

A Message from the Superintendent

June 22, 2009

When I wrote on June 8, I shared the impact of the Governor's May Revise on the Mt. Diablo Unified School District and discussed the need to make additional reductions to our budget. I am pleased to report that following the Board actions on June 16, we will have a balanced budget for the next three school years.

What is the impact of reductions in State funding?

Previously, the Governor called for reductions of \$219/student in the current school year or \$7,296,246 and reductions of \$353/student or \$11,699,574 in 2009/10 and beyond. After this, the Governor announced a 65% reduction to transportation resulting in the loss of another \$1,832,000 per year. This loss of funding meant that this month we had to reduce the budget for the next three years by over \$43million.

What reductions were made on June 16?

At the June 16 meeting, the Board approved \$12.7 million in reductions. These included:

- Increasing fees for transportation from \$305 to \$450 per family for the first student. In addition, the Board eliminated most district transportation for the 2010/11 school year. Starting September 2010, the District will continue the following: all transportation of students needing special education services, transportation of students who opt out of a local school using the No Child Left Behind procedures, transportation of students in Bay Point/Pittsburg, and transportation of students who "overflow" to a neighboring school due to lack of space. All other transportation will be eliminated.
- For two years, transferred funding for Learning Centers, preschool special education programs, and special education Program Specialists to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).
- Eliminated one member of the Superintendent's Council and an Administrative Assistant beginning July 1, 2010.
- Reduced funding for deferred maintenance by \$200,000 a year.
- Delayed the planned transfer of funding from the Meals for Needy program to Food Services for one year.
- Eliminated one Senior General Maintenance Worker.
- Eliminated the Director of Purchasing.
- Reduced funding for the Annual District Leadership conference by 50%.
- Transferred funds previously designated for restricted programs to other uses as allowed by changes in state guidelines for a total of \$2.3 million a year. The Board will consider the specific programs on June 30.

Isn't there any good news about the budget?

For the first time in quite a while, we did get some good news. Late in the afternoon on June 12 we learned that we will receive a total of \$4.3 million in additional one-time ARRA funds for which we have flexibility in its use. Last week we heard that the increase in our health insurance premiums will be about half of the projected amount. We are grateful for the good news, but cautious about how to spend it for the following reasons:

- At the time this is written, the legislature has not acted and the governor has not signed the revised budget for the next school year. We know that there could be additional budget reductions.
- Even if the approved budget mirrors the current proposals, there may be additional mid-year reductions next year due to the failure of state revenues to match projections.
- We believe that we may have to add staff at the beginning of the school year to have enough teachers to meet class size requirements and serve students in mandated special programs.
- While our three-year budget is now balanced, the fourth year is not due to the use of one-time money to pay for ongoing expenses. While we hope that there may be additional state or local income by the fourth year, there is no guarantee this will happen.

For these reasons, we are recommending that the “good news” money not be designated at this time but be saved as a “rainy day” fund in case it is needed in the future.

What about high school athletics next year?

District funding for high school athletics was one of the expenses that could have been funded by Measure D. As a result, there is no district budget for coaches, equipment, officials, and other competitive athletic expenses. Fortunately, a group of concerned parents, staff, and community members have formed the United Mt. Diablo Athletic Foundation to raise money to continue sports in the District. They have created a plan to fund athletics next year, and the Board of Education approved the plan on June 16. This includes new funding from student purchased sports cards, increased contributions by families of students participating in athletics, contributions by the Foundation, and funding from other sources. We all hope that the plan will succeed, and we will monitor the success of the plan in the Fall.

What do I do if I want to help?

Parents, community and staff have already displayed a wealth of support and interest to help the district through these trying times. In response to these efforts, the district has set up multiple venues for staff, parents and community members to make a donation to the district. On the left side of the District web site is a link for those who would like to donate. We can now accept donations using credit cards through PayPal. You can also send donations to the district office at 1936 Carlotta Drive, Concord CA 94519,

Attention: Bryan Richards. Donations can be made for a specific purpose or to support district programs and services in general. Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law and a receipt will be issued upon request. Additional ideas to generate funding can be shared with the Director of Development, Stephanie Roberts at (925) 682-8000 x6201 or robertss@mdusd.k12.ca.us.

As of June 16, district donations from the new program totaled \$4,369.

The Challenge Ahead

The next school year may be the most difficult in the history of the school district. Although we will be fiscally solvent, the impact of the vast majority of budget reductions has not been felt yet. Classes will be larger, many programs will be reduced or eliminated, and there will be fewer people to support schools when help is needed. For this reason, staff throughout the school district are planning for next year. We cannot continue to do what we've always done before. In some departments, we are starting over, forgetting how we did work this year, and thinking creatively about what we need to do next year. We will all need to work smarter next year, to recognize when new strategies are not succeeding, and to adjust as needed. Most importantly, we will need to support one another more than before by focusing on finding solutions rather than placing blame.

These are difficult times, and leadership is needed more than ever. Not everything will go well next year, but that won't be because of a lack of effort on our part. Everyone associated with the education of students – staff, parents, students, and community members – has a vital role to play. I believe that by working together we can make a difference for students in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District.

Dick Nicoll
Interim Superintendent