

CARLSBAD: CUSD trustees approve new spending cuts

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School trustees in Carlsbad voted Wednesday to approve a new series of cost-saving measures that include layoffs, increased class sizes and reduced training.

The Carlsbad Unified School District trustees voted 4-1 on the list after a lengthy discussion. The board members said they hated making the changes but that they had little choice as they work to close a budget deficit estimated at \$7.8 million.

"It's disheartening to be sitting up here and having to make these Solomon-like decisions," board President Kelli Moors said. "Every cut we've made in the last few years is a cut that I didn't want to make."

Trustee Ann Tanner opposed the move, saying she thought the board should have made more spending cuts.

The changes will save the district an estimated \$1.3 million next year and \$2.4 million the following year, bringing the budget deficit to \$6.5 million next year.

District officials had initially recommended even more cuts, including eliminating additional teaching, guidance and library positions. Those moves would have saved an additional \$1.2 million in each of the next two school years.

Several employees spoke, revealing an apparent rift between teachers and support staff that Moors called "a civil war."

District officials are in negotiations with leaders from both unions to reduce pay and benefits beginning next year.

Even with the new spending cuts, district officials have said it could take as much as a 12 percent reduction in employee expenses to balance the budget. If union and district officials can't come to an agreement, it could mean as many as 100 teachers could get layoff notices next month, said Devin Vodicka, assistant superintendent in charge of business services.

All five trustees said they hope teachers will agree to a pay cut in order to prevent more layoffs.

"We all have to work together," Trustee Veronica Williams said. "We all have to make the sacrifices."

If employees agree to pay cuts, it could mean fewer school days for students, officials have said.

Sally Estep, president of the Carlsbad Unified Teachers Association, urged the board to reconsider several proposed cuts, including closing two schools and increasing class sizes.

"If you value putting students first, you simply can't put teachers last," she told the board.

A group of parents also asked the board to take closing Buena Vista Elementary off of the list of possible cost-saving measures.

"We would rather have a plaque for our 50th anniversary than an eviction notice," said Paige Dominguez, one of the parents.

In closed-session before the public meeting, the trustees voted to notify administrators that their pay and hours could be cut or that they could be reassigned to classroom duty if they have the needed credentials.

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.