

Life in LAMORINDA

Lamorinda Schools Face Tough Budget Decisions

By Andrea A. Firth

Since Governor Schwarzenegger announced his proposed cuts to education funding back in January, administrators, educators, and parents throughout Lamorinda have spent countless hours in meetings and discussion trying to determine the best way to manage through the current school budget crisis. "Obviously budgeting is on everyone's front burner," explained Superintendent Jim Negri when he addressed the Acalanes Union High School District Governing Board at their most recent meeting. The Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD), which encompasses three high schools in Lamorinda (Acalanes, Campolindo, and Miramonte), and the kindergarten through 8th grade school districts in Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda each presented preliminary budget scenarios to their Boards and stakeholders over the past two weeks.

AUHSD
The Acalanes Union High School District faces a loss of \$3.3

million in State revenue for the next school year. This revenue deficit includes \$2.75 million less in revenue limit dollars—the Districts main source of funding—and about \$550,000 less in categorical program funding which includes monies for class-size reduction, special education, instructional materials, and professional development. At the School Board meeting held on February 20th, Assistant Superintendent Chris Learned outlined a "worst case scenario" budget that included the elimination of 46 positions across the District. Although many of the positions at risk are not full-time, the staffing cuts would affect certificated teachers, special education staff, and classified and administrative employees.

Some of the budget shortfall will be offset by a \$1 million donation commitment from the District's Parent Clubs and Education Foundations. "This will help to cover counseling, libraries, and some categorical program reduc-

tions," stated Learned. The additional non-personnel reductions proposed included cuts to the District office, curriculum development, fiscal services, human resources, and the popular Summer Institute—a continuing education program for teachers. "This is painful," stated Board member Vanessa Crews as the budget presentation concluded. At the next School Board meeting, budget adjustments and staff reductions will be presented for the Board to vote upon.

Lafayette School District

The financial impact of the State revenue cuts will leave Lafayette School District \$1.74 million short for the 2008-2009 school year. By freezing spending and budget planning that includes program reductions and staff cuts, Superintendent Frank Tom hopes to keep Lafayette's budget balanced. The District held two budget study sessions in January and February to solicit community input regarding the budget dilemma and to help set spending priorities.

Lafayette's School District is also actively exploring ways to boost revenues. "Two [School] Board representatives and I have met with the Presidents of the parent groups to ask them for financial support in preserving many of our exemplary educational programs that are at risk of being reduced or cut," stated Dr. Tom. "Board representatives and I will

also be attending parent group meetings at each school site to talk about the State budget crisis, its negative impact on the District's programs, and asking them for financial support. A Board representative and I have also met with LASF [Lafayette Arts & Science Foundation] to request financial support from them. Over the next couple of weeks, our collective goal is to develop a coordinated and focused fundraising plan with our parent groups and LASF to preserve our programs and to minimize lay-offs."

Moraga School District

Moraga School District's budget reduction target for the 2008-2009 school year is \$937,000. To that end, Superintendent Rick Schafer presented the Moraga School District Governing Board with a laundry list of potential budget cuts last week. Schafer had recently held a Budget Advisory Meeting with representatives from the District's Teachers and Classified Employee Associations, PTAs, and Education Foundation to review and prioritize the list of possible cuts. Regarding this process, Schafer noted, "We are working from the outside then moving inward. We are employing a model that starts as far away from the classroom as possible." The list ranged from reductions for nonacademic expenditures such as cleaning and groundskeeping to the elimina-

tion of administrative positions, classroom aides, counseling services, and classroom teachers. Through attrition and job shares, Schafer hoped to be able to avoid eliminating some teaching jobs.

Although the exact amount of the education funding reduction has yet to be finalized by the State, Districts are required to announce any potential cuts to staffing for the next school year well in advance. "Release notices have to go out by the 15th [of March] establishing the legal process that positions may or will be eliminated," explained Schafer the Moraga's Governing Board.

