

Financing Q&A

Q: So, do "our schools really win" in the California Lottery?

A: The lottery supplied 2.1 percent of the state budget for kindergarten through 12th grade last year — \$767 million, or \$125 per pupil. Since 1985, schools have received a yearly average of \$120 per pupil under the law requiring the lottery to give 34 percent of its receipts to public education, including universities. It's more than \$11 billion.

Q: Shouldn't the state give the same money per student to each district to balance inequities between suburban and inner-city schools?

A: In California, suburban schools are not necessarily better funded than urban schools. Often, the reverse is true.

Barbara Miller of EdSource uses the analogy of a bucket of money at each district. First, property taxes are poured in. Then state money is poured in to fill up the bucket. If more property tax goes into one district's bucket, it doesn't mean the district has more total money. It means less state money is being poured in.

The courts have ruled that this system is fair. Most districts are eligible for millions of extra dollars for specific purposes, such as remedial classes, English language development or smaller class sizes. Many such programs serve low-income students.

Q: Why do districts like Hillsborough have lots of money while others can't even afford enough textbooks?

A: Continuing the bucket analogy, about 60 of California's 1,000 school districts have enough property taxes to fill the bucket to overflowing. They may keep it. Still, the California Constitution guarantees such districts a basic level of state aid, \$120 per pupil. These wealthy enclaves, including Hillsborough, are called Basic Aid districts.

The state gives about \$31.85 per pupil for kindergarten through eighth-grade books. Most districts find this too little, so they dip into other funds. Districts with needier students have a harder time dipping.

Expect a new flurry of book-buying soon, however. Districts have gotten an extra \$42 per pupil during each of the past four years for books reflecting the state's new academic standards.

Q: I had assumed that inequities between districts' property tax revenues had been equalized somewhat, but I keep hearing that the Alameda school district has one of the lowest per capita rates of revenue from property tax in the Bay Area. How is that?

A: Property tax revenue for Alameda city schools is lower than in many Bay Area districts — but what really matters is the combination of local and state funding. The courts have said the combined revenue should be compared against the statewide average, not nearby districts. That means Alameda's funding is at 98 percent of the average.

Q: What is the budget at a "good" public school like Lowell High in San Francisco vs. a "bad" one like McAteer High?

A: Lowell High School received the top ranking of 10 on the state's comparison of school test scores, while McAteer ranked 1, the lowest. (Note that Lowell rejects all but the highest-scoring applicants.) District records show these budget figures for both schools last year:

■ McAteer gets \$3,811 per pupil. Lowell gets \$3,086. But more of Lowell's budget may be spent freely — 87 percent, compared with McAteer's 71 percent.

■ Military education: McAteer gets more than twice what Lowell gets per pupil.

■ Gifted program: Lowell gets twice what McAteer's gets per pupil.

■ Desegregation: McAteer gets three times as much per pupil for the program to aid black and Latino students academically. But when looked at as dollars per black and Latino pupils, Lowell gets 25 percent more money than McAteer, even though there are far more blacks and Latinos at McAteer.

■ Books and texts: Lowell gets \$7 per pupil. McAteer gets zero.

■ Teacher training: McAteer gets more than three times as much per pupil as Lowell.

— Nanette Asimov

THE ARTS

New standards badly underfunded

Rosanna Russell of San Francisco chose Rooftop Elementary for her artsy 5-year-old, Lia, because of its high scores and its "arts magnet" program, meant to attract children who enjoy drawing, painting, music and dance.

When Lia won a place at Rooftop last year, Russell was thrilled. Then confused. The arts magnet school had no art teacher.

"It's incredibly distressing," she said. "Lia would have no art or music if parents didn't teach it."

How an arts magnet school like Rooftop wound up with a patchwork quilt of an arts program — sewn together from charitable donations, one-time grants, half-time instructors and parent volunteers — is also the story of arts funding in California schools.

