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Survey Says: Extend Taxes to Save Schools from Further Cuts

Superintendent Raymond points to survey results, calls for governor, Legislature to act

May 11, 2011 (Sacramento) – Sacramento parents, community members, and school teachers and staff overwhelmingly want the extension of current temporary taxes to prevent further cuts to education, a new survey commissioned by the Sacramento City Unified School District shows.

The Fiscal Priorities Survey, conducted by an independent research firm, shows that Sacramento residents are far more supportive of extending the taxes to make up the budget shortfall than they are making further education cuts, including eliminating teacher jobs.

The survey showed that 81 percent of community members, 87 percent of Sacramento City Unified School District staff, and 77 percent of students surveyed favor the temporary extension of the taxes proposed by Gov. Jerry Brown.

By contrast, the survey showed the parents, community members and staff strongly oppose raising class sizes to address the budget deficit at SCUSD.

“Our community has said consistently that they approve the extension of taxes to provide badly needed revenue to schools,” said SCUSD Superintendent Jonathan Raymond. “It’s time for the Legislature and the governor to take action that will protect our classrooms and our kids.”

The survey was conducted online in February and March. More than 4,200 people responded to the survey – 1,815 community members (including 1,430 SCUSD parents), 2,035 staff members and 388 students.

Superintendent Raymond ordered the online survey to engage community members in a dialogue about the district's dire financial situation. In the last three years, the state's decision to slash public K-12 funding by \$18 billion has resulted in \$107 million in cuts to SCUSD's budget. If certain state taxes are allowed to expire June 30, the district will face another \$22.35 million deficit for the next school year.

Highlights of the survey results include:

- 81 percent of community members, 87 percent of staff and 77 percent of students favor extension of temporary tax increases to prevent further cuts to programs.
- Only 9 percent of community members, 10 percent of staff and 10 percent of students favor increasing class sizes and laying off teachers to balance the budget.
- 77 percent of community members, 85 percent of staff and 67 percent of students support consolidating under-enrolled schools to save money. However, only 38 percent of community members, 43 percent of staff and 51 percent of students are familiar with SCUSD's Board-adopted criteria for consolidating and closing schools.

Raymond ordered the Fiscal Priorities Survey as a way of continuing to engage the community in critically important decisions. It is one of several outreach methods the district has employed this year to ensure community input into budget decisions. Seven community forums were held throughout the district in February and March, the district's automated calling service was used to poll staff and parents and a Budget News page on the district's website was created (www.scusd.edu/budgetnews).

"It's vital that our community engages with us on these important decisions," said Superintendent Raymond. "Our job as responsible stewards of the community's resources demands that we reach out and listen to what our community is saying."

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