Ways to cut school budget being sought

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The local school system has predicted it will have $3 million less to spend in next year's budget, forcing officials to look at ways to make cuts.

According to a memorandum to the School Board's Executive Committee and Superintendent of Schools Raymond Arveson outlining the revised 1985-86 budget, Director of Finance Grady Hazel warns that the situation this year "has serious implications for next year."

"Hopefully it'll turn around," Hazel said on Monday. "But we'll have to cut services and/or personnel if it doesn't."

The board's Executive 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 overexpence of about $63,000, the letter says.

The overexpence will be paid out of the school system's surplus, Hazel said.

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

"We'd have to cut $2 million if the program wasn't planned, but if they (the board) still want the new program, we'll have to cut $3 million," 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.

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.

Other cuts during that time included some supervisors, guidance counselors, librarians, desegregation staff members and some teacher aides.

Many of those positions were not refilled, except for some supervisors, guidance counselors and librarians, Hazel said.

"There's not much room to cut," Hazel said. "We'd have to cut more out of the janitorial/maintenance division and not hurt the service."

The 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

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city-parish settling some disputed sales tax claims.

The new budget goes into effect on July 1.

In his letter, Hazel said that sales tax growth "has been very disappointing throughout the year. In our original budget, we had projected 4.5 percent growth in sales tax receipts."

The letter says the sales tax growth is presently less than 1 percent and that the finance department is projecting "zero growth" in sales tax revenue for the rest of the year.

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.

"It's unrealistic to believe that we will receive additional revenue for next year," Hazel's letter said. "We believe that a zero percent growth in sales tax is a realistic or slightly optimistic projection for 1986-87; therefore, there

will be no new revenue from that source."

Hazel also predicts there will be no increase in state funding.

Board member Frank Millican, who sits on the Executive Committee, said on Monday that he was optimistic about next year's budget.

"If there are state cuts this year, we'll have problems, but I think things will be worked out," Millican said. "I think next year we'll improve."