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AUHSD Teachers Seek to be Part of the Solution

By Jean Follmer

Staring down a \$4.8 million deficit for the 2010/11 school year has been no easy task for the top-rated high school district in California. AUHSD Superintendent John Stockton recently applauded the Acalanes district teachers for being part of the solution. "The exemplary quality of the Acalanes Union High School District has recently been demonstrated by its teachers.

These professionals joined together last week to show a strong commitment to their students, community, and peers," Stockton said in a May 5 memorandum.

The district recently reached a 3-year contractual agreement with the Acalanes Education Association teachers. "This agreement exemplifies a sincere desire by our teachers to do their part, and much more, to buffer our students from the full brunt of state funding cutbacks," continued Stockton.

Acalanes Education Association President and Las Lomas teacher, Jennifer Nickl, said the teachers are dedicated to their students. "Eighty-five percent of our members have chosen to sacrifice for our students - we've 'come to the party', as it is," said Nickl. In addition to the devastating, pending teacher lay-offs, compensation concessions on the part of teachers will include:

- 5 unpaid furlough days for the next 2 school years
- Increased class sizes
- Reduction in health benefits
- Cost containment measures on retiree benefits

Non-credentialed and administrative employees will make similar compensation sacrifices.

Nickl said the AEA has stressed to teachers that, although there will be pink slips issued, "don't bring that message back to the classroom." Contract negotiations were very difficult, according to Nickl, because the furlough days will result in \$2.7 million in salary cuts and the health benefits reductions were hard to digest. "People who had a particular doctor for many years or had gotten particular services have to make changes. As education professionals, we always knew we were paid less than other professionals but we felt somehow compensated because of the benefits," said Nickl.

Although she holds hope regarding the State projections that the school budget dilemma will start turning around by 2014, Nickl said parents, teachers and communities have to operate as though it won't. "I'm beginning to lose faith in any data analysis or collection of any kind. I'm glad we've settled our contracts so we can focus on passing Measure A," said Nickl, adding that the AEA will be visibly supporting the passage of Measure A and are giving out car signs that say "Another AEA member for Measure A."

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