La. school boards seek ways to deal with budget cuts

By The Associated Press

The Catahoula Parish School Board has ordered teacher wage reductions, and many other school boards across Louisiana are discussing wage cuts, shorter school years and other measures to deal with a loss of state money.

"There is no other way that this board can meet this financial crisis," Catahoula School Superintendent Keith Guice said Tuesday after a vote for across-the-board wage cuts of between 9.75 and 13 percent.

In Lake Charles, Democratic state Sen. Cliff Newman told the Calcasieu Parish board on Tuesday that it may take a teachers strike or early closings to persuade lawmakers that more money is needed for public education.

Gov. Edwin Edwards has cut spending for education by 10 percent for the 1986-87 school year because of a state budget crisis, and Newman warned board members that another 5 percent is possible.

Newman was critical of senators and representatives who, under pressure from lobbyists, refused to raise taxes and approve new revenue measures in a special December legislative session.

In Shreveport, the Caddo Parish School Board was considering a plan to cut 85 administrative positions next year at a possible savings of $1.8 million. The Caddo school budget may end $4.5 million in the red by the close of the academic year, administrators have projected.

The last option, they said, would be to cut employee pay by about 3 percent and possibly close school early.

The St. Mary Parish School Board budget committee recommended Tuesday that the board ask parish taxpayers to bail out the budget.

The committee is calling for a 12½-mill property tax, coupled with budget cuts, to alleviate an anticipated $1.9 million deficit.

Ouachita Parish schools may not make it to the end of the year now that a new 5 percent budget cut has been mandated by the state, Superintendent Lanny Johnson said Tuesday.

And newly installed members of the Monroe City School Board came in this week as Superintendent James Stafford bemoaned the cuts, including one made official just before Christmas.

"We'll have to look at drastic action," said Stafford, adding that the last $650,000 cut has not been programmed into the system's budget.

He has said that shortening the school year is one possibility.

Elsewhere across northeastern Louisiana:

* The Morehouse Parish School Board authorized Superintendent Jerry Adkins to meet with a teachers committee on how to handle $750,000 in cuts, including options of closing school 10-15 days early or instituting pro-rata salary cuts. The board said it would not contest a possible strike by the teachers union.

* East Carroll board members complained about having to dip into their reserve to keep the schools open the full year.

* West Carroll schools will close May 7 unless money is restored. The scheduled closing date was May 29.

* Tensas board members discussed a possible tax proposal to offset the loss of funding.

* Franklin board members put off action until receiving final notice from the state. One board member said, however, that the board already has cut services by 9.5 percent.