

Can workshop answer budget questions?

by **Mary Scott**

(Updated: Wednesday, February 24, 2010 6:19 PM PST)

As teachers' jobs teeter on an "unbalanced" balance sheet, questions remain as to whether the Redondo Beach Unified School District can put in place a series of solutions to reduce the impact of a failing state economy.

"The bottom line is that the state of California continues to cut school districts' budgets," Steven Keller, RBUSD superintendent, said in a press statement. "RBUSD has reduced its budget over \$8 million in the last few years, and it's likely that we will have to cut another \$3.6 million for 2010-11. This is painful."

Keller, his staff and the Board of Education will meet with interested community members Wednesday, March 3, at Perras Middle School to answer their questions and present them with some possible cost-savings the district has implemented and is considering. The budget information meeting is co-sponsored by the Redondo Beach Council Parent Teacher Association.

The district will save approximately \$150,000 on its utility bill because of energy-efficient systems used in school site remodels, which was paid for by the voter-approved initiative Measure "C," according to Janet Redella, the district's chief business official. Also, the district anticipates saving another \$100,000 next year after it installs a new, more efficient phone and alarm system districtwide.

Real cost-savings could come if the district implements an early retirement incentive program with Public Agency Retirement Services, or PARS. Offered through a tax-sheltered annuity with Pacific Life Insurance, the PARS program encourages senior-level staff at higher pay brackets to retire early, PARS representative Dennis Yu told the board in January. The district saves money either by replacing those staff members with lower-paid employees or not replacing the position at all.

According to Yu, there are 70 district employees eligible for the program. They have until March 5 to decide if they would like to participate. At that time, PARS will calculate the cost savings based on the number of participants.

"PARS has agreed to give us some pretty good information by the board meeting on (March 9)," said Nancy Billinger, the district's assistant superintendent of human resources. "They'll be gathering information as it comes in until (March 5), when the teachers have to declare."

For those teachers not eligible for early retirement, district administrators will sit down with them at the bargaining table, beginning March 8. Currently, the Redondo Beach Teachers Association is meeting with members at school sites.

"We will not move forward unless we can go to the table and specifically state this is what our membership says, wants (and) desires," RBTA President Amy Santa Cruz told the board.

The budget meeting is open to the public and will begin at 6:30 p.m. Perras Middle School is located at 200 N. Lucia in Redondo Beach.