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K-8 Districts Prepare for Budget Cuts

By Jean Follmer

Once again, the budget outlook is bleak for California's public schools; Superintendents and school boards across the three districts that serve Lamorinda's elementary and middle school students are taking a hard look at their budgets in an effort to determine from where further cuts might come.

Lafayette Superintendent Fred Brill presented his preliminary budget reduction process and timeline during the School Board meeting on January 13th. "Based on the information we received (from Sacramento) and based on our \$2.4 million structural deficit, my recommendation is that we reduce our budget for 2010/11 by \$1.2 million and again by another \$1.2 million in 2011/12," said Brill. "At the very minimum, we would have to reduce our budget by \$920,000 or we would have no ending balance. We have to look at this as a two-year plan," continued Brill.

Lafayette School Board Member Shayne Silva said, "We're kind of between a rock and a hard place. I shudder to think about doing this all in one year."

Brill will be soliciting input during parent meetings at each school site; he started with Lafayette Elementary School on January 13th. "The parents were really engaged and asking great questions," said Brill. Brill will present the budget reduction plan at the February 10th Board Meeting. A tentative Board Meeting is scheduled on February 17th and the final recommendation will be given at the Special Board Meeting on February 24th.

Moraga Superintendent Rick Schafer said the Governor's 2010/11 budget is "full of smoke and mirrors." The budget presented by Governor Schwarzenegger assumes receipt of a \$6.9 billion payment by the federal government that Schafer doesn't believe will happen. At this point, Moraga is expecting to receive \$360,000 less from the State of California next year, but he expects the shortfall to increase by the time the state actually passes its budget. "If the budget was as good as last year, we'd still have cuts," Schafer added.

Schafer said his district expects enrollment to decline next year. He hopes retiring teachers will help the district avoid some resulting layoffs. "When someone loses their job, it's not a nameless number on a data sheet; it's someone you know. We're a people business and, unfortunately, people are going to be affected," said Schafer. The Moraga School District is planning to spend between \$700,000 and \$800,000 in reserves and that will still leave the district with a \$500,000 budget reduction. "We'll use reserves over a 3-year period, so it will be an ongoing reduction," said Schafer.

The outlook is similar in Orinda. "We are projecting at this time in Orinda that there will be a \$678,000 shortfall in 2010/11," said Director of Business Services Jerry Bucci. That represents a "\$1,325 per student funding reduction from what the district should receive by statute," said Orinda Superintendent Joe Jaconette in a written statement on January 14th. "In the past two years OUSD suffered more than \$2 million in revenue limit reductions. Cuts to the revenue limit-or annual per-student finding-are particularly difficult because it represents our largest source of "on going" general operating funds," continued Jaconette. The Orinda district also expects that the state budget will change by the time it's actually adopted. The District plans to hold special budget study sessions on January 22nd and February 17th in addition to its regularly scheduled board meetings.

For more information, visit the school districts' websites: www.lafsd.k12.ca.us, www.orindaschools.org, www.moraga.k12.ca.us.

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