

## District seeks parents' help with budget crisis

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Facing a \$2.5 million funding gap caused by state budget cuts, the Acalanes Union High School District's strategy is quite different from the governor's: It's asking parents to open their wallets.

The district asked its educational foundations and parent clubs to contribute \$1 million, or \$250,000 per high school, to make up for money Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's budget took away.

"His equation is 'No increase in revenues and all decreases in expenditures,'" said Chris Learned, assistant superintendent for business services. "What we're doing is looking at both parts of the equation."

Foundations and parent clubs were budgeted to contribute \$1.3 million to the district budget this year. But that money was for extras such as computer software, department grants and other enrichment programs.

Now the district is asking parents to fund counseling services, small-class sizes and electives, Learned said. The district made the same type of request during budget crises earlier in the decade, he said.

"I feel confident that our community will rise to the challenge and fill those gaps we've been asked to fill," said Emily Schardt, executive director of the

Walnut Creek Education Foundation.

But it means the end of many of the foundation's other contributions, such as science supplies and instructional materials. It has already put a freeze on any spending not "bare-bones" essential, hoping to save some money for next year.

"We're just going to tighten the belt, hold on to the cash and go into a really prudent spending mode," Schardt said. "Our community has said loudly and clearly that we're not going to let our children suffer because the state can't get its act together."

This year the Moraga Education Foundation contributed \$352,000 to Campolindo High School, foundation Vice President Shari Simon said. She hopes that amount will increase by \$25,000 to \$50,000 next year, but programs will still be cut.

For example, this year the foundation contributed \$104,000 for technology. Next year that amount might only be \$4,000 based on early estimates, she said.

No matter what the foundation does, Campolindo will have less money next year, she said.

"I think what the state is doing is shameful," Simon said. "We'll never make up for the state loss."

The district has no choice but to ask the parent clubs and foundations for money, said Erica Bains, president of the Miramonte Parents Club. But she's still not happy to be soliciting donations to pay for "something basic the state should be funding."

"I would (rather) spend on fun things that are in addition so we can get something extra for our

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students," Bains said.

It's not clear what will be cut to make up the \$1.5 million parents are not being asked to cover. Superintendent Jim Negri has asked each department leader to prepare a list of possible cuts, and district staff will present options to the governing board in coming weeks.

The district will definitely have fewer teachers next year, so if not enough retire some will be laid off, Negri said. The human resources department is preparing seniority lists to determine who would be laid off first. It is already leaving an assistant principal position vacant and has taken back \$60,000 it had allocated to schools for supplies.

But until the final budget comes from Sacramento, many of the variables remain unknown.

"We really don't know what it's going to look like until the governor does his budget in May," Learned said.

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