

## Summer school cuts loom

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by Mark McDermott

During the regular school year, class sizes at Redondo Unified School District are likely to substantially increase next year. During the summer, most classes may disappear entirely.

These are a few of the decisions the RBUSD Board of Education faces as it prepares to lop off \$3.6 million from the district's \$65 million budget in order to adjust to impending state funding reductions. At Tuesday's board meeting, the board considered a sharp reduction or possible elimination of summer school.

Assistant Superintendent Frank DeSena offered the board outlines of a "one year plan" that would eliminate summer school at all elementary grade levels and leave a bare bones class schedule at the high school level. DeSena noted that the state has given the district the option of eliminating summer school yet keeping the \$275,000 in state funding allocated towards it.

"I think all of us would prefer to have a full summer school," DeSena said. "We are just looking at making some tough decisions with the dollars we have from the state."

Superintendent Steven Keller said that the loss of summer school would hurt both students in need of extra class work and teachers trying to supplement their income. He said that the potential savings, however, might help save a few jobs.

"This is the plight we are in," said Keller. "We are shopping for dollars. We are being given local control by the state...saying annihilate school, or impact staff."

School board member Jane Diehl asked staff to look into the possibility that the South Bay Adult School might be utilized in some manner for summer school. She said that the district had to find a way to offer high school students some means of taking summer classes.

"How could we not?" Diehl said. "We would have kids that don't have [enough] credits, and how could they make up those credits?"

Board member Arlene Staich worried that students in grades four through eight – grade levels at which summer school was already eliminated last year – would be impacted as well.

"This will be the second year they don't get anything," she said. "They come to high school and all the kids that are deficient, insofar as they need help. By the time you get to high school your pattern is pretty well set. I don't see how you can succeed at the high school level...Someone who really needs help and is struggling."

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has proposed new educational funding cuts. Although the exact size of that reduction isn't likely to be decided for months as the state legislature negotiates a budget, the Governor's proposals are for cuts similar to last year's. The district was forced to trim \$5.2 million in three separate rounds of reductions during the course of the last school year.

The difference is that last year the district received \$3.6 million in "one time" federal stimulus dollars. Meanwhile, state funding cuts that were likewise meant to be one time reductions appear likely to be enacted again, according to RBUSD Chief Business Officer Janet Redella.

"We do know they are turning one time reductions that were taken last year into permanent reductions, but we don't know what that amount is yet," she said. "So until we get more information from the state, we are working with a soft number of about \$3.6 million as our target."

Keller has been visiting school sites and meeting with employees. He has suggested a variety of cost-saving measures, including employee furloughs, a shorter school year, increased class sizes, and an early retirement incentive program aimed at increasing employee attrition while minimizing layoffs. Seventy teachers have been offered early retirement.

A group of teachers appeared before the school board Tuesday night and asked that the board consider two other alternatives – that the district dip into its emergency reserves or use the so-called "Aviation funds" to offset budgetary reductions this year.

The district is required to keep three percent of its budget as a reserve for economic uncertainty, a restriction the state has relaxed to 1.5 percent for the next two years. The Aviation funds are roughly \$6 million the district has additionally held in reserve, collecting interest, that were derived from the sale of the former Aviation High School decades ago.

Amy Santa Cruz, president of the Redondo Beach Teachers Association, said that such funds have long been considered a buffer for a "rainy day." She noted that the district has almost four percent of its overall budget in its emergency reserves.

"Isn't this that rainy day?" she asked.

Keller, in an interview after the meeting, said that the Aviation funds are restricted by law for capital outlay and cannot be used for salaries. The state has loosened that restriction somewhat during this budget crisis, he said, but the monies still cannot be used for salaries. The superintendent was also reluctant to dip very deeply into its reserves.

"My recommendation to the board is stay at or above the three percent reserve right now," Keller said. "If the state of California continues its wing-it economics, we are headed for another mid- and/or end-of-the-year cut. If we don't have a reasonable reserve, how do we make payroll if the State hits us again? Employees need to be paid and we plan on doing everything we can to make this happen." ER