

# EDUCATION IN TURMOIL

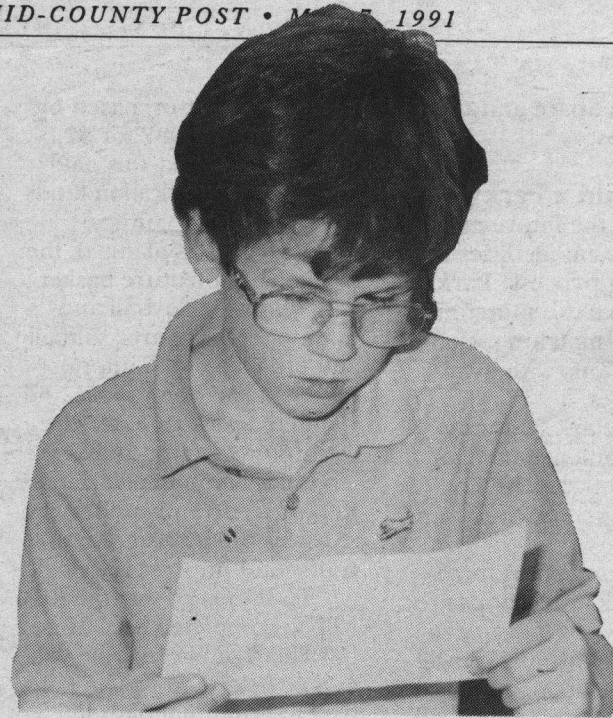
part 3

A school district goes bankrupt in Richmond, and classes may have to end six weeks early. The governor continues searching for ways to balance the state's budget, and hopes of preserving the funding guarantees for schools through Proposition 98 grow dim. President Bush declares there should be more and different types of model schools, but wants businesses to pick up the tab. Thousands of teachers have received lay-off notices, and many more worry their yearly contracts will not be renewed.

In short, all the last few months of turmoil may have produced is more of the same. Even if the debates sound different, the bottom-line still reveals that there are too few dollars to operate schools today.

What are the choices? If the state can't generate the revenues necessary to support public education, then who can? Some say that county government should come up with the money, but where do they find the dollars? And while we wait for the answers, how are teachers holding-up under the pressure?

In this edition of *The Post*, Santa Cruz County Supervisors Jan Beautz and Robley Levy discuss local concerns and why the county decided to impose several million dollars in fees to area schools during last year's budget fiasco. *The Post* also talks to teachers from Mid-County campuses to get their reactions to changes ahead, and gain their perspective on how education does and doesn't work.



## Budget Cuts Frustrate Teachers

by Rachel Strauss

With an unprecedented state budget deficit this year, something's gotta go! If faced with the budget cut guillotine, what would you cut?

- A) daily hot meals
- B) after school buses
- C) on-site counselors
- D) teacher's aides
- E) all of the above and more

Area teachers were recently faced with these choices and struggle every day to keep the reductions as far from the classroom as possible. While

striving to fill the gaps and offer their students the best education possible, elementary, middle, and high school teachers are fearful and resentful.

While budget cuts have been affecting local schools for the past five years, the wounds are getting closer and closer to the bone and classrooms are being stripped of basic educational necessities.

"We've had to make cuts throughout the district, but this year, the cuts are in a whole different league," said Co-President of the Teacher's

Association Penny Chesluk. "The real frustrating thing is that we are full of ideas and expertise that would really improve the way we educate our kids, but we have to keep cutting. Where we want to go is so different from where we're able to."

Teachers and students alike are already feeling the loss of vital extracurricular activities often coined as "fringes"—such as music, sports, and art. "It bothers me that the extracurricular things are being cut because



that enrich you for life. In our country, they're looked at as frills," said Ann DiCiano, 2nd grade teacher at Soquel Elementary School. "It's really important to develop those things that kids can do for the rest of their lives for personal enjoyment and growth!"

In addition to a severe decrease in supply monies for in-class learning, teachers are fearful of losing the already slim budget for out-of-class learning for educators. After spending her week working with over a hundred 13-year-olds a day, New Brighton Middle School teacher Michelle Tomlin looks forward to meeting with colleagues and experts at weekend and summer-time workshops to further her own education.

"I need that intellectual stimulation. It gets me excited about trying new things and I come back ready to 'go for it.' Every industry provides that training as part of your job," she said. "If I'm not valued or my work isn't, why should I put in this kind of work? It's beyond budget cuts, the schools are and have been underfunded!"

But, like Tomlin, some teachers are putting in the kind of work it takes to keep the students afloat—often at the expense of their own earnings and personal lives.

"In general, teachers have already sacrificed life-time earning by going into the profession. Raises don't keep up with the cost of living. The vast majority of teachers are extremely dedicated and concerned first and foremost with teaching in an environment that's good for students," said Chesluk.

Like other educators, Chesluk is disturbed by the common accusation that teachers are just out for bigger paychecks. This argument not only depicts a false sense of self-interest among educators, but has created mounting tension between the teachers and the state.

While educators appreciate the tremendous amount of support at the local level, they say they receive little to no support from Sacramento.

"We don't have the feeling that teachers are valued as important professionals whose work is important to the state's welfare. It feels like they're saying, 'You people are always trying to take the bulk of the state budget and more than your share,'" said Chesluk.

