



## State schools chief calls for more local control

By Neil Gonzales San Mateo County Times

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STAFF WRITER

REDWOOD CITY — School districts should have more say in how they raise and use funds for their particular needs, the state's education chief said Friday.

"We need to return more local control of funding to school districts," state Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell told the audience at the Redwood City Education Foundation's fundraiser.

O'Connell was the special guest at the event benefiting programs in the Redwood City School District.

Among the reforms the state should pursue is lowering the voter threshold to pass a local parcel tax — such as the Redwood City district's Measure E — from the current two-thirds to a 55 percent majority, O'Connell said.

He urged people to support a bill by state Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, that seeks to do just that.

Measure E, on the June 2 ballot, is a proposed annual tax of \$91 to retain qualified teachers, maintain science programs and support other academic services.

O'Connell formally endorsed the local measure, drawing applause from the evening's crowd.

He also called for changes in the state budget process.

"The budget speaks for itself," he said. "We need to have a stable, predictable revenue stream."

The state budget ratified in February includes more than \$8 billion in cuts to K-12 public schools.

However, federal stimulus money is on the way, O'Connell said. It won't solve districts' financial burdens, he said, but it "will help."

The \$787 billion package will give San Mateo County's districts more than \$20 million for special-education and low-income students in 2009 and 2010. Districts will also receive state stabilization funds for other needs.

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