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Possible Closure of Del Valle Campus

By Cathy Tyson



Photo Cathy Tyson

The recent class brochure that Lamorinda households received may be the last one they'll ever get from Acalanes Adult Education with class listings for the spring quarter at Del Valle Education Center. Due to a substantial deficit at Acalanes Union High School District caused by implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula and changes due to AB 86 - a statewide program to grant funds to regional consortia to create and implement a plan to better provide for adult workforce development, not enrichment programs - the doors may have to close at Del Valle.

Unfortunately the first step in the process is the layoff of a number of full-time staffers at the recently renovated Tice Valley campus, including popular Del Valle Education Center Director Frank Acojido, who has been in charge for 14 years. His

last day will be June 30.

The deficit at AUHSD is almost \$2 million, despite taking into account cost savings where possible, some retirements, narrowing of elective choices for high school students and more. Administrators with the district had long characterized the base level funding provided through the new funding formula as "inadequate." School districts with a higher percentage of English language learner students, foster youth and lower income students receive additional funding. AUHSD has few students who fall into those categories.

The intent of AB 86 is to improve the delivery of adult education, focusing on skills required to obtain a high school diploma or equivalency, classes for citizenship and English as a second language, education programs for adults with disabilities, and short-term career-oriented technical education programs.

Classes offered at Del Valle reflect the interests of older students from the Lamorinda area, Rossmoor and Walnut Creek: art, film, quilting, money management, foreign languages, and fitness classes. Although career technical classes and English as a second language are offered, the majority of classes are enrichment oriented.

Caught between substantial deficit spending as the district grapples with new local control funding formula and restrictions tied to AB 86, Acojido calls the situation frustrating. He described this segment of the population as not being served by the state. He points out that enrichment options help keep those 55 and over engaged and active in the community, and it helps them maintain mental acuity. Current Del Valle students have been vocal about the unfortunate situation and have started a Moveon.org petition. Proponents are also encouraged to write their legislators to increase funding geared toward lifelong learning for older adults.

"The timing couldn't have been worse," said Chris Learned, business services associate superintendent. He explained that prior to the Local Control Funding Formula, adult education funds were totally separate from support for high schools. Now, to pay for adult education, the AUHSD would have to take some of the meager funding allocated for grades 9 through 12 to go toward adult programs. Adding another dimension to the unpleasant financial situation is the voter approved and recently completed substantial multi-million dollar renovation of Del Valle.

In 2008, voters in the AUHSD approved Measure E, a \$93 million facilities bond to continue the community's investment in quality school facilities at its four high schools - Acalanes,

Campolindo, Miramonte and Las Lomas - as well as the district office and the Del Valle Educational Center that includes Acalanes Contract Independent Study, built in 1958. A whopping \$24 million of that total was spent to rebuild the crumbling Del Valle campus. Current students at the adult education facility may have trouble wrapping their heads around the expected savings if the campus closes, estimated to be \$750,000 for the year.

Funding from the state is key to keeping the doors open, says Acojido. Noting that he is hopeful but realistic, he's well aware that it will take a concerted effort to keep the lights on, instructors paid and the revitalized buildings open. Ironically, his dream is "that I can come back next year as a student."

The district wants to keep the facility open and is attempting to come up with a business plan to offer some programs, probably with higher fees. More clarity is expected to come on April 15. Meanwhile, signs are posted throughout the spacious classrooms and airy handicap-accessible hallways to sign up for spring classes, which start April 6. The summer session is subject to the availability of state funding and class fees to pay for operational costs. There have already been some preliminary discussions with Diablo Valley College to lease all or part of the campus.

If the lights do indeed go out at Del Valle, each of Lamorinda's three towns has robust offerings through park and recreation departments. Lafayette has Camp Awesome for kids, soccer, tiny tots, after-school programs and a host of children's camps, along with youth, adult and older adult options. Orinda's Activity Guide for spring and summer 2015 has an array of camps, youth, teen, adult and senior programs all at reasonable prices. And classes and activities for all ages are offered through the town of Moraga.

For information, visit www.lafayetterec.org, www.cityoforinda.org or www.moraga.ca.us.

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