School pay cut reduced slightly

By KATY SMITH
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Checking his list twice, school system business manager Ray Culter says he has managed to slightly lower the necessary cut from employee paychecks to balance the School Board's budget.

Instead of an annual cut of 3.25 percent, only 3 percent needs to be cut for the Board to end the year in the black, Culter told The Advertiser Thursday.

That quarter percent drop comes from closing school three days early to save an estimated $31,800, mostly in utilities and transportation costs and excluding salaries, Culter said.

Savings on salaries, which make up more than 92 percent of the system's budget, amount to about $900,000 for those three days, he added. Those salary savings are represented in the 3 percent cut.

Implementation of cost savings measures did not affect his recalculations because they were already taken into account in the preliminary figures, Culter continued.

Those measures, as approved by the School Board Monday, include:
- limiting maintenance to items "necessary to sustain safe operation" with the Superintendent approving any purchases over $500;
- cutting travel to only activities which cannot be handled by telephone or letters;
- eliminating substitute teacher aides and custodians, except for extended absences; and
- requiring administrators and professionals to substitute teach at least three days before the end of school.

Other actions being taken include reducing substitute pay by $5 for each category, which comes to more than 10 percent of a substitute's daily pay, Culter said. Under-budget items, such as mid-year retirements and superintendent's salary, have also been taken into account, he said.

Most of those cost savings measures parallel recommendations by a teachers' organization,

(See Pay, page 9)

PAY

(Continued from page 1)

Culter said. Other suggested items such as layoffs and transfers of capital improvement funds are not practical, he added.

Culter also said he will probably not recommend monies from sales tax audits, if they materialize, be used to offset the cuts later this year. Instead, they should be set aside for contingencies or items, such as asbestos removal, which have been put off, he said.

"We already know we have a problem," Culter said. "There are things we have just kind of figured we just couldn't afford to do anything about."

Based on percentages Culter is currently entering in the payroll computer, school employees can expect to see between 12 percent and 7.2 percent less in their checks this month. That's down from 13 percent and 7.8 percent.

The percentage depends on the number of checks an employee has left for this fiscal year.

For example, a regular 12-month employee earning $30,000 will see about $300 less in his checks for April, May and June. That is about $25 less a month than he would lose before the adjustment.

But, a teacher earning the same salary will receive about $180 less a month on checks from April to August, since they get paid on the school year rather than the fiscal year. Under the higher annual cut, they would lose about $15 more a month.