

San Jose Mercury News

April 19, 2005

Bill would require schools to list costs of salaries

GOAL IS TO GIVE PARENTS ANOTHER MEASURING TOOL, SUPPORTERS SAY

By S.L. Wykes
Mercury News

Parents who want to know just how much their children's schools are spending on teachers may soon have a way to find out.

A bill written by state Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, would require school districts to include teachers' salary costs by individual school in the accountability report cards

the state requires districts to provide to the public.

Those report cards now list teacher salaries as averages for whole districts.

Simitian said Monday that the bill, SB 687, "is simplicity itself. ... It's simply about transparency." And, he said, it answers a simple question: "Where are we spending our dollars in terms of salaries?"

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell joined Simitian on Monday at a press conference in Sacramento to offer his support for the bill. "What we need to have is basic information about what's being spent," O'Connell said.

See **TEACHERS**, Page 6B



Simitian
Bill's author says it's about transparency.



O'Connell
State schools chief offers his support.

TEACHERS | Bill would require salary figures

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A recent report by the Education Trust-West showed that what districts spend on teachers' salaries can vary widely when student populations are sorted by income or ethnicity. The state's 50 biggest school districts spend more on teachers who work in schools with the lowest numbers of African-American and Latino students.

O'Connell said Simitian's bill would help point up such inequities by making it easier to see how much districts spend on teachers on a school-by-school basis.

"Teachers are the single most important factor in improving student achievement," said John Affeldt, managing attorney for Public Advocates, who also spoke in support of the bill at the Simitian press conference. He was the lead attorney in the Williams vs. California case, whose settlement requires the state to address the inequities in learning conditions for students of color and low-income students.

The California Teachers

Association has not yet taken a position on the bill.

Local parents and school districts applauded the school report card changes in Simitian's bill, but cautioned that money doesn't tell the whole story. "Should teachers' salaries be divulged?" asked Beverly Lozoff, Parent Teacher Student Association president at Homestead High School in Cupertino. "Absolutely!"

But, she added, "The schools my children have attended are not the highest-paying districts," and yet their reputation as good schools is statewide, she said. "The equation that higher salaries equals better education is not necessarily true."

San Jose Unified's assistant superintendent, Bill Erlendson, would like to see even more information on those school report cards. His district added the amount of revenue per school to its Web site, and people were confused because that number includes many elements, he said.

Erlendson said parents need to understand why one school might have \$20,000

more than another school. District officials point out that inequities can exist when one school has a cluster of older, more experienced teachers with many credentials and another has more younger teachers.

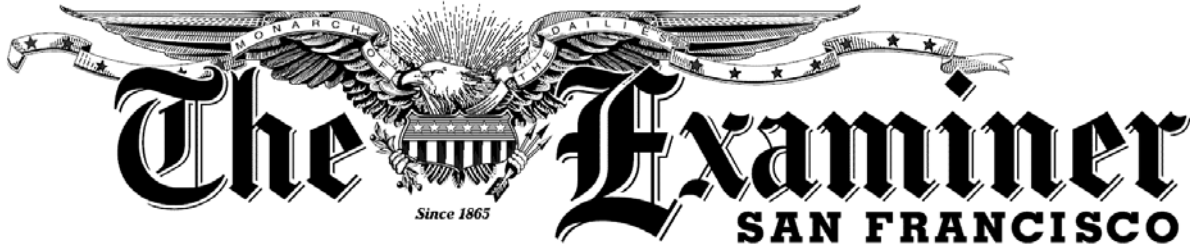
And parents shouldn't necessarily leap to conclusions about age, either, Erlendson said. "An experienced teacher isn't necessarily the best teacher." Very generic statements about salaries, he said, "don't really look deep into other issues."

In Simitian's bill, however, the amended reporting requirements are a first step to "what may be an uncomfortable conversation," he said. "But it's a conversation we have to have if we're going to do right by every kid in the state."

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

For more information about the bill, check http://www.aroundthecapitol.com/bills/SB_687/

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April 20, 2005

Editorial

Send best teachers to struggling schools

Palo Alto state Sen. Joe Simitian has introduced a bill that would require California school districts to report average teacher salaries at individual schools rather than as an aggregate of all campuses within the district. It may sound like this is a matter of quibbling over details, but the bill — scheduled for a hearing at the Senate Education Committee this morning — actually addresses a serious disparity in the way education dollars are distributed.

According to a report from the advocacy group Ed Trust-West, in California school districts the teachers with the most experience tend to cluster at the schools with proportionally lower minority populations. Because the most experienced teachers also are generally the best paid, this results in an imbalanced, impractical and unfair distribution of per-pupil spending. Under the bill, schools also would have to estimate per-pupil spending in other categories by campus.

A large minority population among students does not mean

But because in many instances the parents of students at these schools are not highly educated, their environment predisposes them to having different needs than children in other schools.

that students will not do well or that a school will not be as good as campuses with fewer minorities. Kids at those schools are just as smart as those elsewhere. But because in many instances the parents of students at these schools are not highly educated, their environment predisposes them to having different needs than children in other schools. In other words, these are the schools — and, more importantly, the students — who need the most assistance. School districts and all Californians have an interest in giving these kids the chance to lift themselves up academically.

