

Fiscal adviser picked for schools

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■ Analyst will help Hayward district, which must slash budget by \$18 million, Alameda County says

By Eric Kurhi

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HAYWARD — "We're cutting into bone," was the mantra repeated often last year during the school district budgeting process.

This year's catchphrase might include the word "amputations."

Alameda County appointed a fis-

cal adviser to the Hayward school district this week to help board members make \$18 million in cuts to a \$180 million budget.

The board had given the county a qualified budget — one that said it would be possible to stay afloat in the short term — but it was rejected, making the district the only

one in Alameda County to carry a negative certification.

"It is my responsibility to ensure that, as tough as it is, there is a balanced budget at the end of the day," said Sheila Jordan, superintendent of the Alameda County Office of Education. She cited past and ongoing deficit-spending as a reason for the certification and the fiscal adviser.

The adviser has final say over board decisions regarding the budget. If the adviser cannot help the

district maintain solvency, the district risks being taken over by the state.

Hayward was appointed a similar adviser in 2003, when the district was facing a \$12.7 million deficit. It took three years for the district to regain financial independence from the county.

But that was different, board President Paul Frumkin said.

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"When we went through it before, it had to do with the prior administration spending down to nothing," he said.

"This time it's not because of our decisions or budget process. This is really about the state, and the lack of political will on that level."

The new cuts must be made because of state reductions to per-student funding, as well as cost-of-living adjustments that have been frozen or reduced. The district has used most of its reserve, and federal stimulus funds that were used to preserve programs last year won't be available this time around. Declining enrollment in Hayward schools also has taken a toll.

"I welcome the adviser, but don't know where the heck we're going to cut \$18 million," trustee Sarah Gonzales said. "Even reducing teacher work days by 10 days a year would not do it. It's an impossible task that we have before us — I can't sit here with a straight face and say we're not going to put the screws to the kids of Hayward."

The budget decisions will be reached in coming months following a series of meetings by a budget advisory committee.

The committee will take under consideration resident input from the community meetings already held and other outreach methods outlined in a Wednesday presentation by Interim Superintendent Janis Duran, who headed the district last time it was in dire financial straits.

"It's very important to hear from the community, not only in terms of what they want to keep, but also to hear their ideas. People are often very good at thinking outside of the box," Duran said.

Jordan advised the board to expedite the budget process as much as possible and "overestimate the kinds of cuts you will make."

She emphasized that a state bailout is not an acceptable option.

"The state does not have money," she said. "If we have to go before the state and ask them for money, I don't even want to think about what would happen. They are expecting everyone to do their jobs, and that includes you and me."

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