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The \$Cost\$ of Absence

By Jean Follmer

Excused, unexcused, sickness or vacation - the reason behind a student's absence is irrelevant when it comes to district funding. The biggest portion of a school district's funding comes from the State of California. Computing the student enrollment and average daily attendance (ADA) during the current year and applying them to a statewide formula determine the amount of funding received from the State next year. Declining enrollment and student absences can both contribute to lower funding from the State in the next school year.

"When kids are in their seats, we get paid; when they're not, we don't. A student absence costs the District about \$48 in revenue," said Lafayette District Superintendent Dr. Fred Brill. "That figure is very similar in Orinda," said Orinda Union School District Director of Business Services, Jerry Bucci. The only exception to the rule is a pre-arranged absence of five days or more. In those cases, teachers prepare the classwork and homework to be completed during the absence so the student is not actually missing days of instruction. The district does receive state funding for these pre-arranged absences.

In short, districts want students in school unless they're just too sick to be there. Given the current fiscal crisis, the 2-3 day trip to Disneyland is frowned upon even more because it takes more money out of the district coffers next year. With exorbitant budget cuts looming, districts don't have any money to spare. Some parents do write checks to their district when their children are absent.

Although the practice isn't discourage, it's not required and it doesn't increase the ADA that goes into the calculation for the following school year. Although districts don't want sick students in school, those absences still cost the district valuable dollars. For instance, the flu season has impacted many districts around the country this year. In Lamorinda, preliminary indications show our attendance has also been adversely impacted. "There have been isolated periods of time at some schools where it appears that sickness has resulted in lower attendance," said Bucci. Bucci indicated attendance numbers are only preliminary at this point and will be finalized at the end of this month. However, he's taking note of them. "I'm certainly being more conservative in my projections for funding next year," continued Bucci. Bucci said parents are being more cautious and keeping their children home when they're sick. Ultimately, this cuts down on absences since fewer students become stricken with illness.

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