

San Rafael City Schools

State Fiscal Crisis Update

Providing Critical & Timely Information

San Rafael City Schools

Preparing for Impacts of State Fiscal Crisis

Dear San Rafael City Schools Staff and Community:

This week I was in Sacramento with other Marin County superintendents and school board members meeting with legislators and other state officials advocating for budgetary flexibility and legislative relief that might assist in making the looming budget reductions for K-12 schools.

With each passing day the state's fiscal crisis becomes more dire. What began as a \$5 billion deficit in October is now \$41.5 billion, with estimates that the deficit may reach \$45 billion. The Governor, the Democratic caucus, the Republican caucus and the independent office of the Legislative Analyst all agree that the size of the deficit exceeds \$40 billion. The differences lie in how to resolve the deficit. There is not yet agreement as to how to close this gap. Outlined below is information related to our current status, next steps, and how you can choose to be involved.

We must unite as we address unimaginable reductions to our educational programs.

Your support on behalf of the children of San Rafael is much appreciated!

Mike

Michael Watenpaugh, Ed.D.
Superintendent

San Rafael City Schools - Our Status Now

For the current school year (2008-09), the Governing Board had to make over \$1.2 million in painful reductions to balance the budget by keeping the impact away from the classroom. Most of the reductions occurred away from the classroom and included items such as eliminating district office and administrative positions, eliminating literacy coaches and teacher specialist, eliminating support staff, eliminating bus routes, as well as reducing supply, travel, operations and staff development budgets. The cuts had both immediate and long-range implications. All of last year's reductions diminished services to students or impacted our ability to plan and prepare for the future.

These difficult decisions have been followed by news that even deeper cuts are needed for this year - knowing that next year's budget will be worse than the current year's. **It is currently projected that \$2 million must be cut in the Elementary District alone.** The reduction figure for the High School District is dependent on what the State ultimately chooses to cut. Given the magnitude of the cuts we must make, we will be unable to keep cuts away from classrooms.

At each upcoming board meeting we will provide a public updates on the state budget, our budget reduction planning process, as well as initial lists of potential budget reductions. These draft lists of possible budget reductions will cross all segments of the school district: administrative, certificated and classified staff, programs and services for students, home to school transportation, as well as operational support for schools. As draft lists are shared with staff and members of the public, remember, no decisions have been made, and no action has been taken by the Board of Education.

We hope that by providing factual information related to proposed cuts and the associated cost-savings, our staff and members of our school community will be better able to see and understand both the cost-savings and the potential impact of such reductions. We also want to stay ahead of rumors and speculation through timely and consistent communication.

Any comprehensive budget proposal considered will require unprecedented reductions in the services and opportunities we provide our students. Because 82% of our budget pays for personnel, and most of the remaining 18% must be spent for unavoidable costs (such as utilities, property/liability insurance, workers compensation, books, taxes, mandatory reserves, and supplies) we will likely be forced to issue layoff notices to many of our employees this spring. These employees all provide services to students, and it is likely that we will see larger class sizes, fewer elective options, and fewer support services for our students unless there is a major "rethinking" of California's budget priorities.

Next Steps - What Lies Ahead

We will continue to monitor the budget developments and communicate with our legislative representatives about the impact of the current budget proposals on our schools. We have also implemented a "spending chill" that limits any current spending to only those items and services that are critical to safety and instruction. Every dollar we can save in the present is a dollar we do not have to cut next year.

We must also begin to prepare for a worst-case scenario. The final budget decisions for this year and the next are still pending, however, our staff will be preparing options for reductions and analyzing how those reductions impact the core instructional programs of the Districts. Our first priority, as always, will be to assure that our students are safe and receive the basic instruction they need to learn and graduate.

Community forums to provide information about the budget crisis and to gather ideas are being scheduled for early February. This series of forums will be specific to either our K-8 Elementary District, or for our 9-12 High School District. Forum dates, times and locations will be announced next week.

We will also be developing and implementing an on-line survey of our parents and community to gather information about funding priorities and ideas for cost savings. We will all need to think beyond the "usual suspects" when it comes to developing a plan for the coming year(s). **Reductions of \$2+ million dollars, in the Elementary District alone, cannot be accomplished without considerable sacrifice.**

We Want and Need Your Help!

Please stay involved and learn all you can about public school finance. We have posted information about the District's budget and other related items on the "Budget Watch" section of our district's website, www.srsc.org. We will regularly update information on this site.

For the long term, remember that in California we have been below the national average in per-pupil funding for over two decades even though we have among the highest standards and a diverse population of students who "need more to get the same." In the long term, our legislature needs to reconsider the entire process for funding public education. The often-repeated mantra that we must "live within our means" is only appropriate if we know that our means will provide the type of education our students will need to succeed in the future.

For the short term, send any ideas you have for cost savings or revenue enhancements to us at suggestionbox@srsc.org.

Please have patience and understanding. This crisis was not caused by a lack of fiscal integrity at the local level. Nor was it caused by the public education system in California. What we are experiencing today is the result of years of under funding. For decades public schools have reduced services, especially support services such as counselors, nurses, administrators, librarians, as well as clerical, custodial, maintenance, and grounds staff, with most of these reductions unseen by the local community or general public. Some might say that public education has done "too good" a job of hiding the effects of prior year budget cuts. With the magnitude of the cuts on the horizon, every program and classroom will likely feel the impact.

The budget picture for the next few years is dark and gloomy. However, the talent, commitment and quality of our teachers, administrators, and support staff will remain, and we will continue to strive to do our best for our students and community.

San Rafael City Schools

San Rafael City Schools is actually two school districts: the San Rafael Elementary School District, and the San Rafael High School District. A common Board of Education and a common administration operate these two districts. The Dixie Elementary School District is the only other feeder district to the San Rafael High School District.

San Rafael City Schools currently operates eleven school programs: six K-5 elementary schools, one K-8 school, one 6-8 middle school, two comprehensive 9-12 high schools and one continuation high school.

Current enrollment in the K-8 district is approximately 2800 students. Enrollment in the high school district is approximately 2100 students.

Board of Education

Natu Tuatagaloa, Board President
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San Rafael City Schools
Dr. Michael Watenpaugh
Superintendent