Teachers keeping a keen eye on the governor and president's latest policy decisions are unhappy with the solutions and frustrated with the evident lack of understanding about

"what's really going on inside the classrooms."

"In regards to the president's latest policy of creating new 'model schools,' it seems that it would be more efficient and equitable to put the money into existing schools so that every school would

"But the worst part is that they pit us against each other. We don't want to take away from other human needs and social services. Education is our future and the quality of your democracy is directly equal to the quality of our education," Ziegler said.

***"In regards to the president's latest policy of creating new 'model schools,' it seems that it would be more efficient and equitable to put the money into existing schools so that every school would be a 'model school.'"***

—Suzanne Russo, 2nd and 3rd grade teacher  
Mar Vista Elementary School

be a 'model school,'" said Suzanne Russo, 2nd and 3rd grade teacher at Mar Vista Elementary School.

Statistical comparisons at the April 25 Henry Mello/Sam Farr forum, such as prison and youth authority funding, left many local teachers dumbfounded. After learning that the state spends \$70,000 a year to incarcerate one person in jail but only spends \$4,000 a year on a student, Linda Ziegler, 3rd and 4th grade teacher at Mar Vista Elementary School, was horrified.

And too often, teachers claim, the blame comes down on the educators who are publicly being commanded to serve as band-aids for the unceasing budget cutbacks.

"When I watch the news, there are a lot of comments being made that teachers are 'failing the students due to lack of expertise.' There doesn't appear to be a realization that the students we're working with have many emotional needs that aren't being met in their homes and the greater society," said Russo.

"Teachers need support in order to help children get in a position where they're ready to receive information. A lot of socializing has to go on before they're ready to turn their attention to academics," she said.

An increase, not a decrease, in teacher's aides, on-site counselors and even school nurses would only begin to aid these "at risk" kids

"We work all the time to come up with ideas to help the 'at risk' kids. We've come up with a million good ideas like peer counseling and mini courses, but they can't continue to be supported without the money and the time," said Ellen Damon of New Brighton Middle School.

And as Luis Zavala, bi-lingual teacher's assistant at Aptos High School points out, there's a whole other segment of the student population who are suffering from lack of funding.

A school with a 20 percent Latino population, Aptos High School only has two certified bi-lingual instructors and a handful of bi-lingual aides who risk losing their positions with the cutbacks.

Driven to aid students to improve their math skills, Zavala attempted to launch an extra tutoring session on

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**TEACHERS**

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Sundays, but was turned down by the administration due to lack of funding. Zavala knows that with the cuts, the school will hesitate to hire desperately needed counselors, migrant liaisons, and role models such as himself.

"If these budget cuts take effect, programs such as Mini Core [an organization developed for the improvement of migrant student education] will cease to be successful. These programs are the only link between migrant students and education," he said.

Mending that break between the two is exactly what area teachers are trying to do. Most teachers feel they are still offering their students a strong education.

"Today's students are learning to be more evaluative and critical about material whereas 20 years ago, they were learning how to perform certain tasks. The evaluative and synthesizing skills are much more useful to them as adolescents and adults," said Chesluk.

"They're still getting a good education because teachers are dedicated to giving them one. But, if we were well-funded, it would go that much better," she said.

The question is: how long will they be able to pull it off and at what cost to their personal lives?

A teacher for over 20 years, Damon has definitely felt the ways in which her career has cut into her per-

sonal life. "Teachers have their own lives which get short-shifted. Husbands [and wives] do not understand this. You just don't have time for your personal life. You think, 'it's family, they can understand,' but they don't and it really cuts into your personal life."

And if parents didn't come to the rescue with in-class assistance and donations,

to shoot for their potential? Because, with the amount of energy, money and thought put into education now, the message we're [the society] sending out to kids and society at large is 'we don't really care about you,'" she said.

"I think the majority of people are saying, 'we want to spend more money on education' and the government

***"The children are our future. If we try to make up for our debt by cutting back on education, it'll come back and bite us down the road."***

—Linda Pearson, 5th grade teacher  
Soquel Elementary School

teachers would have it even harder. Having a parent in the room means the 30 to 1 ratio can be broken down and students can receive more personal attention.

Not only is the teacher-parent relationship vital to an educational world full of cut-backs, but it is necessary for teachers to feel a level of mutual respect within the field.

"In our district, there's a tremendously high level of friendship, morale and respect within schools and across grade levels. We're all doing a job we love to do with people we enjoy working with in a community we love. I really don't see the burnt-out teacher character," said Chesluk.

Anything but a burnt-out teacher, Tomlin points out what she feels is the bottom line. "Have we [as a society] decided that we want to provide an equal education for everybody to have the chance

isn't listening. This is supposed to be a representative democracy but they're spending more money on guns than on butter."

One thing all teachers agree on is this: the government needs to hear from everybody—not just teachers. In order to preserve the education of our future, it's time, they say, for the public to be heard.

"The children are our future. If we try to make up for our debt by cutting back on education, it'll come back and bite us down the road. If it gets to the point where kids suffer, if it really does degenerate, we'll see more unemployment and more crime," said Linda Pearson, 5th grade teacher at Soquel Elementary School.

"We're going for the immediate fix, but what we think we're saving now will cost us down the road." □



Teachers Linda Ziegler (L) and Susan Russo of Mar Vista Elementary School.