"I do believe that the District will make every effort to keep the cuts as far away from the classroom as possible," stated Mary Ellen Viboch, President of the Moraga Teachers Association. "But we won't really know until May or even over the summer what some of those true cuts are going to look like," she added. "[My] colleagues are worried. They're frustrated. We just don't know anymore. We are working on a wait and see basis at this point."

Orinda Union School District

Despite the fact that the Orinda Union School District (OUSD) faces a \$1 million loss in State funds next year, staff reductions are not expected. "Through cost-savings and [staff] attrition we are trying to keep whatever cuts we make as far away from the

classroom as we can," stated OUSD Governing Board President Pat Rudebusch. "We really want to preserve the programs that we have in place and avoid doing layoffs." Cost savings and staff attrition are projected to cover almost half of OUSD's revenue deficit. "In addition, we have gone to the Parent Clubs and the Education Foundation (EFO) and asked them to contribute to help make up the budget shortfall," stated Rudebusch. The Parent Clubs and EFO have been asked to increase their financial support by \$400,000 to \$600,000 for the next school year.

Although the budget crisis has consumed and at times overwhelmed the local Districts, there still seems to be some hope among administrators that the State cuts will not go quite as deep as originally outlined. "I still anticipate that the Governor's budget will change dramatically over the next few months and additional funding will become available," stated Superintendent Schafer. Chris Learned noted that Legislative Analyst Liz Hill recently presented the Governor with an alternative budget that would limit the education funding deficit and cuts to special education. "My feeling is the cuts will not be any deeper [by May], and I hope that the Governor and the Legislature seriously consider Liz Hill's suggestions," stated Learned.

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Christi Costa Brings Her Talents to Acalanes

Submitted by the Lafayette Arts & Science Foundation



Lafayette Arts & Science Foundation is fortunate to work with and support talented and exceptional teachers and their programs. One example of this is Acalanes High School's new dance instructor, Christi Costa.

Christi comes by her expertise naturally. She began dancing at the age of four in her grandmother's studio, Doreen's School of Dance located in Antioch. Her mother now runs the studio and is president of Dance Masters of America Inc. Christi honed her skills at San Francisco where she earned a double degree in Dance and History. She earned her teaching creden-

tial at California State University Hayward.

Immediately upon graduating, Ms Costa was offered a position at Deer Valley High School where she developed a dance program and remained for two years. The urge to dance took Christi to Los Angeles where she performed in parades, magic music days and was stage manager and organizer of special events for Disney.

Ms. Costa developed a successful dance program at Eagle Rock High School in Los Angeles where she built both the cheer and dance program in just one year. She was in charge of

200 students at Milliken Middle School in Sherman Oaks, a performing arts magnet academy catering to children of movie stars and actively performing young television actors.

Romance brought Christi back to the Bay Area where she received many offers to teach. Acalanes' excellent reputation for attention to the arts drew her to take her current position. Christi says "the enthusiasm of the kids and the genuine support from the administration make coming to work here a joy."

The students in this program aren't just learning the Two Step. They are schooled in the techniques of jazz, ballet, modern dance, hip hop, swing and salsa. They complete fitness circuits which include Pilates and yoga to ensure safety and proper muscle development. Understanding and designing

choreography are important aspects of the class.

Christi incorporates academia into the program by having the kids contrast and compare the histories of the different dance genres. They are also required to produce a musical theater timeline.

To round out their education, the students are asked to create a Dream Life Journal. In this they put their aspirations for the future and how, practically, they intend to make their dreams come true. This exercise is always a favorite as it encourages the kids to look within themselves to recognize and express what really makes them happy and the possibilities of where their lives can take them.

Christi's philosophy is one of team building. Through her innate ability to connect with her students she helps them to see that each and every one of them is equally important. This realization allows them to see themselves in a positive light that transcends into all other aspects of their lives. Self esteem and the ability to carry themselves proudly with poise and dignity are lifelong gifts. Acalanes High School is truly lucky to have Christi Costa as part of their staff. LASF, with the help of generous donors, is very proud to financially support her program.

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