

The Quarterly Newsletter of Springboard Schools

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*From the Desk of Dr. Merrill Vargo,
Founder and Executive Director*

Education Budget Woes

You've heard that the Governor has proposed drastic cuts to school funding. But do these cuts happen? And what is their impact on students and schools?

In California, education funding comes from state income taxes. When the economy slips, so do tax revenues and schools feel the pinch. In attempts to soften the impact, many communities try to get special taxes (or a "parcel tax") on the voting ballot to generate funds, which San Francisco recently did. However, these special taxes require a two-thirds majority to pass and many don't.

Is there a crisis? Yes! Here's why. First, even in good years California ranks towards the bottom of the nation in school funding. When school budgets are cut, politicians pledge to "keep cuts far from the classroom." Some would like to believe that cuts apply to useless bureaucrats. But here's what's actually at risk:

- professional development for teachers
- coaching for new principals

Dr. Merrill Vargo



(See Budget Woes, pg 3)

Voices From the Field

Educators Talk About the Budget Crisis

For many people, the budget cuts and financial crisis being experienced in our schools mean little more than one more bit of bad news. But to teachers and students this is a very serious situation, one that can negatively impact our state and our future.

We talked to three California education leaders to hear what the budget cuts mean to their school systems and how they are coping with yet another challenge. All three work in systems that serve many students learning English and students living in poverty – the

ones most affected by the cuts. These are the people working every day to see that every child gets the opportunity to succeed. They are:

Ken Bergevin, Superintendent
Richland Unified

Maité Itturi, Principal
El Verano Elementary, Sonoma Unified

Thelma Meléndez, Superintendent
Pomona Unified

Here is what they had to say:

(See Voices, pg 2)

Voices (cont. from page 1)

What does the current budget situation mean in regards to your work to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap?

Ken Bergevin: The budget situation has led to some pretty difficult discussions about what was most important [to the district] and how to set priorities at both the district and school level. Our district team's goal was to manage around [the budget] as best we could while keeping the district focused on improving student achievement.

Maité Itturi: Being a Program Improvement school requires a tremendous amount of resources to support our students. But we are operating on a shoestring and do not have the resources we need to meet the needs of our students. We need to provide more opportunity for learning and we cannot do that with our current budget and certainly not with next year's budget. We have nowhere else left to cut!

Thelma Meléndez: Working with our board, we've focused on maintaining essential programs and the professional development areas we've identified as supporting us [thru this situation] to achieve our target goals.

How does the budget situation affect your district/school overall?

Bergevin: It has also caused me to become much more conservative and cautious – if it weren't, I could bankrupt the District because I want to do so much and provide so much support to our teachers and administrators. We have absolutely taken all the steps we could to maximize our categorical funding [funds allocated to support students living in poverty, students learning English, and other special needs students].

Itturi: Given our level of poverty and percentage of English Language Learners, our students need more time and individualized attention to achieve at the level that the federal government is requiring. In the 2008-2009 budget we are unable to fund two key positions. Both positions were teachers who worked with newcomers and students who are two or more years behind grade level. Now that support is gone.



Meléndez: We had to increase class size, eliminate assistant principals ... each division had to cut a [significant amount]. They're now working on what that means to individual programs in each division. For example, our Pupil and Community services division has a teacher specialist who helps in student learning, and we have to decide if we want to continue with that. That's just one of the things we're re-evaluating.

What do you focus on the most during this budget crisis?

Bergevin: We have stressed the need to move forward as a district. We will still have great site leadership teams, a great District Curriculum Action Team, plus we will continue to develop our own people to become trainers and providers of professional development. Our Board of Trustees is committed to keeping the topic of instructional improvement as the most important thing. I truly think we are building momentum that will not be derailed despite the budget situation.



Itturi: Teachers never give up educating our students. Our teachers have the attitude of "whatever it takes" to raise achievement. Our student population is high poverty, high English learner. In the corner of my white board I keep the number of our English language learners who are not proficient, and it keeps me really focused. Every day, I look at that number and I think "Does what I'm working on revolve around removing that number?"

Meléndez: We've really had to think through what is most effective and then ask how all of this fits together. Is this program really worth this amount of money? Is this getting us to our goals and the targets we set?" It's really looking at whether something has been effective or not and seeing if it's something we can continue if it hasn't.



How have you tried to create something positive from this situation?

Bergevin: Absolutely—Our focus has always remained on the instructional program. And we managed to reduce and divert \$1.3 million from our unrestricted general fund,(cont.)
(See Voices, pg 4)

(cont. from page 1)

Budget Woes

- resource teachers who provide extra academic support to kids who need it
- after-school and extended day programs; and
- data collection and analysis to help schools track kids' progress so that teachers can target help to those who need it most.

To compound the problem, while the budget is being cut this year by 10%, the student achievement improvement targets are increasing by 10%. No other sector in our economy would find it acceptable to cut funding while demanding an increase in output. Cuts in school funding always hurt – but this year, the situation is very, very serious. And educators can't be blamed for being discouraged and demoralized, which many are right now.

But when the economy recovers, won't school budgets recover as well? Can't we just ride out this economic downturn? Here's the problem: when the budget recovers, politicians don't replace funds that were cut. Instead they introduce a new program. And, with every new program comes a new round of regulations. So the flexible funds for professional development, for example, that were cut get replaced with a new set of requirements. Thus with every budget cycle, there is more regulation, less improvement infrastructure and less of the funding flexibility that makes leadership, innovation, and investment in students' learn-

ing possible.

