



Los Altos Town Crier

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State Legislature approves funding for underfunded school districts

Special to the Town Crier

The California State Assembly voted unanimously July 23 to approve Assembly Bill 441, Assemblyman Joe Simitian's bill authorizing \$40 million to equalize funding in school districts throughout the state. Simitian's bill also states the legislature's intention to provide additional equalization funding in subsequent years. The ultimate goal is to ensure that every youngster in the state is supported at the 90th percentile of school funding.

Simitian's goal in pursuing equalization legislation has been to "help level the playing field for underfunded districts and the children they serve. This is a fundamental issue of fairness," said Simitian, who represents the 21st Assembly District, which includes Los Altos and Los Altos Hills. "School districts in my area and around the state receive disparate levels of funding and that means disparate opportunities for student success. Assembly Bill 441 is a significant first step in addressing this issue."

Simitian's bill, co-authored by 40 assembly members, requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to compute an equalization formula so that lower-funded school districts will receive at least as much funding (base revenue limit) per student as the top 10 percent of school districts throughout the state by the 2006-07 fiscal year.

Revenue limits vary across school districts, based on historical funding disparities as well as changes in law. Revenue limit equalization began as a result of the Serrano v. Priest court decisions when the California Supreme Court ordered the State to reduce disparities in school

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district funding. Although the last Serrano case was closed in 1986, disparities continued and the Legislature has periodically taken action to address the problem.

In the current year, the difference in base revenue limit per average daily attendance (ADA) funding around the state ranges from \$3,976 in the Newcastle Elementary School District (Placer County) to \$7,914 in the McKittrick Elementary School District (Kern County), a difference of nearly \$4,000. For the 2001-02 school year, the Los Altos School District has a base revenue limit per ADA of \$4,365.

"These funding inequities have serious consequences," said Simitian. "Higher-funded school districts, for example, have a hiring advantage over lower-funded districts because they can afford to pay more."

Simitian is a former school board member, past president of the County School Boards Association and public schools attorney who represented school districts around the state. His experience, he said, has made him "acutely aware of the problems and inequities caused by differences in revenue limit funding."

The \$40 million included with Simitian's bill is only a fraction of the total \$400 million required to equalize schools to the 90th percentile throughout the state by school year 2006-07.

Under AB 441, the Los Altos School District is eligible for

approximately \$58,000 and qualifies for nearly \$578,000 to equalize to the 90th percentile. The Mountain View-Los Altos Union High School District figures are \$18,236 and \$182,358, respectively.

As Simitian noted, "AB 441 is only a first step, but it's an important first step. My hope is that the Legislature will act in future years to fully fund the gap. For far too long we've been 'leveling down' not 'leveling up.'"

"This is not just a problem of disparities across the state," said Delaine Eastin, State Superintendent of Public Instruction. "Oftentimes there are significant differences in the amount of funding that school districts receive in the same county, not to mention districts that are right next to each other. Assemblyman Simitian is to be commended for his efforts to ensure funding fairness."

Simitian's bill (AB 441) was approved by the Senate with a unanimous vote on Sunday and, following Monday's vote in the Assembly, was sent to the governor for signature.

Revenue limit equalization has broad-based support from education advocacy organizations throughout the state including the California PTA, the California School Boards Association (CSBA), the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), the Association of Low Wealth Schools and numerous school districts.