

Grand Island schools face cuts in new budget

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Only a handful of residents attended a public forum Monday at which the Grand Island School Board hoped to hear ideas on how to close a nearly \$7 million budget gap for the 2012-13 school year.

Board President David Goris said the “harsh reality is that there will be cuts” as the board faces a “difficult and arduous task” in creating next year’s fiscal package, tentatively set at \$54.1 million.

A second budget forum is set for 9:30 a.m. Wednesday in the Middle School Little Theater.

Within the past three years, the district has seen its state aid drop about \$3 million. State aid for next year is projected at \$14.9 million, supposedly an increase of about \$427,000. But Loraine Ingrasci, assistant superintendent for finance, said she has doubts about that calculation, noting this year’s state aid was about \$15.1 million.

Included in the projected revenue shortfall for next year is \$2.5 million from the appropriated fund balance; \$990,515 in federal education job funds; \$600,000 in the debt service reserve fund; \$300,000 in the Employee Retirement System reserve; and \$100,000 from the unemployment reserve allocation.

Superintendent Robert Christmann, in summarizing personnel and nonpersonnel areas for possible reductions, stressed: “These are areas being looked at by the board . . . not what’s definitely going to happen.” The board expects to adopt a budget by March 30.

Because salaries and benefits comprise 74 percent of the budget, Christmann said: “I don’t see how we can escape [having] a smaller staff next year . . . and it will encompass several categories of staff.”

Grand Island is one of the few municipalities in Erie County experiencing a growth in its tax base, a factor that figures into the state’s complex formula for calculating how much the district can increase its property tax levy.

According to Ingrasci, that percentage is 3.61 percent. Despite being above the state’s 2 percent cap on the increase in the tax levy, it would still require only a majority of district voters to approve the budget. Christmann noted that the percentage of allowable increase in the tax levy will differ for school districts across the state.