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Regents request smaller tuition hikes from colleges

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TOPEKA -- The state Board of Regents on Wednesday decided against imposing a formal cap on next year's round of tuition increases for six state universities. Following a lengthy discussion, the board instead voted 7-2 to request that university leaders propose tuition hikes later this year "well below" the double-digit ones paid by students and their parents earlier this decade. However, board members also said they expected to see charges increase by 6 percent or less this year, unless university leaders face extraordinary circumstances.

"I think we've made it clear that we would like to see proposals under the 6 percent limit," Regent Janie Perkins of Garden City said.

Two board members, Gary Sherrer of Overland Park and Donna Shank of Liberal, wanted to impose a formal 5 percent cap but were voted down. In opposing the resolution calling for more moderate tuition hikes this year, Sherrer and Shank said the board's action would carry little meaning.

"This motion just says: 'Don't

do it as big as you did in the past and we'll see you in June,'" Sherrer said, referring to the month in which board members set tuition rates.

Affordable schools?

The board's debate Wednesday was sparked by a series of steep hikes that have significantly driven up the price of the state's historically low tuition rates. In recent years, the board has approved the hikes proposed by university leaders in May, a month after they're initially unveiled. But several board members called last month for a discussion on whether the board should change its approach to setting tuition rates.

Since 2002, in-state tuition and fees have more than doubled at the University of Kansas and Kansas State University. Increases at the state's other schools -- Wichita State, Emporia State, Pittsburg State and Fort Hays State -- have averaged at least 8 percent a year.

At the same time, in-state enrollments at some schools have dropped slightly and student debt-loads among borrowers were 5 to 21 percent higher for 2006 graduates than their 2004 counterparts.