

Capistrano district prepares to cut \$25 million, 356-plus jobs: Deep cuts would wipe out class-size reduction, about 254 teachers.

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About 254 classroom teachers in the Capistrano Unified School District could be pink-slipped next month as officials prepare to slash \$25 million from the district's budget in response to state budget cuts.

At a school board meeting Wednesday, district officials said they would be recommending an aggressive cost-cutting plan that would hit core classroom jobs and programs, including class-size reduction in the primary grades. The cuts are necessary following the state budget plan signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger last week that calls for \$8.4 billion in cuts to K-12 public schools.

“The picture has changed (from a week ago), but it's still very dire,” Deputy Superintendent Ron Lebs told trustees.

Officials have identified 356 positions so far they'll recommend be pink-slipped next month, including classroom teachers, elementary school music teachers, counselors, elementary school assistant principals and high school activity directors.

All of these employees legally must be notified by March 15 they could be out of a job at the end of a year.

As a result, the 20:1 student-teacher ratio in the primary grades would be eliminated completely, and class sizes in the fourth through 12th grades would be increased by an average of one student each.

Still to be determined are dozens of other job cuts, from district administrators and middle school assistant principals to adult education and special education employees.

A more complete layoff picture will be presented at a March 9 board meeting, when trustees are expected to vote to authorize sending out the layoff notices.

Capistrano officials also must begin the arduous task of identifying and prioritizing other 2009-10 school year cuts. The hundreds of anticipated teacher and administrator layoffs likely will not get the district to its \$25 million cost-savings target; officials also will need to cut scores of programs and services. Those cuts have yet to be identified.

“The best way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time,” Lebs said. “We will keep doing that all the way through June.”

Capistrano officials, who were predicting up to \$38 million in cuts earlier this month, warned that the \$25 million figure is most likely a best-case scenario, not a worst-case scenario.

“There are no sacred cows in that process, and everyone is going to have to accept being reviewed,” Trustee Anna Bryson said.

The cuts will be made to next year's budget, even though the state slashed Capistrano's funding for the current school year as well. Because the state loosened restrictions on how school districts can spend their money, officials expect to end this year about \$100,000 in the black.

The federal economic stimulus package signed by President Obama earlier this month also is not likely to help Capistrano soften the blow of cuts, an independent school finance expert told the school board Wednesday.

“It will help support cash flow at the state level rather than coming to the school districts,” said Joel Montero, CEO of the Bakersfield-based Fiscal Crisis & Management Assistance Team. “If you were expecting the federal stimulus money would come down to all the school districts, that's not likely the case.”

<http://www.ocregister.com/articles/school-cuts-officials-2319007-district-state>