

Budget FAQs:

Frequently asked questions about the upcoming SFUSD budget cuts

Many of you have heard about the unprecedented cuts to education funding California is facing, and the resulting cuts for San Francisco Unified School District. We have heard from Superintendent Carlos Garcia that SFUSD must cut 20% from its budget over the next three years. Some of that will impact the district offices and some, our individual school sites. Here are the answers to some of the questions we have been hearing. As you have more questions or comments, please let us know and we will get you the best answers we can. Please contact the San Francisco District PTA Legislation Chair, Michelle Parker, know via email at legislative@sfpta.org or by phone at 661-2543. Some useful links to more information can be found at the bottom of this Q/A list. Please check back for more information as it becomes available.

- 1. Why are we facing this budget crisis now?** *The quick answer is that the entire economy is in a slump and our state is feeling it and is passing the pain. The longer answer goes all the way back to 1976. The California Supreme Court in Serrano v Priest found California's school finance system unconstitutional because it created huge disparities between high wealth areas and low wealth areas. Education funding moved from one based on local property taxes to a state funded system. This was followed by Prop 13 in 1978 that limited property tax rates to 1 per cent of assessed valuation. California's education spending was among the highest in the nation and has steadily gone down hill ever since. It doesn't help that Prop 98 from 1988 hasn't had the intended effect either. This constitutional amendment guarantees a minimum funding level from state and property taxes for K-14 public schools, and was meant to establish a floor for school funding, but has instead been looked at as a ceiling. In addition, Prop 98 was suspended in bad budget years and there have been disagreements as to what the base level is which the funding formula now works upon. The last major reason we find ourselves in fights for education funding every year, is that our state legislators have a stalemate every summer on passing the budget because it requires a 2/3 vote to pass. California is one of only three states to have this requirement in its constitution.*
- 2. Is this budget problem happening only at some schools? What about middle and high schools?** *No! This budget cut will affect every school in the city and has already been affecting the rest of the state. It is possible that every school site will see a 10-20% cut. At worst, that means stripping to the bare bones of regular classroom teachers, a principal and a secretary. For others who are not fully enrolled, it will be even worse. Not all the answers are out there yet of exactly what it will look like; there is a big difference between 10% and 20%.*
- 3. What about the stimulus package money? Where is this going?** *Much of the stimulus package (as a whole, part of the ARRA) is restricted funding, meaning not everything can be used for just anything. Some schools did see some this year from the SFSF (State Fiscal Stabilization Fund) with more Title 1 (for free and reduced lunch students) and Special Education funds. The district will be applying for a part of the Race to the Top*

funds, if the state gets those funds. This won't be a significant amount in terms of our overall budget and will be aimed mostly at innovation and creativity in reaching low-performing students. Helpful, but not available for general use.

4. **What about Prop H and Prop A? Didn't we approve mandated spending?** *Yes, we are still benefiting from both of these measures. The Prop H fund, passed in 2004 (PEEF- or Public Education Enrichment Fund) is still growing and was put in place to provide sports, libraries, arts, music, early childhood programs and other district uses. Prop A (The Quality Teacher and Education Act), passed in 2008, goes primarily to teachers. It is because we have both of these funds, and because of the foresight of San Francisco residents in supporting the Prop G in 2003 (aka the Rainy Day Fund) that San Francisco hasn't felt the full effects of the budget cuts up until now.*

5. **How come California appears to spend so little on education vs. say Rhode Island?** *Because we do. California is currently 47th in the nation for per pupil spending. We spend an average of \$7,571 per student, behind states like Mississippi, Florida and Idaho, while the highest spending states (Vermont, \$15,139) spend about twice as much per student. California education funding is largely determined at the state level and a 2/3 vote is required to pass the state budget and increase revenue. (In other states, a much higher percentage of school funding comes from local property taxes.) Links to reports that discuss this can be found on this website.*

6. **Can SFUSD reduce its budget at the administration level vs. the school level?** *Yes. Superintendent Garcia has already said they will cut as deeply as possible next year of the 3 year cut projections, and plans to have as many of those cuts as possible at the district level, so as to have as little impact on the students as possible. That is why the range given for school site cuts (10-20%) is so large. They are moving line by line to do the best they can to meet student needs.*

7. **Will we be increasing class sizes next year? What grade levels might be affected?** *Superintendent Garcia has said that class sizes will likely go up again, but hasn't given a number. They will know more in January/February. The higher class sizes are likely to affect transitional grades the most: kindergarten, sixth and ninth grades. Past that is still unknown.*

