrollment.