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Budget cuts shrink size of summer school

BY MEGAN DOWNS

Summer school begins today, but only a small number of students will benefit from the extra help this year.

In previous years, Brevard County infused nearly \$5 million into its summer programs, offering help for all students struggling in reading, enrichment programs for all students or makeup courses for high school students who were falling behind.

But, after two rounds of budget cuts, the program -- which had risen to its full glory during Superintendent Richard DiPatri's tenure -- was all but eliminated.

Some are worried that the elimination of summer tutoring will put more students behind during the summer months and could cause the district Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test scores to slip, as well as ripple into a drop in school grades in upcoming years.

"We will have to work in remedial help during the regular school year," said Lynn Spadaccini, director of elementary programs for Brevard Public Schools. "Yes, the money was a loss, but this was also a huge loss for our students."

High school students could be impaired by the limited offerings because they can't make up credits during the summer. But Walt Christy, director of secondary programs, said schools placed an extra emphasis on targeting struggling high school students during the school year.

"We did a push during the school year to help those kids," Christy said.

Those who still need to make up courses do have a few options. They can enroll in the Florida Virtual School to take those courses at their own pace. Or, if they are 16 or older, they can enroll in adult-education courses this summer.

According to the plan, most schools this summer will be open only for reading camps for the district's lowest-performing third-grade students who scored a Level 1 -- the lowest possible score -- on the FCAT.

Level 1 students are those who are one to two grades behind grade level.

About 650 third-graders qualify for the summer reading camp, but typically about 60 percent to 70 percent of those students stay throughout the summer.

The rest could receive a "good-cause exemption."

The extra summer help in reading, which is required by Florida law, will cost the district about \$123,000.

Some Title I schools, or those that serve a high percentage of low-income students, will use their federal money to offer extra help for students in several grades.

These schools have continually failed to make adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind law, so they use the summer as an attempt to raise test scores.

These include Cambridge, Coquina, Creel, Endeavour, Gardendale, Jupiter, Riverview, Riviera, Turner and University Park. That effort will cost about \$160,000.

Next year, that number could expand, as the district receives stimulus money to increase the number of schools that will benefit from the fund.

A handful of other summer programs will be available this year including:

- # Extended school year for some exceptional-education students (\$1.4 million). These are offered to a small percentage of the district's most severely disabled students.

- # Three career and technical courses for summer internships to 11th-graders in finance, culinary arts and automotive programs (\$14,000).

- # Summer fine-arts program (\$22,030). Students must apply to be in this program, which is partially funded by theater ticket sales.

- # A fee-based driver's education program, at a cost of \$120 per student.

- # Fee-based programs at individual schools, such as crime-scene investigation or writing camps. Fees vary by school and program. Parents and schools said these programs offered only a limited number of spots and filled up quickly.

- # Voluntary pre-kindergarten at some schools where students could not access the program during the regular year. Voluntary pre-kindergarten is funded through the state, and doesn't use district funds.