



Alameda Unified School District
Excellence & Equity For All Students

Superintendent's Office
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UPDATE ON THE AUSD MASTER PLAN PROCESS

At the March 24th Board of Education meeting, I proposed to the Board that we begin a Master Plan process, to be completed by December. The result of the process will be a detailed plan that will provide the district a clear road map for decision-making over the next several years.

Our school district faces many challenges ahead, and important and difficult decisions about facilities, programs and staffing will have to be made. These decisions will impact all of our community so it is imperative that students, families, and staff – as well as the overall Alameda community – participate in the Master Plan process and face these challenges together.

To act as a sounding board and provide feedback as I move through this Master Plan process I've asked a few individuals to serve on an advisory group. I selected them based on their expertise and skills in curriculum, instruction, administration, fiscal background, student experience, and community outreach. Members of the group are Steve Jubb, Ed O'Neil, Sean McPhetridge, Vickie Smith, Rob Siltanen, Katherine Crawford, Jennifer Ramos, Ben O'Neil, Maggie Muir, Maureen Erwin, Ash Vesudeva, and Stephanie Wilson. If you run into them, please feel free to talk with them about the Master Plan process. I welcome everyone's feedback. This group will end in August after the August 18th meeting. I look forward to all members of our community joining us in this work.

COMMUNITY MEETINGS

As part of this planning process, I have scheduled three community meetings to take a close look at the District's current and future financial outlook, and to discuss possible solutions to the financial situation we all face.

We have completed the first two of these community meetings that seek to address a series of questions and engage the community in a dialogue about the future of our schools.

Our first two meetings and their topics were:

Community Meeting #1

Can AUSD Live on State Funding Alone?

Wednesday, May 20th, 6:30 – 8:00 PM at Henry Haight Elementary School, 2025 Santa Clara Avenue

At this first meeting, we took a close look at what it would mean for the district to "live within our means," surviving only on state and federal funds. To live only on what the state provides per student would mean significant cutbacks including school closures, raising class size, teacher layoffs, and severe program cuts that would significantly change the face of the Alameda School District.

AUSD will soon face a severe financial crisis. While we have made more than \$7 million in cuts over the last seven years, there remain three significant issues that threaten the district:

- 1) Continued unreliability of state funding
- 2) Declining enrollment
- 3) Expiration of our two parcel taxes in 2011-2012 that represent a loss of \$7.3 million in funding

"Education is the key to unlock the golden door to freedom." – George Washington Carver

Those threats will leave the district with a projected on-going deficit of \$7.2M in 2011-2012, which grows to a projected deficit of \$14.5M in 2012-2013 when the existing School Parcel Tax ends.

We are living on one-time monies, and without our parcel taxes, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), and categorical flexibility, we are looking at budget cuts of \$7.2 million for 2011-2012, and \$14.5 million for 2012-2013.

AUSD does a very good job of running a lean district. There is really no "fat" to cut.

- Teachers' salaries rank 14th out of 16 local districts
- Administrative costs rank 17th out of 17 local districts
- Expenditures for employee benefits rank 10th out of 17 local districts

Given this financial scenario and the fact that we already run a very lean district, what cuts would be next? The cuts that offer the most significance in savings, and are traditionally where districts look to cut, are:

- School closures
- Program cuts
- Increasing class sizes (while most districts have the flexibility to increase class size, in Alameda, this option would require modification of AUSD's contract with AEA, our teachers)

For more information please visit www.alameda.k12.ca.us/AUSD_Master_Plan.htm to view the power point presentation presented at this first community meeting.

The State Budget Crisis Impact On AUSD Funding

Last year AUSD adopted a budget based on the State's 2008/09 budget promises. In 2008/09 the State would reimburse AUSD \$5,779 per student, generating \$55,000,000.

