

Lakota outlines more budget cuts

By Lindsey Hilty, Staff Writer
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LIBERTY TWP. — Changes to the way Lakota does business may mean some adjustments this new school year, Superintendent Mike Taylor told the board Monday night.

At the Aug. 10 board meeting, he spoke of the district's financial status at this point, although a final budget will not be approved until closer to the Oct. 1 deadline. The school board has yet to vote on specific cuts

"We are looking at things very different right now," Taylor said.

Lakota is facing a \$9 million budget deficit by 2011 and is planning for a levy within the next year. It is projecting 100 new students this school year, but Taylor said at least \$3.7 million has been cut from the budget thus far.

It cut \$1.3 million from transportation by eliminating buses through altering and consolidating routes, as well as changing the start time of Shawnee Early Childhood School.

So far, \$2 million has been cut in staffing through eliminating 27 teaching positions, six support staff members and four assistant principals through attrition. Also \$250,000 has been cut from the athletic budget.

Supplemental contracts were non-renewed in April, and the goal is to cut \$150,000 in costs by eliminating some of those positions next year. Department and building budgets also have been cut by \$25,000

There will be some administrative job sharing in several buildings and the possible creation of a dean of students position at the high schools that will be funded partly through the Butler County Educational Service Center, he said.

Budget cuts must focus on a long-term strategy rather than a "Band-Aid" approach to fixing the problem, he said.

"It's a bigger picture and a longer term discussion we need to be having, he said."

While class sizes at the moment will remain at similar levels, one teacher spoke to the board expressing concern over the additional reading assistance students may not be getting this year.

Taylor said tough decisions have been made and changes like this cause anxiety, but students still will be served.

Officials still are trying to make sense of the House Bill 1 budget approved by the state July 13 with an education package included, he said, and many of those mandates will require long-term planning.

The state funding formula reduces the state portion of Lakota's funding by \$450,000 next year and \$890,000 the following year. Taylor said it may get worse the following two years.

Vice President Joan Powell said the board does not support Gov. Ted Strickland's education plan or his budget which she says penalizes successful districts like Lakota.

"Never once have they turned and created anything that rewards success," she said. "Never. It's always a challenge when you never reward people who are doing the right thing."