

Eye On The Board

The Salinas Valley Federation of Teachers
21 West Laurel Drive, Suite 61, Salinas, CA 93926-3434
Telephone: 831-442-8234 * Fax: 831-442-8563
E-mail: presidents@svft.net

Board Highlights ~ February 12, 2008

Reported by Mariann Klinger

Figures show class sizes hit averages

Overloaded classes, long an issue with teachers, got whittled down to size – an average of 31 or 32 students per class.

Numbers crunching left all schools in the district with class sizes at contract levels. Only physical education classes carried loads at an average of 44 or 45 students, according to a report by Associate Superintendent **Alejandro Hogan**.

Hogan presented the numbers by individual schools. In each school, only physical education carried more than a 31 or 32 average student load.

But a list of average student numbers overlooks the fact that some teachers carry well over the average in every class, SVFT Co-president **Peggy Carroll** said after the meeting.

Carroll said that some classes are small. When the smaller classes are averaged in with much larger general education classes the result is an average that may appear reasonable.

Even the average physical education class load of 44 can be deceiving. Some PE classes contain 50 or more students.

The report suggested even lower class sizes than the average high of 31 or 32 students. The report called for lowering PE to 42 students, general education and ESL classes to 29, lab and industrial arts to 26 and G.R. classes to 18.

Vote opposes budget cuts at state level

Trustees labeled the proposed state budget “a giant step backward” and unanimously passed a resolution opposing Gov. **Arnold Schwarzenegger**’s recommended cuts.

The proposed budget cuts would cost the district \$390,000 this year and more than \$1.6 million next year. “It would create chaos in our schools and would derail the progress made by students,” according to the resolution.

About 88 percent of the district budget is tied to personnel and trustees expressed concern that deep cuts could mean the loss of teachers and support personnel.

In addition, the resolution reminds Schwarzenegger that California schools are chronically under funded. The state spends \$1900 less per student than the national average. That amounts accounts for an under funding of \$24.7 million to the Salinas district alone.

At the last meeting, Chief Business Officer **James Earhart** cautioned against panic, saying state analysts were already crunching the numbers down a bit. Still he added, “it’s scary stuff.”

The resolution called on the governor and the legislature to reject the funding cuts.

The resolution was adopted by a 5-0 vote. Trustees **Phillip Tabera** and **Cheryl Larison** were absent.

Health benefit set aside puts claim on budget

Trustees gave the nod to a plan that would set aside monies annually for retiree health care.

The plan is a follow up to action taken last year, when the district transferred \$3.9 million from district reserves to a newly established Special Reserve Fund for Postemployment Benefits.

A government accounting requirement (GASB 45) prompted both steps.

Employees with 15 years of service at retirement are eligible for continued coverage by the district's health care plans to the age of 65, when Medicare takes over. Until recently, the benefits came under a pay-as-you-go plan. No specific funds were set aside and no liability claimed.

While the set aside represents a beginning, GASB 45 requires that a postretirement health care fund anticipate future expense. The plan identifies all employees from day one as possible beneficiaries. The cost estimate from May 1, 2007 for current employees was \$826,762 with an annual increase of approximately 10 percent a year.

Earhart said the set aside could be difficult in some years. "You have to do what you can," he told trustees.

"There's some reasonableness to see that all employee benefits are covered," said SVFT Co-president Kyle Samuels. But he said the 10 percent recommendation might be too high. "I don't want to see the set aside hurt the entire district."

Samuels recommended lowering the set aside to 7 percent. About one-third of the employees don't stay for 15 years and therefore don't qualify for the benefit, he said.

While GASB 45 will cost the district annually in set aside monies to meet a contractual benefit, it also recognizes the funds as a liability for the first time, according to Earhart. When the district sought funding through ballot measures, there was no mention of the ongoing expense of retiree health benefits as a liability.

Teachers' Letter Forum

Teachers are invited to send letters-to-the-editor style comments or questions about newsletter topics or other concerns of general interest to the SVFT membership.

All letter writers must be identified. Letters may be edited for space considerations. Letters can be sent by email to mklinger44@Yahoo.com or to presidents@svft.com