In February 2009, the Governor and Legislature passed a historic budget deal that changed the promises for 2008/09 and established promises for 2009/10. The State would now reimburse AUSD \$5,627 per student or \$53,500,000 for 2008/09 and \$5,575 per student or \$53,000,000 for 2009/10.

Due to the failure of May 19 ballot initiatives and the worsening economy, the Governor has revised his promises once again. Under his proposed May revision, AUSD would now receive \$51,500,000 or \$5,408 per student for 2008/2009, and \$49,000,000 or \$5,223 per student for 2009/10.

If the legislature approves the Governor's budget, AUSD will receive \$3,500,000 less than expected for 2008/2009 and \$6,000,000 below 2007/08 funding levels in 2009/2010.

With three weeks left in the fiscal year, AUSD still does not know the amount of funding the State of California is going to send us for the 2008/09 school year.

Thanks to the combined \$7 million in *temporary* funding from Measures A and H, we are able to cover some of the budget shortfall. However, until we know the exact amount in funding we will receive from the state, the actual shortfall amount remains unclear. This year's budget crisis is, I believe, an unfortunate preview into the continued funding crises we will face next year and beyond when the \$7 million in parcel tax funding expires in 2011-2012, and the future of the state's fiscal health remains tenuous.

While this financial outlook is difficult to face, I feel it is important to ensure that every member of the Alameda community, whether you have children in school or not, understand the tenuous and ever-shifting financial situation AUSD is in.

Once the legislature either adopts or amends the Governor's proposed budget this summer, I will send you an updated per pupil budget figure.

Community Meeting #2

What Would a District of Charter Schools Look Like?

Tuesday, June 2nd, 6:30 – 8:00 PM at Edison Elementary School, 2700 Buena Vista Avenue

Our second meeting looked at whether charter schools represent a financial or educational opportunity for the district. The question we asked was “should some or all of the district schools convert to charter?”

We had a large turnout and spent a great deal of time after our presentation answering important and thoughtful questions about how charters might operate in Alameda. The presentation and discussion was simply to impart and gather information. No decisions were being made that night.

Supporters of charter schools embrace their flexibility in curriculum choice, budget and staffing, their freedom to innovate, and their ability to make quick and effective changes to meet student needs.

Charter school opponents cite the potential to negatively impact the school district’s revenue, the variation in quality of schools, and the potential ability of charters to pick and choose whom they educate as reasons to oppose charters.

While this is an extremely complex, and at times controversial issue, we did learn that the district would lose a significant amount of money should it convert entirely to a charter district.

However, converting one-by-one may not be as adverse financially for individual schools, though there are many variables for the district to consider and the final numbers would need to be examined more closely.

Exploring whether it is fiscally prudent to pursue charter schools one-by-one will be better answered with a more detailed analysis and after the Board of Education and I have listened to the desires of AUSD families, employees, and community members and have a clear picture of their vision, goals and priorities for our schools.

Please visit www.alameda.k12.ca.us/AUSD_Master_Plan.htm to view the power point presentation for more information and funding details.

Community Meeting #3

How Do We Define and Provide for a Quality Education in Light of the Funding Challenges We Face?

Tuesday, August 18th, 6:30 – 8:00 PM at Wood Middle School, 420 Grand Street

We will be looking at other options for the school district including magnets and school consolidations. It is my intent to put all options on the table for discussion, as we don’t have the relative luxury of simply picking a few programs to eliminate or administrative costs to reduce in order to put us in the black financially.

Unfortunately, we are in a situation in which there is no easy answer that will please everyone. Our choices will be difficult, but I am confident that, as a community, we can come together to find a solution that will provide our children with the best education possible.

We will be scheduling more meetings in the fall and will keep you updated as we move forward. Please be sure to come to as many of these community meetings as you can, your contribution is very important to the success of our Master Plan process.

As always, if you have questions or concerns, please call me at 337-7060 or e-mail me at kvital@alameda.k12.ca.us .

Sincerely,

Kirsten Vital
Superintendent of Schools