

March Budget update

Not much has changed since the last budget update (January Budget Update). Much like the recent weather, the budget picture is mostly cloudy with an infrequent and short-lived ray of sunshine. The ray of sunshine comes from reports that the state's revenue for January exceeded predictions by \$1 billion. This is the first good news we have heard in months, and all of us dependent on state revenues hope this trend continues.

As to the clouds, even with a \$1 billion dollar increase, the state's budget is still out of balance by over \$19 billion dollars, and the structural flaws in the state budget are not resolved. A Superior Court judge has also ruled that the state owes back pay for illegal furlough days. If the state loses an appeal to the Supreme Court, the back pay will gobble up more than the \$1 billion from the January revenue increase.

Additionally, it appears that the federal assistance we received last year will be significantly less this year. The governor included \$6.9 billion in federal assistance in his budget proposal, but the federal budget has only earmarked \$1.5 billion.

It is also very frustrating to know that there is little meaningful dialogue about the funding for public education occurring at the state capital. Many political pundits predict that the state assembly will not take any action until after the June primaries. This inaction perpetuates an unhealthy state of limbo that causes students and parents to worry about what services and opportunities will not be available in the fall, and hundreds of staff members to worry about whether or not they will have a job next year.

Unfortunately, it looks like we are in for another long, hot summer.

Times are tough, but you still have to wonder . . .

The economy has impacted everyone, and the questions being asked about state taxes and the levels of services provided by state-funded agencies are legitimate.

However, if Californians are taxed at a rate that ranks in the top five to ten in the nation (depending on the analysis you accept) then why does the state's spending on public education fall in the bottom five in the nation?

In addition to being funded well below the national average, public schools in California do not receive the minimum guaranteed by our own statutes. Proposition 98 guaranteed a minimum of the state's revenues would flow to education. According to the Proposition 98 calculations, we should be receiving \$6330 per student, but for 2010-11 the state plans to provide \$4983. Like Wimpy in the Popeye cartoons who promises to pay for a hamburger at some time in the future, we are supposed to be repaid once the economy recovers. The state refers to this under funding of the established minimum as the "deficit factor."

Meanwhile, today's students experience reduced electives, higher class sizes, library closures, and fewer support services. . . a "deficit factor" that impacts their future. By the way (in case you were wondering) if the FCUSD received the funds promised by Proposition 98, we would have \$26 million more to provide services and opportunities to our students.

Money isn't everything; however, our students will have to compete for college admission and jobs against students in other states and countries that have made a greater investment in education.

Potential reductions

A copy of potential solutions and reductions to balance our budget for the 2010-11 school year is attached (March 1 tentative budget solutions and reductions).

The list is divided into four categories that include the current recommendations, other options that were considered, items that must be negotiated with employee groups, and ideas that would require a change in existing law.

Those of you who have been following our budget process will note some changes from the last list.

The list will be revised several more times before we adopt a budget in June. The list of reductions will be impacted by factors such as changes in the state and federal budgets, agreements with our employee groups, new ideas for savings and/or revenue enhancements, and continual analysis of our current spending.

Our promise (from the January 15 budget update)

The Governing Board has vowed to be transparent in all of its considerations. We will keep you informed of all of our considerations and recommendations. **The most accurate and complete information will be posted at this location on our website, and we will keep it up to date.**

The most damaging aspect of the budget crisis is the potential to harm relationships. With decisions being made to reduce positions and services, there will be strong disagreements about the choices.

I would suggest that now is a time for us to exercise patience and understanding. In particular, please do not participate in circulating rumors and conjecture. These are difficult times, and we do not need to add to our challenges by succumbing to unwarranted FEAR (False Evidence Appearing Real).

If you have a concern or question, ask the person most responsible, or ask me. Together we will get through this mess.

Want to help?

There can be no denying that the state is in the midst of an unprecedented fiscal crisis. However, I hope you will join me in seeking a more appropriate level of funding for California public education by making our political leaders ([list of legislative contacts](#)) aware of your concerns.

You may also want to visit a website that has been established by local parents concerned about public education at SupportCAKids.com.

Even in tough times we all have a duty to do what is right for our children and our future.

I look forward to what I believe will ultimately be a ground swell of support for public education. People who care about children and our future will eventually demand better from our state.