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## Budget Cuts Prompt Pink Slip Protests

By Andrea A. Firth



Miramonte High School teacher Campbell Hunter and Acalanes student Deanna Jarquin join local district teachers and administrators in downtown Lafayette to protest recent termination notices  
Photos Andy Scheck

The passage of the State budget last month clarified the fiscal picture for public school districts across Lamorinda, and improved the outlook somewhat. Unfortunately, it was not sufficient to enable the districts to avoid issuing preliminary notices of termination-pink slips-to several teachers and other certificated and classified staff.

Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) notified certificated staff representing 40.6 full-time positions-an improvement from the original list of 92.4 fulltime positions facing layoffs when the District's 2009-10 revenue deficit was projected to be over \$5 million. In addition, about 17 classified employees (16.75 fulltime equivalents) may be on the list to receive layoff notices after the AUHSD Board meets on March 18.

Far fewer certificated and classified staff faced termination in Lamorinda's kindergarten through 8th grade districts. However, teachers and staff working in the elementary and middle schools in the areas of environmental science, libraries, technology, music, physical education, and maintenance are at risk of losing jobs.

As school administrators continue to parse through the fine print, many aspects of the State budget remain unknown and to be determined. "In some ways it's a moving target," stated Kathy Bell, chief business official for the Moraga School District (MSD). "Everyday we are getting new information."

The California Legislature's 2009 Budget Act is contingent on the passage of several propositions on the May ballot, some of which directly impact school funding such as establishing a Rainy Day Fund, amending Proposition 98, and borrowing from future State lottery profits. When and how much money districts

will receive from the American Recovery Investment Act (a.k.a. the stimulus package) is also unclear.

Each of the Lamorinda school districts anticipates receiving money and eagerly awaits a final read on the amount and date of arrival, yet none of the districts are quite ready to bank on it. The risk of the monies being siphoned off by the State before reaching the district level remains a possibility.

"I am not comfortable budgeting for a revenue source that could be unreliable," stated Chris Learned, AUHSD Assistant Superintendent of Business Services. "We are going to have to be very careful moving forward."

Learned fully expects the numbers will change by the time the budget is adopted in the summer. In addition to the State budget's reliance on the outcome of the May election, the State's dreary economic picture and flagging revenues may yield further school funding reductions at the May Budget Revise, ironically scheduled for June 2.

Although the financial picture is likely to continue to change, Lamorinda school administrators now have a much clearer idea of the challenges they face. After managing their district budgets without a state budget for the first eight months of the current school fiscal year (which runs from July 1 through June 30), the budget analysts for AUHSD, MSD, and Orinda Union School District (OUSD) each presented a three-year fiscal projection at their early March Governing Board meetings.

The three-year budget report for the Lafayette School District (LAFSD) will be presented at their upcoming meeting on March 18.

## **Breakdown by District**

### **AUHSD.**

Reduced State funds for the current school year created a \$1.4 million problem for the high school district, which they can manage with reserves. "Having those reserves enabled us to survive midyear cuts of this magnitude," reported Learned. The District is facing a shortfall of \$3.9 million for the 2009-2010 school year. Although over 57 personnel will receive layoffs notices, Learned anticipates that number will drop when the contributions of the education foundations and parent clubs are factored in. AUHSD's current parcel tax, which contributes \$7 million to the general fund, will expire in June, 2011. The AUHSD Governing Board decided not to place a parcel tax proposition on the June, 2009 ballot; discussions regarding renewing the parcel tax are ongoing.

### **MSD.**

Increased flexibility in the use of categorical funds from the State will enable MSD to offset about \$500,000 in funding reductions in the current school year reported Superintendent Rick Schafer. However, given the size of the State funding reductions going forward, Schafer said, "If we keep spending at the same level, we'll be in the hole in two years." To avoid depleting reserves and deficit spending, the MSD Board approved a list of recommended budget reductions, enhancements, and transfers along with the use of up to \$300,000 in reserves for the 2009-10 school year.

### **OUSD.**

Orinda's K-8 district will use reserves to address the \$708,000 deficit facing the District this year. The Governing Board has approved a prioritized list of personnel and program cuts to go into effect in the next school year. A recently passed parcel tax will bring an additional \$870,000 in to the District coffers each year, but these revenues have yet to be accumulated or allocated.

### **LAFSD.**

According to Superintendent Dr. Fred Brill, the LAFSD was able to weather the 2008-09 State funding shortfall due to a variety of factors. The District had budgeted for increased employee health care costs, and remarkably their rates were not raised. While enrollment was projected to decline, the District actually grew by 35 students. In addition, the District received a generous contribution from the parents' clubs and the education foundation. The Governing Board has approved an expense reduction plan for the 2009-10 school year. Dr. Brill noted that five retirements have enabled the District to avoid some layoffs.

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