

Island to ax summer middle school

By Paul Lane

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Grand Island School District officials took the first ax swing at the district budget Monday as they voted to eliminate most of the summer school program.

Facing a \$4.77 million budget shortfall for 2011-2012, district leaders opted to act early in the budget process to cut summer middle school so that students who might need summer school to pass a grade have adequate time to “get cracking” this semester, Superintendent Robert Christmann.

The district’s summer school programs cost a combined \$87,000. Summer school will still be offered for high school seniors who need the program in order to graduate and for students from other tuition-paying districts, provided the class will not cost Grand Island anything.

The move was one of many cost-cutting measures that appeared in a draft proposal issued by Christmann. Among the other cuts included in his draft are five elementary school teachers, four part-time monitors, two clerical workers and one custodial staffer.

“This certainly is not anything that is desired, that we would choose, but if you look at our situation we don’t have a lot of options,” Christmann said.

Other proposed cost-cutting actions include eliminating two of the district’s three late bus runs, shuttering the high school on Sundays and not permitting it to be used by the public, and issuing high school course outlines and district calendars only online.

Christmann’s proposed cuts would save the district about \$1.54 million. His draft also calls for drawing on \$1.5 million in reserve funds, \$1 million of which could be used only for specific areas such as debt service and employee retirement costs. Combining the money from savings with the proposed cuts would still leave the district \$1.74 million short, though, Christmann said.

Chief among the reasons for the budget shortfall is a proposed \$2.21 million drop in state aid, which Christmann acknowledged may be a necessary evil.

“We recognize the problem the state is facing,” he said, referring to the state deficit. “We realize that education has to play its part in fixing this.”

Fixing the district shortfall also will likely entail a tax rate increase, Christmann said. As an example, he said a hypothetical 3 percent tax rate increase would generate about \$710,000, still leaving the district about \$1 million short if Monday’s proposed draft budget were enacted.