School Board panel OKs budget revisions

By Lori Chandler, Advocate staff writer

A School Board committee on Tuesday approved revisions in its 1985-86 budget that included some overspending, and were warned that next year the school system may have $3 million less to spend.

“We don’t anticipate any additional for next year other than what is budgeted here unless we reduce programs or service that’s in this budget,” Finance Director Grady Hazel told the board’s Executive Committee.

The committee voted to accept a revised budget that included about $63,000 in expenses above what was anticipated this year. The extra expenditures will be paid from the school system’s surplus, Hazel said. Superintendent of Schools Raymond Arveson said that the staff will set priorities on what cuts should be imposed. He said that the staff will have a better idea of the situation after the state Legislature acts on the state’s budget problems.

The committee usually considers revisions to the system’s $160 million general fund budget. The revised 1985-86 budget shows a growth in revenues from $160.2 million to $161.4 million, or an overspending of about $83,000.

Although it is not included in the 1986-87 budget projections, a recent board proposal that authorized spending $1.2 million to lower 150 the number of students a teacher has during the day in middle and high schools may run into trouble, Hazel said.

Hazel said that the finance department will suggest cuts to be made in next year’s budget, but it is ultimately the board’s decision as to what will be cut.

Board member Frank Millican, who also sits on the city-parish Planning and Zoning Commission, said that he thought sales and property tax revenues will increase because of increased building in the area.

However, Hazel said that the staff anticipates zero growth in those revenue sources.

“We don’t know what we’ll get, but I’m 90 percent sure we won’t get more revenue,” Hazel said. During the 1982-83 school year, the school system had to cut $4 million out of its budget, and 322 positions were cut, Hazel said. The personnel cuts were mainly in the maintenance division and were not replaced, he said.

A boost in revenues for this school year was mainly because of an unexpected $900,000 growth in property tax receipts and a one-time windfall of $1.4 million in sales tax revenues. The windfall resulted from the city-parish settling some disputed sales tax claims.

The new budget goes into effect on July 1.

Also, the finance department estimates that sales tax revenues will fall $740,000 below original projections. Hazel said that, since the $1.4 million windfall is not recurring, the school system will have to reduce expenditures by that amount or anticipate receiving the money again.