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Three bills signed in Simitian education package

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Gov. Gray Davis signed three of four bills of an education package written by state Assemblyman Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, and designed to provide funding for San Mateo and Santa Clara county schools.

"I'm delighted that the governor understands the importance of these education bills. They provide adequate funding and smart spending strategies, which are essential for progress in the classroom," Simitian said.

According to Simitian's office, school kids will be the beneficiaries of the new laws.

Davis also signed AB 2781, which will restore funding for the "Tinsley Program," a voluntary desegregation

program in eight school districts on the Peninsula.

"I was on the Palo Alto School Board when we first began our participation in the voluntary desegregation program," Simitian pointed out. "The state funds we received helped make that possible. It's important we continue to make progress in this area, so ensuring continued funding was one of my top priorities."

AB 47 restores cost of living adjustments for the Santa Clara County Office of Education, which has reportedly lost over \$2 million since a state funding freeze was imposed on certain county office programs in 1995.

"They've had to close schools and ask local districts to contribute nearly

\$1 million to maintain the remaining programs," Simitian said.

"Some of our most vulnerable children attend these schools. As a matter of fairness to these students, we needed to revise the funding formula."

The third bill Davis signed was AB 1000, which allows the San Mateo Community College District and the San Jose Evergreen Community College District to use a streamlined bid process known as "design-build" for school construction and major rehabilitation.

The bill authorizes a pilot project for the two districts, and to five individual projects in community college districts, to put together architectural services, engineering services and construction services in

a single package for projects of \$10 million or more.

"This design-build option eliminates some of the bureaucracy involved in building new schools. It offers a common sense approach for building schools quicker and more economically. It's a useful tool with immediate impact," Simitian said.

"This bill couldn't have come at a better time," added Ron Galatolo, chancellor of the San Mateo County Community College District.

"The voters have just passed a \$207 million bond for new construction. Simitian's bill allows us to stretch our dollars further and faster."

There was one disappointment, however. A fourth bill that was part of the education package failed to garner the governor's signature.

AB 1100, designed to help the Sequoia Union High School District grapple with falling revenues caused by the formation of charter schools that have received an out-of-district charter was vetoed by Gov. Davis.

"I'm disappointed that AB 1100 was vetoed," Simitian said. "The bill helped Sequoia by ensuring that when students chose out-of-district charters or out-of-grade level charters, the district would retain a portion of its per-pupil funding to cover ongoing expenses. And the bill helped charter schools because it ensured that they retained full per-pupil funding while reducing any friction that might result when students chose to leave their home district."

Simitian said Davis vetoed the bill due to cost concerns.