

Life in LAMORINDA

State Budget Cuts to Education

What's at Stake for Lamorinda's Schools?

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Even the current school year budgets may be jeopardized by the proposed cuts. Although the Governor's budget proposal indicated that a \$360 million reduction in current school year funding was expected to come from a redirection of savings from categorical programs, this may not be the case.

"School Services of California [an organization that advises schools districts on fiscal issues] has suggested that the state may not be able to recapture the full amount that they need," explained Moraga School District Superintendent Rick Schafer. "...there may be a .5% midyear cut to our revenue limit funds. Again, we do not know if this will happen. We guesstimate this amount to be in the neighborhood of \$50,000 if it was to occur," he added.

Learned of AUHSD was working on similar assump-

tions for the current school year budget, "Not good news there. That's about a \$190,000 this year to this District's revenue limit."

Orinda would be short this year in the range of \$60K - \$95, according to Jaconette. The district held a special board study session last week to discuss the budget and the financial options. "We will be planning for the worst case that we know at this time," Jaconette confirmed.

At this point in the school budgeting process the final fiscal picture remains hazy. "There are still a lot of things to play out," noted Superintendent Negri in discussions with the Governing Board. "We are working off the Governor's proposed budget," he added. "We have to. Whether it comes out that way, we won't see for a while." Although some things may change or be clarified with respect to the budget

and education funding as the state legislature begins to tackle the issue over the next few months, the Governor's May Revision will provide the next major budget update, according to Negri.

Despite the murky picture, school administrators throughout the area moved quickly to begin to identify areas to be reduced and ways revenues could be increased to offset the expected funding shortfall.

Assistant Superintendent Learned has already met with the AUHSD Budget Advisory Committee, which is comprised of parents, students, teachers, and staff, to brainstorm ways to reduce. "One of the things that keeps coming up is our energy costs. What can we do to be more energy efficient in this District? But that's hard to measure," explained Learned. "And 86% or maybe a little less of our budget is salaries and benefits. So it's unavoidable for the District to not affect people of this District," he added.

Superintendent Schafer is



Acalanes High School in Lafayette

also planning to meet with members of his District to get input prior to the development of final budget recommendations. "We need to plan now, but no decisions can or should be made until the budget really begins to take shape in May," added Schafer.

Enrollment is another factor affecting Lamorinda schools budgets. According to Learned, enrollment has been in decline in the Kindergarten thru 8th grade schools districts for the past few years and that decline is now affecting AUHSD. He is projecting enrollment of 150 fewer students

across the District next year. "We would have been compressing our budget anyway. Some of our lost revenue is due to enrollment decline," Learned noted.

Moraga School District also faces a declining enrollment trend and the related decreased revenues but Superintendent Schafer cautioned, "As we look forward, we must balance spending reductions with our mission of educating all students. However, the cuts away from the classroom must be carefully analyzed and thoroughly explained before we take action."

When asked what the school community can expect over the next school year Superintendent Schafer responded, "Any and all reductions will have an impact. Prioritizing where and what to reduce can become contentious and leave stakeholders uncomfortable at best and angry at worst. For the next six to eight months our entire educational community will need to practice the Lifeskills of cooperation, flexibility, patience, and problem solving at levels never before imagined."

Bumps Revisited: Moraga Town Council Strikes a Balance

By Sophie Braccini

It was a long and emotional Moraga Town Council meeting on January 16th. Two groups of Moraga citizens argued over the issue of traffic calming devices on Camino Pablo, a major collector street bordered by two schools and leading to a populated area of the town. In its decision, the Council took a first step toward a resolution that strives to satisfy the majority of the concerns, but did not completely satisfy either side.

Council Member Chew supported leaving the raised crosswalks as is, while Mike Metcalf supported their removal and replacement with stop signs or other device that would maintain the present gains in safety for the children. Vice-Mayor Dave Trotter proposed the compromise that won the day: Maintain the

raised crosswalk at Oxford so "little people" be better seen by cars, remove the one at Hodges and have a traffic engineer study the possibility of a stop sign there, and set staff to studying alternatives for the raised crosswalk in front of Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School. Mayor Linda Deschambault commented, "This decision provides a good balance between the two needs of our community: protection of the children and response times for emergency vehicles."

"The raised crosswalks are serving their purpose," stated Jill Mercurio, the town Director of Public Works and Engineer. "Smoothing the raised crosswalk improved the response time tested by the Moraga Orinda Fire Department (MOFD) over the previous configuration of the

tables," said Mercurio, as she presented the data given by MOFD. The report shows that it takes now the biggest fire truck an additional 35 seconds to travel Camino Pablo and an ambulance an additional 20 seconds. These improved results didn't impress MOFD Chief Pete Nowicki who persisted in his opposition to the impediment.

Response time is MOFD's main concern and so is the focus of MoragaSafety.org, a group founded by Jack Balousek and Stan Roth. On the opposing side, parents of Camino Pablo Elementary students are concerned with excessive speeding in Moraga and consider the raised crosswalks a real improvement.

The public comments part of the meeting started with

Moraga Safety. Their long PowerPoint presentation was informative, with presentation of maps showing how an added 30 seconds in the response time puts more residents outside of the 6-minute response time zone.

Christina DaRodda, President of the Camino Pablo PTA, presented the results of a CP parent poll. 250 parents signed a petition in favor of the raised crosswalks and in a survey a majority declared they could support stop signs instead. DaRodda later commented that she was glad the raised crosswalk at Oxford was maintained but added, "Removing the raised crosswalk (at Hodges) without providing an alternative traffic calming device puts us in a situation that is worse than what we have now."

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CHP Offers Free Child Car Seat Installation Assistance

"Ensuring the safety of your most precious cargo should be your top priority before you get behind the wheel of a car," says Captain Jim Cahoon of the California Highway Patrol (CHP). In cooperation with the Bay Area Rapid Transit District and the Lafayette Police Department, certified car seat technicians from the CHP will be at the Lafayette BART Station (3601 Deerhill Rd), in the east parking lot, on Saturday, Feb. 9, from 9:00am-1:00pm to provide

assistance with installations.

According to CHP Officer Scott Yox, in California during 2005, 62% of children under the age of six that were killed in car accidents were not using a child safety seat. Another 568 children were injured. "Most of these injuries could have been prevented," says Cahoon, adding, "Anytime you have children in your car, I urge you to take a few extra moments to ensure they are restrained properly. And if anyone has any doubts about whether they are using a child

safety seat properly, now is the time to seek out a certified child safety seat technician."

California law says children must be secured in an appropriate child passenger restraint (safety seat or booster seat) in the back seat of a vehicle until they're at least six years old or weigh at least 60 pounds. If you miss this event but would like help with your child's car seat, you can also make an appointment with the Contra Costa Area

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