

OPINION/EDITORIAL

Turn public values into public policy ... full funding for our schools

Twelve months after declaring 2008 the Year of Education, Governor Schwarzenegger now proposes \$4.8 billion in cuts to education funding. The Year of Education is fast becoming, as noted by State Superintendent Jack O'Connell, "The Year of Evisceration."

California's schools simply do not have \$4.8 billion to cut. In recent tough financial years, Alameda County has endured deep cuts; becoming leaner, while demonstrating progress toward our goal of educating students. At a time when we should be investing more money to protect and increase these gains, school districts across the state are now being asked to reduce even further. This is not a matter of "trimming the fat." The Governor's proposed budget reduction is equivalent to cutting more than \$24,000 per classroom, and eliminating 107,000 teachers. Funding for textbooks, child development, supplemental instruction, nutrition and transportation programs, among others, are all jeopardized by this plan.

If this deep cut strategy to fixing the budget prevails, it will significantly reduce funding in districts small and large, urban and suburban. Across the board, districts would face lay offs of teachers and staff, and most would see an increase in class sizes. In Alameda, for example, that district could be faced with increasing class sizes in K-3 from 20 students to 32 students and closing two elementary schools, while San Lorenzo could be forced to reduce art and music classes, among other reductions.

The impact of such a scenario would be devastating not only for school districts, but for all Californians. To quote Schwarzenegger's 2007 State of the State Address, "That small child with sticky hands starting the first day in kindergarten is the foundation of California's economic power and leadership. We must invest in education."

Even in the best of times our school districts are woefully under funded. *Education Week* magazine recently gave the state a D+ grade for its school funding efforts. California currently spends \$2,000 less per student than the national average and ranks 46th in the country in school funding - behind less prosperous states as Louisiana and Mississippi. When the Governor asks California schools to make further cuts, it's like asking a poor family to stop eating to make ends meet; hardly a realistic solution.

Reducing educational spending is not the answer to the state's fiscal crisis. Rather, California's financial health is dependent on what the legislature and Governor do today to address the educational funding deficit.

To secure a successful future for our communities and the state of California we must address a series of vital questions: How do we prepare our youth to meet the demands of a democratic nation? How do we address persistent inequality in our society? How do we maintain our economic prosperity in an increasingly competitive world?

Providing a quality education to every child, in every school and in every classroom is the answer to each of those questions.

This opinion/editorial is signed by Alameda County Schools Superintendent Sheila Jordan and Superintendents of all 17 Unified School Districts in Alameda County

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