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## Lafayette Parcel Tax for Schools on May Ballot

By Cathy Tyson

With a unanimous vote by the Lafayette School Board, a parcel tax will go on the May 3rd ballot as an emergency measure to continue to provide a quality education program in the face of deep cuts in school funding by the state legislature.

Voters will be asked to levy a \$176 per parcel temporary tax for four years to maintain core academic programs in math, science, art, music and more. If approved, the tax will take effect on July 1, 2011 and deliver \$1.5 million to Lafayette schools each year. Seniors can receive a special exemption.

Resolutions for the tax spell out the reasoning behind the measure: the District has not been fully funded to provide a quality education, and the District has exhausted all feasible means of generating revenue. No stone has been left unturned, even sports fields are rented out to LMYA and CYO programs, and facility rental fees are paid by the summer Jazz camp, scouts and others.

"We have to plan for the worst," said School Board Member Teresa Gerringer. "We've already cut \$2 million over the past two years and we still have a structural deficit." She said that schools are not being adequately funded by the state, but the District still needs to provide a quality education that parents expect.

Not only are severe cuts coming from Sacramento, but there is a timing issue that exacerbates the problem.

According to School Services, an organization that advises school districts, there will be a \$330 per pupil cut, which roughly equals \$1 million District-wide. This is in addition to \$2 million that has been cut over the last two years.

Required notification only complicates the dilemma. The Lafayette School District is required to notify teachers by March 15 if there is the possibility of a layoff, and yet a final state budget is not anticipated until June. How can the District know if they will have money to pay teachers if they have no idea what the budget will be?

At a recent meeting addressing the Lafayette Elementary school PTA, District Superintendent Dr. Fred Brill said, "The budget is very unsatisfying for a number of reasons - there is extra ordinary uncertainty."

"I take an incremental approach - we want to protect core systems to keep a program of the highest quality." With 89% of budget going to personnel costs, with continued cuts, teachers and aides will feel the brunt of the budget ax. There have already been cuts to custodial services and school maintenance; teachers have taken two furlough days and administrators took three furlough days.

Last week, Brill explained that the problem is the state budget is based on a lot of questionable assumptions that may or may not pan out. "A parcel tax gives us revenue that can't be taken away by the state."

As California faces a \$25.6 billion budget deficit over the next year and a half, it's clear that something has to give. Just last week in a poll by the Public Policy Institute of California, a non-profit non-partisan think tank, 71% of likely voters responded that they were willing to pay higher taxes to support kindergarten through 12th grade education.

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