

CARLSBAD: CUSD to form school closure committee

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Trustees in Carlsbad moved a step closer to closing two schools as soon as this summer with a vote Thursday to form a committee to consider the move.

The group of Carlsbad Unified School District parents and educators will discuss strategies and recommendations related to closing Buena Vista Elementary School and Carlsbad Village Academy at the end of this school year or the following one, district officials said.

Before the unanimous vote, four parents with children at Buena Vista asked the board to reconsider the move.

"For our 50th anniversary, I ask that you would give us a gift and not approve this action," said Paige Dominguez, a mother with two students attending the school.

The trustees said they would rather not close any schools but want more information about how much the district could save if they did, as they look for ways to cut spending.

"I don't like sitting here in this position, being faced with these challenges, but we have to do the best that we can with the resources that we have," Trustee Lisa Rodman said.

Closing the two campuses could save the district more than \$1 million a year, officials estimate.

Buena Vista and Carlsbad Village Academy are the most expensive campuses in the district to operate, officials said.

The committee is expected to bring a proposal to the school board in April, but the final decision will be up to the trustees.

"I want to make sure that we have all of the facts," Trustee Veronica Williams said.

Creating the panel doesn't necessarily mean the school board will decide to close the schools. If revenues improve, the district may not have to close any schools, officials have said.

Moving students to a different campus could lead to a temporary dip in achievement for some students, but the committee will explore ways to avoid that, said Devon Vodicka, assistant superintendent in charge of business services for the district.

"High mobility for kids is a challenge," he told the board.

The vote to consider closing schools was part of a larger group of spending cuts the board approved in November, which also included eliminating administrative positions, relocating the district office, asking employees to accept pay cuts and reducing training.

Officials have said they expect to have a budget shortfall of \$7.8 million next year if the amount of money coming in from the state and from property taxes doesn't increase.

This year, district officials expect to bring in about \$73 million and spend about \$83 million. The district has enough in reserves to cover the difference this year but won't have enough next year, officials have said.

District revenue has declined from \$89 million in 2008-09 to \$83 million last year and a projected \$73 million this year.

"We are really stunned by the news that keeps coming out of Sacramento," Trustee Ann Tanner said. "We are in a position where we have to look at everything" when considering spending cuts.