

Officials outline economic plan for Upland schools

School leaders ask employees to suggest cost-cutting measures.

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Claremont-Upland Voice

UPLAND — Upland Unified School District officials warned that a \$5.3-million budget deficit they face for next year could mean “catastrophic” cuts.

School leaders asked teachers and other employees to suggest ways to trim the budget to avoid deep cuts.

“All the groups recognized the importance of this and that everybody needs to do their part,” Supt. Pete Watson said. “I’m optimistic that everybody is going to see that if this doesn’t happen, the result will be catastrophic.”

The district balanced its \$3.9-million deficit this year largely by using all of its available reserves. But the operating deficit and the ongoing \$2.3-million increase in health and welfare benefits, contract-mandated teacher pay increases and workers’ compensation insurance will put the district in the red.

The district will make one-time transfers of unused money from maintenance budgets and state-funded programs along with money saved by switching insurance providers to help close next year’s gap. District officials will also be allowed to dip into reserves previously restricted by the state.

It will be up to employees to find the remaining \$2 million. Teachers are looking at other insurance plans and

providers to cut healthcare costs and are considering the elimination of in-service days to save salary costs. But teachers remain concerned, said Andy Megaw, president of the Upland Teachers Assn.

“They’re very nervous about any change to healthcare or the number of days they work,” he said. “They’re not happy. They want to keep what they have because any reductions mean they won’t have as much money to buy things they couldn’t afford before. It’s very disturbing when we’re talking about cuts when we’ve had nothing to show for it for three years.”

The district has not had to lay off teachers, increase class sizes or eliminate many student programs to balance its budget. But asking parents to pay a portion of school busing might be considered, officials said.

Despite the deficit, the governor’s budget is a good sign for the district, Watson said.

“I think the fact that we’re getting some money for the first time in three years is an incredible help for Upland, especially in a declining enrollment district. If this budget passes in a timely fashion, it will allow us to move forward and not have to send out layoff notices by speculation this year, and that will create a more positive environment with employees and the community at large.”

The \$1-million funding increase by the state could be dependent on whether the governor’s \$15-billion Economic Recovery Bond measure passes March 2, officials said.