8. **What can we do about this at our own school sites?** *Get connected! Sign up for PTA Legislative alerts at <http://www.capta.org/sections/advocacy/legislative-alerts.cfm> to find out when there are urgent opportunities to advocate for education and children's issues. Become a member of the city-wide "A Team", a group of parents and teachers working together to find solutions and to create an action plan to make our voices heard. Create an advocacy or legislation chair in your PTA or PTO and get connected into the district PTA network for training and ways to help. Get organized at your own school: get parents, teachers and administrators together to talk about the right plans and focus for your community. We must tell our legislators that enough is enough! It is time to invest in children. Provide parents with messages to convey to our legislators (which this district network can help you with), actions to take, and events to attend. Our advocacy is to*

make sure the state meets its responsibility to pay for teachers and on-going public expenses. Remember, no amount of fundraisers will ever make up for adequate funding in the state budget.

1. Do you have more questions? Please contact Michelle Parker through the PTA email: legislative@sfpta.org
2. Where can I go for more information?
 - *The California State PTA has lots of great resources and information on legislation, advocacy, issues and getting organized at your school www.capta.org. Specific relevant links:*
 1. *California State PTA Legislation Page*
<http://www.capta.org/sections/advocacy/current-legislation.cfm>
 2. *Local PTA Advocacy*
<http://www.capta.org/sections/advocacy/local-advocacy.cfm>
 3. http://www.pta.org/take_action.asp for information on advocacy at the federal level
 4. *Online advocacy toolkit* <http://www.pta.org/3020.asp>
 - *check out www.edsource.org for detailed information on everything you ever wanted to know about California education finance and policy- a fantastic resource! Some of their helpful reports are listed below:*
 1. *“New Federal Education Policies: California’s Challenge” gives the details surrounding the impact of the American Recovery and Investment Act (ARRA) on California’s schools* http://www.edsource.org/pub_new-fed-policies.html
 2. *“School Finance 2008-2009: Fiscal Crisis Meets Political Gridlock” explains the major features of the education budget and some of the complex political and economic factors behind it* http://www.edsource.org/pub_SchFin08-09_report.html
 3. *“Local Revenues for Schools: Limits and Options in California” provides background on schools districts’ current options for raising their own revenues and describes some of the ongoing discussions about ways to allow communities to raise more funds for their schools* http://www.edsource.org/pub_new-fed-policies.html
 4. *“Proposition 98 Sets a Minimum Funding Guarantee for Education” is a short fact sheet*
http://www.edsource.org/pub_prop98.html
 - *The SFUSD budget situation “Demystified for the Average Joe” (presentation given to principals this past fall)*
<http://portal.sfusd.edu/data/budget/BudgetPresentationforPrincipals'Meeting.pdf>

- *“Students First: Renewing Hope for California” The Official Report from the Governor’s Committee on Education Excellence. You will find the executive summary, the full report, as well as a document with answers to frequently asked questions about the education debate in California.*
http://www.edsource.org/reform_GCEE.html
- California Teachers Association at www.cta.org and <http://www.standupforschools.org/>
- California Budget Project does independent analysis to improve the lives of low- and middle-income Californians and has a sections with reports on education in their left hand column www.cbp.org. Some great ones are:
 1. *“How California School’s Get Their Money”- provides an introduction to K-12 school district funding*
http://www.cbp.org/pdfs/2009/090202_SFF_HowSchoolsGetTheirMoney.pdf
 2. *“How Does California Compare”- a report about how education is funded in California, the trends in funding and how it is different in other states*
http://www.cbp.org/pdfs/2007/070926_how_does_ca_comp_are.pdf
 3. *“How California’s School Districts Spend Their Funds”*
http://cbp.org/pdfs/2008/080506_HowDistrictsSpendtheirFunds.pdf
 4. *“School Finance in California and the Proposition 98 Guarantee”* http://cbp.org/pdfs/2006/0604_prop98.pdf
 5. *“What Will the Federal Economic Recovery Act Mean for California’s Schools?”*
http://cbp.org/pdfs/2009/090709_SFF_ARRA.pdf
- *The most recent LAO (Legislative Analyst’s Office) Report on California’s Fiscal Outlook for the 2010-2011 Budget*
<http://www.lao.ca.gov/laoapp/PubDetails.aspx?id=2143> The LAO is California’s Nonpartisan Fiscal and Policy Advisor
- *Powerpoint presentation on impacting legislators (scroll down to “Impacting Legislators” under “Archived Brown Bag Lunch Trainings”* <http://familyvoicesofca.org/?q=node/7>
- *Tips for legislative advocacy*
<http://www.connectforkids.org/node/2694>
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