

## West cuts staff, eyes teaching positions

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AURORA -- Cost-saving measures continue in the West Aurora School District, where Superintendent Jim Rydland this week announced he's initiated another wave of cuts in the administration office, with the potential of eliminating several nontenured teachers being discussed as well.

In the wake of cutting seven administrator positions that went into effect this school year, Rydland eliminated two assistant superintendents, two regional custodial supervisors, two "teachers on special assignment" at district headquarters, and one director of benefits and planning.

Those changes become official July 1.

Combined with last year's cuts, the latest removal of positions will save the school district nearly \$1.1 million in annual salary and benefits.

"This is important for us to take into account as we talk about fiscal responsibility," Rydland said.

Several teachers attended this week's School Board meeting to hear discussion on the district's Financial Reduction Plan. Though the number is not yet clear, and no action has been taken by the board, one proposal is to cut \$5.7 million worth of annual salaries, including \$4.3 million made by teachers.

"I understand the challenging position this puts us in as a district," Rydland said. "It is not our preferred course of action."

Residents will decide whether to support a referendum which will appear on the April 17 ballot. The district is asking for a 50-cent property-tax hike per \$100 of assessed valuation. Passage of a referendum, geared toward the daily operational budget, would prevent the district from going \$3 million in debt in 2008 and enable officials to install a refresh cycle for things like buses, computers, security cameras and band instruments.

About 76 percent of the district's annual operating budget is comprised of salaries and benefits.

"It's difficult to make those cuts without affecting certified staff," said Kevin Wegner, the district's assistant superintendent of finance.

"You can't bring new (teachers) in and expect them to have staying power," Pat Butler, a 33-year teacher and math chairperson at West Aurora High School, told the board. "They

will be snarfed up by other districts. You've always said, 'Our job is not to train teachers for other districts,' but that's exactly what you'd be doing."

"This has me nervous and concerned about the future of West Aurora education," Joe Neukirch, a social studies teacher at West, told Rydland and the board. "The reduction of teachers and increased class size are attached to each other."

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