

W. Aurora eyes cuts to balance budget

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-->AURORA – West Aurora School District will cut seven positions, including five administrator positions, to help shore up its finances.

But officials said that even more cuts would have to be made, as much as \$5.7 million in cuts, if residents did not approve a 50-cent tax increase in April.

Teachers might bear the brunt of those cuts.

West Aurora High School teachers Joe Neukirch and Pat Butler voiced their concerns about the possibility of teacher cuts during Monday's school board meeting.

"If we reduce the number of teachers, we will have to look at increasing classroom size," Neukirch said.

Butler also voiced her worries.

"I am not going to stand by and watch us make a huge mistake," Butler said. "There has to be some other way of looking at it."

School board President Rick Slocum said no decision had been made.

"We need to look at some options," Slocum said.

The district might decide to phase in any staff cuts, he said.

Board member Al Rhea said the board first needed to get a handle on how many teachers would retire this year before talking about teacher cuts.

"I would like to see what would be saved by people retiring," Rhea said.

School Superintendent James Rydland on Monday announced that seven positions would be cut for a savings of more than \$500,000. Those positions, which include two assistant superintendents, a director of benefits and planning, two regional custodial supervisors, and two teachers on special assignment, will not be replaced regardless of what happens to the referendum, Rydland said.

"It means we are going to do things differently," he said.

The latest cuts are on top of seven cuts that were made last year, for another \$500,000 in savings.

The district projected a \$1.9 million deficit for its 2006-07 fiscal year. Board members approved the budget in June.

A 50-cent tax increase would boost the district's operational tax rate to \$3.53 per \$100 of assessed valuation, from its current \$3.03 per \$100 of assessed valuation.

The question is on the April 17 election ballot.

The owner of a \$100,000 home would pay an additional \$166.67 next year in taxes if the referendum was approved.

As proposed, the operational tax rate would remain at \$3.53 through 2010.

Want to find out about April 17 referendum?

Facts forums at 7 p.m. Thursday at Jewel Middle School and at 7 p.m. Monday at Herget Middle School.