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R.I. schools slash budget

By Robin J. Youngblood, Staff writer

ROCK ISLAND -- About 24 more teachers' jobs were added Tuesday night to the school district's list of 35 to be cut from next year's proposed budget.

Rock Island-Milan School Board members approved more than \$2 million in reductions to the 2003-04 district budget when it is written this summer.

Superintendent David Markward gave the board new information Tuesday that about 24 of the 59 teachers could be let go because their salaries were paid through grant money that the district won't receive next year. The district learned last week the grants either won't be coming from state or federal sources or will expire.

Dismissing 35 teachers would save about \$1.17 million. The loss of an additional 24 won't affect the budget because grant dollars aren't included in it. The school board will vote on pink-slipping teachers March 11.

With a projected deficit of \$4.7 million, the district had to cut \$2.23 million worth of expenses across the board, from extracurricular programs and administrative salaries to funds for building repairs and some teachers' salaries.

Board member Bill Cleaver voted against the cuts but could not be reached for comment after the meeting. Member Linda Dothard was absent.

The district will take about \$2.7 million from its surplus to offset the deficit, whittling the surplus to \$9.3 million.

In a previous presentation to the board, district comptroller Mike Oberhaus said if the surplus isn't used to cover the deficit, more services, teachers and staff would need to be cut.

Some significant non-personnel cuts approved Tuesday were \$294,000 from major building repairs, \$100,000 to buy computers for teachers, \$67,750 from buying textbooks and reducing extracurricular funds at the junior and high schools by \$25,000.

Staff cuts will include:

-- Two junior high administrators, one from each school -- \$137,000.

-- One high school administrator -- \$68,000.

-- Two full-time custodians -- \$56,000.

-- Two full-time secretaries, one from the central office and one from the high school -- \$56,000.

-- One central office administrator, partially grant-funded -- \$45,000.

The board made one change to the cuts by keeping the employee-assistance program for \$16,000 and instead eliminating one certified nurse's job for \$25,000.

In other business, the board:

-- Learned students' test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, or ITBS, improved over last year. Third-, sixth-, and eighth-graders took the standardized test in November in language, reading, math, social studies and science skills. Every testing area improved from last year except third-grade math and social studies, which stayed the same.

-- Approved school-improvement plans for Eugene Field and Thomas Jefferson elementaries.

-- Heard about the use policy for the Rock Island High School Fitness Center. Mr. Oberhaus said it is still being determined how best to run the facility, but, for now, only high school students may use the facility.

Physical education classes use the gym during the day and students in extracurricular activities can use it before and after school. Members of in-season sports teams receive priority.

-- Learned about the Classroom Project proposal, which would incorporate 3-D software into classroom instruction. Jay Marino, assistant superintendent of curriculum, said the district is asking several funding organizations if they are interested in helping to pay for the project.

For example, Mr. Marino said, science students could better learn about the inner ear if 3-D technology were used because that part of the body is complex and multi-faceted.

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