



Parents form group to help cash-strapped school district

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The Daily Review

Posted: 05/13/2009 02:21:12 PM PDT

Updated: 05/13/2009 07:04:50 PM PDT

CASTRO VALLEY — With area schools expected to lose millions in funding because of the state budget crisis, two parents are embarking on a grass-roots effort to raise money and aid the cash-strapped Castro Valley Unified School District.

Allen Mueller and Brett Pletcher, both fathers of students attending Castro Valley schools, earlier this year founded the nonprofit Save Our Schools Castro Valley. They recently finalized a joint-operating agreement that will provide a revenue stream of donated funds that district officials can rely on if forced to make continued cuts in the coming school years.

"It's realistic and safe to assume that cuts may continue past next school year," said Jerry Macy, interim district superintendent. "The work (the group) is doing can be really helpful to stem and minimize any future cuts."

The district was able to absorb about \$3 million in mid-year cuts this school year by tapping into its reserves, but will have to trim its staff by about 40 employees to meet a projected \$4.4 million deficit in its \$70.6 million general fund next school year.

"We're not going to just throw our hands up and be victims of these cuts," said Mueller, who serves as the organization's president and is a commercial real estate consultant.

"We are looking to change the mind-set of the community," he said. "We are entitled and should expect (public school) funding to come from the state, but the fact is, the state can't be relied on."

Mueller and Pletcher began looking for a way to help the district shortly after officials announced it would have to trim the budget in response to state-imposed education cuts.

While the district does receive support from several foundations, the fathers found a hole that needed to be filled.

"What is the district going to do with 10,000 musical instruments that have been donated to a music teacher that's no longer there?" Mueller said as an example. "We found that there is no mechanism to replace what's being cut."

Mueller said he is hopeful fundraising efforts can expand into corporate sponsorships and grants, in addition to donations from the local community.

"We want to continue to maintain high education in Castro Valley," said Pletcher, a corporate lawyer who serves as the group's vice president. "My goal is to try to maintain the funding to keep it that way."

For more information on Save Our Schools Castro Valley, visit www.soscv.org.

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