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Lafayette Teachers See Red over Pink Slips

By Cathy Tyson



Photo C. Tyson

Everyone knew it was coming. Classroom budget uncertainty became very real for staff of the Lafayette School District and parents last Wednesday night, when the Governing Board approved the Proposed Budget Reduction Plan for 2011 - 2012. Although Superintendent Fred Brill held a number of meetings to gather feedback and involve parents on funding priorities, there is just not enough money to keep all the teachers and programs currently offered. To make matters worse, because of revenue uncertainties, the administration has to plan for a worse-case scenario that may or may not play out depending on a number of factors: the passage of Measure B, additional cuts from Sacramento, and tax extensions making it on the ballot.

"No one wants to cut programs that benefit children. Over the past three years, the state has reduced funding by \$1,089 per student, resulting in a reduction of \$3,403,125 million to the Lafayette School District," said Brill. "The district is now facing a structural deficit of \$2,240,000 for the 2011- 2012 school year."

Brill placed cuts into one of two groups, "Category

One" cuts are strongly recommended - the second group, cuts to "Category II" present greater challenges and complexities. Category One includes reducing four full time elementary teachers, eliminating student services support and reducing music in grades four and five, along with increasing health insurance co-pays and adding four additional furlough days to the existing two furlough days. Also included are increasing PE classes at Stanley to 53 students and eighth grade English class to 26 students, and reducing already-diminished custodial time.

Category II includes reducing instructional aides, eliminating the Kindergarten through fifth grade science lab, eliminating instrumental music for first through fifth grade, partially reducing Stanley counseling staff, eliminating the district Tech administrator, further reducing custodial services and maintenance and eliminating the Kinder music program.

Due to notification requirements all staff involved in both categories will receive pink slips, as school officials prepare for dire budget cuts. State law requires districts to issue pink slips by March 15. The recipient of a pink slip may or may not be laid off in the end. As the budget situation firms up over the summer, all will become clear.

Stanley Middle School's auditorium was packed with concerned teachers and parents, standing at times; many parents wearing red in solidarity with teachers. Several parents commented that they understood the difficult decisions, but emphasized their common goal of the best education possible for students. Many reiterated their support for Measure B, and encouraged working together as a community.

Jean Follmer, President of the Springhill Elementary Parent Faculty Club, called the formula for funding Lafayette's schools inequitable. She and a group of concerned parents are pursuing real reform in education funding. "Forty years ago, Lafayette was designated a 'low wealth school district' because of our rural nature and small population. It was determined that our small community had less of a need for services than an urban community, so we received a smaller amount of money per child than those in larger towns and cities. Forty years later, we still receive less money than the statewide per child average revenue limit," said Follmer. "We believe it is completely unacceptable that this district receives less than the state minimum revenue limit and we plan to pursue equalization relentlessly."

The group also wants to take on Proposition 13, which limits annual property taxes to 1.1% of the purchase price of a home, with minimal annual adjustment. "Prop. 13 unduly impacts low-wealth districts like ours due to the disparity between paying taxes on a \$60,000 home purchased forty years ago versus a \$1.5 million home purchased today," said Follmer.

For more information on the Lafayette School District, go to www.lafsd.k12.ca.us, for more information on the education funding reform effort, go to Groups.google.com, then enter: lafayette-for-education in the search box.

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