While Simitian's bill simply addresses reporting of expenditures, it seems obvious that the situation in state schools is crying out for an adjustment of policies. What school districts need is an

incentive for great teachers to choose underperforming schools. The simplest and best incentive for teachers and school districts probably is to provide a positive incentive — a bonus, from within their budgets — to teachers who choose to use their talents at the schools that need their help the most.

Simitian's bill would be an important step toward providing parents and others with better information about per-pupil spending in their schools, and would enable districts to distribute that spending more efficiently and equitably. It deserves the support of the Legislature and the signature of the governor. And school districts should actively look for ways to provide teachers with rewards for teaching at schools where they are most needed.

San Jose Mercury News

April 20, 2005

Sen. Simitian's SB 687



Alondra Alcaraz, a student at Horace Mann School, gets writing tips from fifth-grade teacher Shanna Lawson.

EUGENE H. LOUIE
— MERCURY
NEWS ARCHIVES

'Fog of averages' blurs school funding

Disparities in funding among different schools within a single district can be as wide as the gulf between the state's rich and poor districts.

That was the stark finding of a study earlier this year by Education Trust-West, an advocacy group. Yet the inequities do not appear in the state Department of Education's school accountability report cards. The state requires data only on a district's average spending.

Following up on the study's findings, Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, is sponsoring SB 687. It would cut through the "fog of averages" and require a breakdown of spending by school, including the average teacher's salary. That's important because younger, less experienced teachers earning the lowest salaries usually are concentrated at underperforming schools with low-income, minority children. Veteran teachers use their seniority to choose schools with fewer needy kids and more money.

The Education Trust-West found that the differential amounts to about \$3,000 less in pay per teacher in poor schools within California's urban districts.

Excellent schools often thrive with a blend of experienced and young, energetic teachers. There's not always a correlation between salary and effectiveness in the classroom.

But poor schools clearly deserve more money to even out the differences in performance, whether it's to offer pay incentives to attract veteran teachers (contract language permitting), or more training for young teachers, extra mentor teachers or perks like laptop computers.

Once the numbers are known, legislators can figure out how to come up with more money, parents in underserved schools can pressure trustees to distribute dollars fairly, and the state will have the facts to begin a much needed debate over inequities in school funding.

RICH SCHOOLS, POOR SCHOOLS

Data compiled by Education Trust-West revealed significantly lower average teacher salaries in schools with large percentages of poor and minority children. Examples from San Jose Unified School District, one of the districts studied, generally followed the same pattern in 2003-2004 school year:

Peter Burnett Middle

Estimated average salary:

\$51,022

Percent minority:

81.9%

Bret Harte Middle

\$61,862 / 16.5%

Horace Mann Elementary

\$48,839 / 82.3%

Simonds Elementary

\$60,454 / 10.8%

■ To read the full report, see www.hiddengap.org.

Oakland Tribune

September 29, 2005

Law uncloaks school-spending mystery

■ Inspired by Oakland 8th-grader's story, measure compels districts to disclose money for each campus

By Jill Tucker
STAFF WRITER

Gerry Silva got his law.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed Senate Bill 687 on Wednesday requiring the state's school districts to divulge what they are spending at each school — a measure that aims to more accurately assess where

education dollars are flowing.

State Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, authored the bill after a February report by an Oakland-based education think tank found that more money is spent teaching white and wealthy kids than their low-income and minority counterparts across town.

The Education Trust-West report was sparked by a story about Gerry Silva recounted in a five-day series by the Oakland Tribune in 2003.

When Gerry was an eighth-grader at Oakland's Havenscourt Middle School in 2003,

the state spent \$55,000 on his teachers — \$27,000 less than what Californians spent on the teachers for an eighth-grade girl in Pleasanton that year.

Yet because of the way the state and local districts report spending, such differences among schools within and across districts are currently masked by districtwide averages.

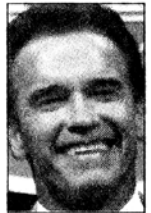
The difference in spending reflects the years of experience and education levels of the teachers in each school. Those with more experience and education make more

money.

The reality of the fiscal inequities is that schools filled with low-income and minority kids are five times more likely to have the least experienced and educated teachers.

SB 687 requires districts to tell parents and policy-makers, community members and kids how much they are spending at each school, including unrestricted money and money designated for specific programs or costs such as teacher training or text-

Please see **SCHOOLS**, Local 2



SCHWARZENEGGER

Signed bill
Wednesday.

Districts must reveal funding

► **SCHOOLS**, from Local 1

books.

The bill also requires schools to show total salary costs and a school average of teacher salaries, comparing it to the district and state average.

"I think it will lead to some real serious discussion within school districts about how much different schools spend on pupils," said John Affeldt, attorney for Public Advocates, which sued the state over unequal public school conditions.

"(SB 687) will potentially have a big impact on the school funding discussion in California," he said.

The new spending statistics will be included in each district's annual School Account-

ability Report Card.

"It's a huge step forward in making sure what we're reporting to the public is honest and accurate," said Russlyn Ali, executive director of Education Trust-West, adding that the data speaks for itself.

"I do think we'll have some action forced in the area of teacher distribution."

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