

CARLSBAD: CUSD trustees approve spending cuts

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Carlsbad Unified School District trustees approved a variety of cost-saving measures Wednesday for next year, including eliminating administrative positions, asking employees to take pay cuts and looking into the possibility of closing a couple of schools.

"There's nothing on here that I like," Trustee Elisa Williamson said. "We're going to do some things that we don't want to do."

District officials have said they expect a \$10.6 million shortfall next year if the amount of money coming in from the state and from property taxes doesn't increase.

More work will be necessary with some of the proposed cuts before district officials know how much money they will save with the changes, but the amount isn't expected to be anywhere near the \$10.6 million without cuts to employee salaries and benefits.

Those changes will need to be negotiated with the district's two employee unions.

It would take more than a 10 percent reduction in salary and benefits for the district to cut \$6 million in spending each year.

"The main question ... is 'Are we going to cut jobs or are we going to cut compensation?'" Trustee Ann Tanner said.

The district could also end up shortening the school year if employees agree to furlough days in exchange for a pay cut, officials said.

In order to determine which school or schools to close and what to do with the students there, the district will form a committee that will bring recommendations back to the board.

The trustees voted to wait a year before hiring employees to prepare for the opening of Sage Creek High School. They decided against a proposal to delay the 2013 opening of the campus.

Other spending cuts approved Wednesday night include cutting spending on administrators by \$450,000, eliminating some support staff and programs, and reducing some stipends, site budgets and training.

Some of the changes could take effect early next year, while others would take longer.

District officials also expect that special education costs will be lower this year and in the future because they have hired specialists to work with students with special needs rather than contracting with agencies for the work. The change could save the district \$250,000 this year and the same amount next year, said Devin Vodicka, assistant superintendent in charge of business services for the district.

A final budget decision won't be made until June, but the district must present proposed spending cuts to the San Diego County Office of Education by Dec. 15 or risk losing some autonomy.

This year, district officials expect to bring in about \$71 million and spend roughly \$82 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 \$71 million this year.