School system may lose $2.1 million in funding

By LORI CHANDLER

East Baton Rouge Parish school system stands to lose $2.1 million in its state education funding if the state's Minimum Foundation Formula is cut by 3 percent, a parish finance official said Wednesday.

On Tuesday, a legislative subcommittee recommended almost $105 million in education cuts, most of which included basic education, allocations to state colleges and universities and the elimination of a tax credit.

The recommendations also included cutting $29 million from the Minimum Foundation program, which provides the bulk of operating money, including teacher salaries, for the state's 66 public school districts. That subcommittee will report next week to the Joint Legislative Committee on Economies in State Government.

For East Baton Rouge Parish, such a cut means the system would lose $2.1 million out of $70 million it receives for the Minimum Foundation Formula.

“Tain’t what I need to say what kind of impact it would make,” local Finance Director Grady Hazel said. “That’s a lot of money, on top of what we already have to cut.”

Lawmakers are currently considering a bill that would authorize the state's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to spend the minimum foundation program, which oversees the foundation program, would be ordered not to cut the salaries of teachers, teacher assistants and some for classroom supplies and materials.

Local school officials, however, say the board's decision to cut $2.3 million in reimbursement costs in the state's school lunch program.

For this parish, that means a $150,000 cut, Hazel said.

“We would either have to reduce the level of service or raise the price of school lunches,” Hazel said.

Hazel said the system expects the $2 million drop in revenue next year because of a prediction of “zero growth” in sales taxes. Sales tax revenues are down about $740,000 from projections this year. The board also approved a $1.2 million program to limit to 150 the number of students that middle and high school teachers will instruct daily.

School officials say that the new program, coupled with a rise in employee group insurance premiums for the last six months of the 1967-68 school year, also explains the $3 million cut.

 Officials say that they will know more about next year's budget after the state Legislature determines how much more education money will be received, but they say that some employees may be laid off when the budget is cut.