



District 158 looks to trim budget

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Huntley Unit District 158 has begun cutting its budget for next year, anticipating a revenue picture Superintendent John Burkey described as a "disaster."

Burkey this month presented his first draft of the 2009-10 budget, which includes big reductions in operations and maintenance but avoids cutting areas that would directly affect classroom instruction.

"I wanted to touch the classroom last," Burkey said when he presented the budget to the school board recently. "If we can work within the framework of this budget, we will not see a reduction in services that kids will feel."

The proposed cuts would allow the district to hire new teachers next year, primarily at the middle schools and high school, to keep class sizes constant.

Cuts in the operations and maintenance department, including building repair and maintenance, would save the district more than \$700,000.

The district also expects to save money by moving some special education services in house, deferring technology purchases, cutting pay for substitute teachers and reducing legal expenses.

District 158's main budget challenge next year will be paying for higher teacher salaries and benefits while receiving only minimal increases in its chief revenue sources: local property taxes and state aid.

The good news is that the federal stimulus bill could give District 158 money for special education while providing the state with enough money to increase funding for education.

Still, the superintendent warned that if the economy does not improve, future cuts will affect classroom instruction.

Members of the District 158 finance committee said they agreed with Burkey's budget priorities. The board will review a second draft in April, when more concrete revenue numbers will be known.