The state has no arts education budget. But that didn't stop the state Board of Education from

adopting rigorous arts standards in January. By fifth grade, for example, students are supposed to be able to draw using perspective, create an "expressive abstract" work after looking at a real object and assemble a sculpture that reflects "unity and harmony."

And that's just for the 11-year-olds.

"How can we ever implement those standards if the schools don't have funding for supplies and teachers and professional development?" asked Patty Taylor, the arts coordinator for the state Department of Education.

More than 75 percent of California students take no art, a survey by the state Department of Education found last year.

Aware that such classes stimulate children's interest in school, all but a handful of districts try to offer some art. But the subject is absent from the most influential

funding engine of all: the state's achievement test. So state funding is also absent.

Nearly half of districts, use general fund money for art, the survey found. That's the same fund used for salaries and books, so competition for dollars is fierce.

In districts like San Francisco, which has cut millions of dollars from its general fund over the past three years, art is an afterthought. The district devotes less than 1.8 percent of its general fund to art. City government throws in \$600,000. Not one elementary school has an art teacher on staff, and kids have no music teachers until the fourth grade.

Some districts, 7 percent, dip into state and federal funds set aside for other purposes to pay for art. Charitable donors supply programs to 14 percent of districts. Fund-raisers are used by another 14 percent, and 16 percent rely on

parent groups.

The PTA — which pays for art programs at many schools — sees a crisis.

"It's terrible," said Carol Kocivar of the California PTA. "We have research showing the arts help at-risk kids, yet we're not funding it."

Schools with many low-income children are often least likely to have art, since their parents are the least able to raise the money.

The PTA has made restoring the arts a priority and set up a Web site at <http://www.theartcouncil.org/to/index.htm>. The group also approached Democratic Assemblyman Kevin Shelley of San Francisco.

Now, his Assembly Bill 869 sits in limbo in the Assembly Appropriations Committee, its members bombarded by e-mails and calls from parents who are desper-

ate to bring back the arts. But Kocivar said the energy crisis could be its downfall no matter how badly the public wants it.

At Rooftop, the arts school Principal Richard Curci said Winston Churchill was told once that precious funds could be saved for the war effort by cutting the arts. He replied, "What the hell do you think we're fighting for?"

As befits an arts school, Rooftop has become creative about funding. Each Friday, volunteers teach art to the youngest children. Teachers write grants that have brought in mask-makers and dancers. And the PTA pays a part-time art teacher for special education students and fourth-graders.

"But this is all soft money," Curci said. "We need hard money, and a commitment from the president on down to our governor to pour money into the arts. I think they'd see a better world."

— Nanette Asimov



Alameda Unified School District teachers put on a mock funeral last week to mourn the lack of progress in contract negotiations.

TEACHER SALARIES

Big school budget still not enough

Despite infusion of \$1.8 billion by lawmakers, educators' incomes low

"If you want a first-rate military, or any profession, you have to pay for it."

WAYNE JOHNSON
president, California Teachers Association

To run the small nation that is the California school system — population 6 million students — lawmakers devote a tiny slice of the budget to books.

The vast majority of the budget, 86 percent, pays support staff and teachers' salaries and benefits. Still, the average new teacher earns \$32,000 and works for more than 20 years before reaching the top pay of about \$60,000.

That's hardly a sexy enticement for the 300,000 new teachers California needs to hire this decade to cover its burgeoning classrooms and help students meet the state's new academic standards.

Yet these salary figures represent a recent raise for many teachers. They are the fruits of a \$1.8 billion infusion of education funds authorized by lawmakers last year. Even the most conservative state lawmakers, usually at odds with union interests, said the teachers deserved the raise.

"I think teachers are woefully underpaid," said Sen. Jim Brulte, R-Rancho Cucamonga (San Bernardino County). "We felt the money should go to

districts with no strings attached."

