



Redwood City parents to raise funds for threatened music program

By Shaun Bishop
Daily News Staff Writer

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Fearing that the Redwood City School District's instrumental music program could be eliminated in next year's budget, parents plan to launch a fundraising campaign this week to allow the show to go on.

The elimination of the district's four music teachers is one item on the chopping block as the district prepares to cut millions out of its 2010-11 budget, spurring parents to organize a meeting Wednesday to brainstorm ways to save the program.

The music program's \$311,000 budget was originally slated to be cut last year before an influx of \$4.7 million from the federal stimulus package allowed officials to fund it this year.

But because the stimulus funds were one-time monies, district officials are now planning to trim at least \$4.7 million and possibly up to \$13.7 million out of the 2010-11 budget, depending on the extent of state budget cuts to education. The district's budget is about \$78 million this year.

"In spite of the fact they don't want to cut music, their hands are tied," said Vivian Euzent, the music teacher at Kennedy Middle School for the past 12 years.

Euzent has been working with the Redwood City Education Foundation to organize Wednesday's meeting in an effort to recruit parent volunteers and outline fundraising strategies.

"We want the endeavor to be sort of parent-led, not just us doing a top-down campaign," said Elaine Park, the president of the foundation. "There's a lot of parents, obviously, who are quite upset at the thought of losing music, so we're hoping we can get them organized and send them out."

Among the ideas already being considered are holding a benefit concert, getting local businesses to contribute proceeds from fundraising nights and simply encouraging parents to donate what they can to the program, which serves about 1,000 kids per week from fifth through eighth grade.

Euzent said their goal is to raise upward of \$300,000 to cover as much of the program's cost as possible. Besides the teacher salaries, the program has few other expenses, except for instrument repairs and an annual student music festival, she said.

Euzent said she has already been getting e-mails from people involved with music programs at local high schools asking how they can help.

"I announced it in all my classes," Euzent said. "I said, 'Go home and tell your parents, tell them this is what we're trying to do.' Nobody wants the program cut. They love it."

While the district won't vote on the final budget until June, it's almost certain that the music teachers will again be on the list of cuts, said Board of Trustees President Dennis McBride.

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McBride said he nearly broke down in tears at a board meeting two weeks ago when trustees were discussing potential cuts to the music program.

His two sons, now in their 20s, attended Kennedy and had Euzent as a teacher. His younger son played trumpet and now attends San Jose State University, which his son chose because of its marching band.

"Now we're talking about not doing music, it just kills me," McBride said.

E-mail Shaun Bishop at sbishop@dailynewsgroup.com.

IF YOU GO

What: Kick-off meeting for campaign to raise money for Redwood City School District music

When: Wednesday, 7 p.m.

Where: Room 312, Kennedy Middle School, 2521 Goodwin Ave., Redwood City

RELATED: the district is also holding community meetings to answer budget questions from parents:

Today: Clifford School, 255 Clifford Ave., Redwood City, 6 to 8 p.m.

March 1: Garfield School, 3600 Middlefield Road, Menlo Park, 6 to 8 p.m.

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