

Budget Notebook



Chronicling California's developing budget and its impact on IUSD

Superintendent's Update: IUSD takes necessary steps to ensure financial stability despite state budget crisis

BY SUPERINTENDENT GWEN E. GROSS, Ph.D.

We are still months away from glimpsing a tangible state budget, but the Irvine Unified School District has already taken the steps necessary to ensure fiscal solvency in the face of California's economic crisis.

On April 15, our Board of Education reluctantly approved a list of [budget adjustments for 2008-09](#), developed with input from staff, parents and our community.

This was not an easy task. But with much collaboration and some creative thinking, we were able to spare class-size reduction, as well as athletics, our valuable media specialists, support for larger classes and our popular Secondary Writing Project. Moreover, our Board made the admirable decision to preserve 120 minutes of weekly science instruction for fourth- and fifth-graders, directing staff to utilize one-time funds from the Irvine Ranch Water District to make up the difference.

When all was said and done, IUSD had closed the \$12.5 million gap projected from the Governor's 2008-09 spending plan, giving our principals just enough time to work strategically and thoughtfully to develop the best possible instructional programs for next year's students.

Ongoing cuts vs. one-time cuts

As you will recall, school districts are being forced to produce budgets well in advance of the state, which likely won't adopt its budget until August or September. That means our spending plans are based almost entirely on the Governor's January proposal to trim \$4.8 billion from education. This has led many of you to ask, "What happens if the cuts come in lower than initially proposed, thereby lessening the impact on IUSD?" The answer is that our district is now aptly positioned for either scenario.

Our staff has devised a series of strategies to bridge our

\$12.5 million shortfall, but not all of these strategies are ongoing cuts; some result in savings for one year only.

For example, we implemented a freeze this year on school site allocation dollars to save about \$5 million. And we've deferred some maintenance costs for one year only, saving another \$750,000. Both of these actions will serve us well for 2008-09, but what happens if the budget crisis continues beyond that, as most experts predict?

By adjusting staffing ratios and lowering some site allocations, we've managed to produce about \$6.15 million in ongoing savings, meaning these dollars will help in 2008-09 and beyond, if necessary.

In this way, we are prepared for the worst case scenario – the projected \$12.5 million deficit under the Governor's plan – but we

have not shortchanged our schools by cutting too deep in case the economic forecast improves.

Diligent planning, collaboration are key

Of course, if the Governor's proposal does become a reality, we know that additional cuts may be necessary a year from now. But we remain hopeful that the Governor and the Legislature will hear the pleas of California's families and minimize cuts to education.

The past few months have posed many challenges, and more lie ahead. But, once again, diligent planning and a collaborative spirit have secured our fiscal stability going forward. Credit the remarkable Irvine community, our thoughtful Board of Education and a tireless staff for working together to meet our financial responsibilities, while never forgetting that kids are the real bottom line.

For more information on IUSD's budget, or to see a full list of adjustments for 2008-09, check out the district's Budget Watch page at www.iusd.org/budget_watch.

