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## Stimulus Plan Will Net Berkeley Unified School District \$4 Million Over Two Years

By RIYA BHATTACHARJEE <sup>350</sup> fiscal year.

The \$819 billion federal economic recovery package that the House approved Wednesday will inject California's public school system with nearly \$10 billion in federal aid over the next two years, providing funds for scholarships, child-care development, at-risk children, Head Start, school renovations and other programs.

Under the proposed stimulus package, the Berkeley Unified School District is set to receive a little over \$4 million over the next two years in combined construction, special education and Title I funding increases, with \$2.5 million allocated for 2009-10 and the remaining assigned for the next

Other East Bay school districts, such as Oakland Unified and Alameda Unified, will receive a total of about \$64 and \$4.5 billion, respectively.

Alameda County Superintendent of Schools Sheila Jordan said that funds for the different school districts were based on enrollment, adding that a lot of time was being spent to analyze how California—which received some extra money compared to others, since it was an “economically distressed state”—would use the funding.

The news comes at a time when the state's public education system, like that of many other states nationwide, is reeling under the threat of possible state budget cuts that would take

away billions of dollars in federal spending from school districts, including roughly \$9 million from Berkeley Unified in the next two years.

“Everyone is anxious to see additional money come in,” said Jordan. “This is one-time money, and we can't use it for ongoing costs. The feds want everyone to spend it quickly. The whole idea is to stimulate the economy. As soon as the final bill is released, we will have to press the governor to release the money to the Department of Education, so that it can get it into the hands of the districts. However, exactly how this money is going to be used is not clear.”

Some district educators said that

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the two-year investment in public schools by the federal government could reduce by half the cuts in the district and even curtail lay-offs. Others said that they were fearful the state would take away money to address its own budget problems.

Bill Huyett, superintendent of the Berkeley Unified School District, said that of the total amount assigned to Berkeley, \$1.2 million was for construction, which would leave the district with \$3 million and do nothing to alleviate its budget problems.

"It will do nothing to relieve this year's cuts, which are going to be around \$3 million," he said, adding that the district had already started the process of determining cuts and layoffs. Huyett said that cuts for the 2009-10 fiscal year were topping \$6 million.

Nancy Riddle, president of the Berkeley Board of Education, said that although the news was very positive, the district would not be relying on the stimulus package for its initial planning on how to deal with the budget cuts.

"I am hopeful about what we are hearing in Washington but won't count on it," she said. "There aren't any details yet and there are usually strings attached with whatever Washington says."

Riddle said that the proposal itself was very encouraging, since it would fund previously neglected programs such as special education, providing a boost to children who require special care and attention to succeed but don't

always have the financial capabilities.

"The federal government spends so little on education that to have them target things like early childhood education and school renovations—which would create jobs for a lot of people—is really great," she said. "I am hopeful that they will do something about K-12 education as well."

Of the \$14 billion set aside for K-12 repair and modernization, California will receive about \$1.7 billion over the next two years to be used for health and safety repairs, revamping educational technology, and infrastructure and facility upgrades for disabled students.

Board Vice President Karen Hemphill said that she was happy that the United States finally had a president who recognized the importance of federal support in public education.

"I welcome the fact that President Obama wants our children to be com-

"It's the first time in many years that the federal government is stepping up to its plate and providing money with mandates," Hemphill said that although federal law required school districts to provide appropriate education to special education students—which could range from going to a speech therapist to accommodation in another school district—the government has always underfunded the program, leaving school districts with no choice but to use general fund money.

"To read that the federal government is signing an increase in funds for special education means that they finally realize that the mandates are costly, and it needs to be a part of paying for those services," she said.

The stimulus plan would provide \$13 billion over two years to increase the federal share of special education costs and prevent these mandatory expenses

from forcing states to cut other areas of education. It also sets aside \$600 million to help districts serve children with disabilities age two and under.

California is expected to receive \$1,422,484,000 in special education funds over two years.

Cathy Campbell, president of the Berkeley Federation of Teachers, said that an increase in federal aid to special education would free up general fund dollars that pay for teacher salaries, leading to fewer cuts and layoffs.

"This is helpful but doesn't change the fact that the state government is completely failing the students of California irrespective of this money," she said. "Their lack of action is going to lead to a high number of layoffs."

State law mandates that teachers be sent layoff notices by March 16 this year.