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Fiscal Outlook Bleak for Schools

By Jean Follmer

Lamorinda's public schools are facing certain change in the upcoming 2010/11 school year and it's not the kind of change that Lamorinda parents will want to see. Teachers will lose jobs, entire districts will take furloughs, some salaries and positions will be reduced and class sizes will likely increase. California's ongoing budget disaster is impacting our communities. What does it mean to your elementary/middle school district?

Lafayette

The Lafayette School District is likely to feel the most pain of the three local districts next year. At this point, Lafayette anticipates it will be operating at about a \$1.8 million structural deficit for the 2010/11 school year. This translates to a number of potential changes and reductions throughout the district. Class size will increase from 20 to a soft cap of 24 in grades K-3, from 25 to a soft cap of 29 in grades 4-5 and 8th grade English will increase from 20 students to a soft cap of 26 students. This will result in a reduction of five elementary teachers and three middle school teachers. Superintendent Fred Brill hopes to handle at least most of the reductions through natural attrition. "At Stanley, we're going to see very little change in class size due to declining enrollment," said Brill. Other reductions in the Lafayette district will probably include reducing classroom aide time by 1 hour per week, reducing the salaries of music and science instructors by 25% and eliminating the district reprographics department altogether. While the Acalanes Union High School District is going out for a parcel tax this May, it is likely that Lafayette will follow suit in 2011. As Governing Board Member Art Kapoor put it, "It's not likely that the State of California is going to turn around and find a pot of gold." For a complete list of reductions, visit www.lafsd.k12.ca.us.

Moraga

The Moraga School District budget reduction plan has increased from \$500,000 to approximately \$643,000. Superintendent Rick Schafer said he had expected the figure would increase since the State of California's initial budget contemplated the receipt of \$6.9 billion in federal aid. Schafer didn't believe that would happen, and he was correct.

The district plans to address its budget shortfall through a number of reductions and enhanced revenue opportunities. Revenue enhancements are currently projected at \$157,000 while staff and expense reductions will make up the balance of the \$643,000. Possible staff reductions include two teaching positions, two library technicians, a student support worker and a maintenance worker. Schafer hopes to handle the teacher reductions through attrition. The district also expects to reduce its Director of Educational Services position by 40% as well as make potential reductions in music, art and physical education. At press time, Schafer is still in negotiations with the Moraga Teachers Association. The Moraga School District Governing Board will reconvene at its regularly scheduled meeting on March 9. For a complete list of reductions, visit www.district.moraga.k12.ca.us

Orinda

On par with Moraga, the Orinda Union School District is looking at a budget deficit of \$678,000 for the 2010/11 school year. The district has considered a number of budget reduction techniques: increased class sizes, reduced classroom aide hours and OIS counselors and changes to art and physical education programs. At the regularly scheduled February board meeting, Director of Business Services, Jerry Bucci, stated the district plans to use \$300,000 in reserves and approximately \$400,000 from "on-going categorical funds" to address the shortfall. "During the current year, we have made approximately \$100,000 in savings from district office reductions in personnel, technology, maintenance, accounting and technology," said Superintendent Joe Jaconette in a letter to parents. The district hopes to preserve on-going programs and small class sizes and has not made any final decisions about the coming year. The Board of Trustees is scheduled to reconvene at its regular scheduled meeting on March 1, after press time. For more information, visit www.orindaschools.org.

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