Chronic underfunding means that California runs its school system on a shoestring: buildings are in bad shape, schools lack counselors and librarians, class sizes are high, and districts struggle every year to pay for the training and coaching that teachers need to succeed. The budget cycle means that California schools are not just under-funded, they are overregulated as well. What every Californian should know is that the fact that schools work as well as they do is a testament to the ingenuity and commitment of thousands of teachers and administrators. The way we fund our schools is a bad system, and it needs to be fixed. But in the meantime, we should stop for a moment and appreciate the many hardworking people who keep trying to do good work in spite of it all.

Sincerely,
Dr. Merrill Vargo



Founder and Executive Director

Donor Spotlight:

Springboard Schools would like to recognize Wells Fargo for its \$15,000 contribution to our Leadership Development Fund. Spanning all of North America, Wells Fargo is the largest financial institution in the Western United States. Wells Fargo is America's 25th largest private employer, is among the top 10 Biggest Givers in Corporate Philanthropy according to *BusinessWeek*, and is ranked the 16th most admired company by *Barron's*. Wells Fargo is proud to support organizations working to strengthen communities. Through the efforts of enthusiastic team member-volunteers and their contributions, Wells Fargo shares its success within



the community by giving to areas that are important to the future of our nation's vitality and success: education, community development, human services and the environment. By sponsoring the Springboard Schools Leadership Development Fund, Wells Fargo supports developing the leadership talent our public school system needs to be successful.

Springboard Schools would also like to welcome Pamela Erwin, Sr. Vice President, Wells Fargo Foundation, who recently joined Springboard Schools' Board of Trustees. We are excited to have her as a member of the Springboard Schools family and welcome her expertise and insight to help guide the direction of Springboard Schools.

Thank you, Wells Fargo, for your contribution, and, welcome to you, Pam!

Voices (cont. from page 2)

meaning no employee has lost a job. We are implementing a full-day kindergarten program and a powerful new ELD program, and we are sustaining our momentum in terms of the work we've started with Springboard (data-based decision-making, collaborative learning communities, seeking out research-based best practices, etc.). There's still plenty we can do.

Iturri: You have to find the positive and a way of maintaining morale, otherwise one might just give up. We will NEVER stop finding ways to support our students and families. We have a huge task here, and we have to accomplish it. We become more creative and look to our very generous community for help. Our community has opened their hearts and wallets to help us. However, it should be our state that is funding our basic needs not the community.

Meléndez: We are much more focused on student achievement. Our culture has changed; people are talking about the kids. There's a sense of appreciation, that the people are valued. That the work that we do, no matter what we do, is going to help our children. We're about teaching and about learning. We have no doubt that all students can be successful.

Why is working with Springboard Schools important for you during this time?

Bergevin: Let me count the ways! Working with Springboard enabled me to "hit the bricks running." I had the trust and knowledge that each of my administrative leaders was getting powerful executive coaching from people I knew and who were reinforcing the message I wanted to bring to our district. Prior to Springboard there was no coordinated devel-

opment for administrators to become better instructional leaders. I also knew that I too would have access to some challenging feedback on my priorities from my own coaches. I look at it like a huge "multiplier effect." The Springboard model now lives at each site, each leadership team, each collaborative team, and more and more in each classroom.

Iturri: Springboard puts the package together. They have access to the latest best practices and they can go around the state, around the nation and bring it back to us. When you're in the trenches, when you're in the classrooms, when you're in the administrative offices, you don't have time to go out and look for best practices. Springboard has been able to go out and bring to us what's going on [in other schools and districts] around the country and what's making a difference. Also Springboard has brought to us the ability to work together. Within the district, we all meet regularly and share what we're doing, what our achievements are, to work together, to collaborate.

Meléndez: Principals are the most important people at the school sites; they're the ones who are really going to have that enormous impact on their teachers. If our principals don't have the opportunity to work on their leadership abilities or have coaches they can talk to, then they're missing out on an important resource. With Springboard, it's about knowing we can make a phone call when we need help. But most importantly, it's having someone who can help us implement our broader vision and keeping us aligned and focused to that. Being able to implement our strategy in every single classroom is due in part to our work with the coaches and all our different professional development opportunities that we had. We couldn't have done it otherwise.

Other News

The Springboard Schools Leadership Development Fund

Every child deserves a chance to succeed, and for many students, public schools offer the best road to a bright future. But many California schools are finding it harder and harder to meet the needs of their kids, as the state's continued budget crisis cuts away much needed funding.

Through the Springboard Schools Leadership Development Fund, Springboard Schools is leading the way in supporting a new generation of education leaders with the skills required to raise achievement for all students. In the past two years, Springboard has trained 60 school board members, 250 superintendents, 100 district administrators, 150 principals, and 100 teacher leaders. The Leadership Development Fund

offers the community a tangible way to stand behind their schools and invest in the next generation of education leaders. Every donation enables Springboard Schools to leverage matching funds from the public sector. If you would like to know more about the Springboard Schools Leadership Development Fund, please contact Amy Hood, Director of Development, ahood@springboardschools.org.

Save-The-Date: October 15, 2008

The Springboard Schools Board of Trustees will be hosting its third breakfast discussion forum around the state of public education in California on October 15, 2008 at the Four Seasons Hotel, San Francisco, to discuss the budget crisis and its effect on education in California.