

MacDougall: District to host community meetings

Contributed by Dr. William MacDougall
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The Konocti Unified School District (KUSD) is currently making plans and decisions for the 2009-2010 school year. We want to make sure that whatever decisions we make improve our current programs and support student success.

These financially difficult times have forced everyone to take a very close look at all of our programs. This is a very good thing. We must determine what is working well and should be preserved and even expanded. We also need to look at what is not working and should be modified or eliminated from our program.

You are our clients. We value your opinions and insights. In the upcoming days, there will be several opportunities for you to express your opinions. We have scheduled five special board meetings in February so that we can hear your opinions and insights. These meetings will take place from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. on the following days and at the following locations:

- Feb. 17: In the Oak Hill Middle School multi-purpose room;
- Feb. 19: East Lake Elementary School cafeteria;
- Feb. 24: Lower Lake Elementary School cafeteria;
- Feb. 25: Burns Valley Elementary School cafeteria;
- Feb. 26: Pomo Elementary School cafeteria

The driving force behind our making these decisions is the current fiscal situation in California and our district.

We have been cutting costs in the district for several years now. Last year, KUSD cut a million dollars out of our \$28 million budget. The majority of these cuts were made away from the classroom; for example, we eliminated the assistant superintendent and district curriculum and instruction positions.

Yet, the budget reductions keep coming. We are expecting to have to cut close to a million more dollars at mid-year when the state decides on this school year's (2008-09) budget. Projections are that we will need to cut another \$1 million next year.

In late October, we formed committees of district personnel, parents, and community members to investigate and recommend methods to increase our revenue and decrease our spending. These recommendations were presented to the KUSD Board of Trustees on Feb. 4. Copies of the recommendations can be obtained at the District Office or can be emailed.

Schools receive monies from the state and federal governments based upon student enrollment and attendance. The easiest way to increase revenue is for our students to attend school more regularly. If we increase our overall district attendance by 1 percent, then we will earn another \$180,000. More importantly, when our students attend more, they learn more, and will be better prepared for life.

Lowering costs is a far more difficult problem because we have cut so much already that we are down to cutting personnel and consolidating our services. This is where we need your opinions and input. KUSD has been the leader in determining ways that the county, city of Clearlake and other school districts can join together to reduce our purchasing costs and prevent the duplication of services.

This will certainly save dollars, but not enough to balance our budget. We must do something that will significantly reduce our costs over a long period of time, while at the same time improving our overall services to the students.

The consolidation committee has recommended three plans to do this. They are ranked below in order of costs saved.

Plan No. 1: Close Oak Hill Middle School and make Burns Valley, Pomo and Lower Lake Elementary Schools serve kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8). East Lake would remain a K-8, but with a higher enrollment.

Plan No. 2: Close Oak Hill Middle School and make Burns Valley a K-3 and Pomo a fourth through eighth grade school. Lower Lake Elementary becomes a K-8. East Lake would remain a K-8, but with a higher enrollment.

Plan No. 3: Close Burns Valley Elementary and have Pomo and Lower Lake both continue as K-6 schools with expanded enrollment including former Burns Valley students. Oak Hill continues as a 7-8 school and East Lake a K-8.

There are many pros and cons to each of these plans. The committee felt that the best way to judge a plan was by using the following criteria:

1. Is it beneficial for students by improving opportunities for learning? 2. Will it save money? 3. How does it affect the parents and community? 4. What is the impact on certificated and classified staff members? 5. Can it be done by the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year?

The pros and cons of each of these plans will be further discussed at the February board meetings at each site. In addition, all parents and staff will receive a Connect Ed phone survey on Friday, Feb. 27, at 7 p.m. We ask that you vote for the plan that you think best meets the above criteria at that time. If you are unavailable to answer the survey at that time, you will receive another call on Saturday morning (Feb. 28) at 10 a.m. Your opinion is important and valued.

The Konocti Board of Trustees, your elected representatives, has placed our students' academic and personal growth until graduation as their Overriding Goal. To do this, their priorities are: safety, low class sizes and intervention programs. They want to reduce the number of combo classes (two grade levels in one classroom), make sure that the smallest class sizes are in the lower grade levels (K-3), and make the last personnel cuts those who directly work with students in the classroom.

The board also emphasized the importance of art, music, drama, career tech (vocational education) and athletics in grades K-12. In short, the board of trustees has mandated that we provide a full curriculum, in fully staffed, safe classrooms. These are superb goals that we can achieve and our children deserve.

Thanks so much for your willingness to help us make wise decisions that improve our educational services. Together, we will make sure that the Konocti Unified School District is known statewide for students who receive the education necessary for a happy, productive life.

William MacDougall, Ed.D, is superintendent of the Konocti Unified School District.

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