Alameda Unified School District was among the few districts that held off on salaries. Fed up with years of flat pay, its teachers voted last week to strike if necessary.

"We're always given the crumbs," said union President Margorie Stanley.

Business manager Lorenzo Legaspi said the district is "not willing to rob Peter to pay Paul." Programs and salaries are at war for scarce resources, he said.

A new teacher in Alameda earns \$33,000, while neighbor-

ing districts pay newcomers \$34,500 to \$38,700.

"Teachers are always asking me for recommendations so they can leave," lamented Principal Keith Nomura of Lincoln Middle School.

Even in districts that have raised salaries, pay is so low that college graduates hesitate to go into teaching. There is no incentive to get a credential when salaries are too low to pay off college loans.

Gov. Gray Davis has created a debt relief program, but one in seven California teachers has no credential. That climbs to one in three in poor neighborhoods, says a new report by the California Teachers Association.

"If you want a first-rate military, or any profession, you have to pay for it," said Wayne Johnson, the association's president. "Forty to 50 percent of teachers quit within the first five years."

In the past, women with few choices went into teaching and worked for next to nothing. Harriet Perl, who began teaching in the 1940s, was among them.

"These days she could have

been an attorney, a surgeon, anything," Johnson said. "Instead, public education got the brilliant services of this woman for 35 years for minimum wage. She'd never go into teaching now."

The experience at one South Bay district shows how things have changed. Desperate administrators hired an inexperienced candidate after a 15-minute interview and assigned him 45 students with behavior problems.

"I was their seventh teacher," said the man, who asked not to be identified. "Was I qualified? No, and I told them as much."

But his inexperience soon caught up with him when he grabbed a student by the shirt. "I thought it would be permitted," said the former employee. "I thought wrong."

Stacy Stephens, an experienced teacher, loves her profession but can't afford to stay in San Francisco. After much hunting, she has found a place that will pay her a living wage. "I'm going to teach in Kuwait," she said.

— Nanette Asimov

COUNSELING

Conversation could make a difference

Say you're a middle school student. Someone's bullying you. Your parents are divorcing. You feel angry and scared, so you hang out in your room a lot and sleep.

These days, you might fantasize about "pulling a Columbine" and imagine what that student in Santee felt when he pulled the trigger. Sometimes you consider suicide.

In 1977, you could have knocked on your school counselor's door. At Berkeley's King Middle School, there were five counselors to choose from.

School counseling was among the first services to be cut after voters passed the property tax cap of Proposition 13 in 1978 and the Gann spending limit a year later.

Today, California ranks last in the nation in the number of school counselors available to students, state records show. The national average is one counselor to 513 students. In California, it's one to 979.

By 1984, King Middle School had no counselors left. That was the year Jan Sells arrived. She had quit teaching to become a psychologist, and needed counseling hours to get her license. King had no money, so Sells did an unusual thing. She worked for free.

King was a typical urban school with frustrations and fights. Four principals quit during Sells' first four years there.

Today, after 17 years at King, Sells supervises seven interns working toward their licenses.

"At any given time there are over 100 kids seeing counselors," she said. "We do grief therapy, family therapy and crisis intervention." Sells helped some 400 students settle differences this year.

She is paid a part-time salary from Berkeley's parcel tax.

"When kids are being bullied or feel threatened, they come and tell me," said Sells, who is writing a book on conflict resolution.

"We're not perfect here. Every year, there have been kids talking about suicide, and several have tried. Every year, there are kids who get pregnant or run away."

But scores are up at King, and in April the campus was named a "Distinguished School."

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin is pushing for a \$60 million counseling budget to pay for 1,124 new counselors each year for five years to bring the state up to the national average.

"We need this," Eastin said. "It's one day's worth of energy bills per year."

— Nanette Asimov

Sources: Barbara Miller, research director for EdSource, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education data group in Palo Alto; California Department of Education; California Teachers Association; School Services of California Inc.; California State Lottery Commission