

SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS' ASSOCIATION

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VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGY AND SMALL SCHOOLS

By Robert Hudson, Superintendent Alpaugh Unified School District

As more schools continue to acquire greater technological capacity, it only becomes a matter of time before small schools start seeing the benefits of implementing virtual independent study programs. Those small schools located in rural isolated areas often face unusual challenges when it comes to alternative instruction. Expelled students, students with social issues, and students that are not in tune with the traditional learning model are often offered no practical solutions to meet their unique learning styles and needs. Virtual instruction closes the learning gap for students who typically drop-out and never return.

Alpaugh Unified School District, a K-12 district with an enrollment of 340, recently implemented a virtual independent study program utilizing the OdysseyWare program. Alpaugh currently has a free and reduced population of 96%, and many students simply do not have computers in the home due to

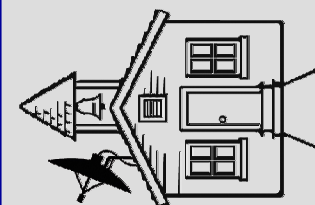
economic restrictions. Compounding the issue is the fact that there is no high speed internet service available. Once students were identified as interested in resuming their education, Alpaugh Unified opened an evening learning center and provided classified help to monitor the student's activities. A certificated highly qualified teacher met each student weekly to review and grade student work and document ADA based on the completion of assignments.

Over all, eleven students enrolled last year. The reasons included pregnancy, post-partum care, fathers that had to work in the fields to support their families, expelled students, and students from other communities that wanted a chance away from their hometowns. As a recovery program, it has been quite successful, even in this small scale. The virtual program has also had an impact on the regular school program by increasing the use of technology as a

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SSDA'S SMALL WORLD



SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS' ASSOCIATION

The Forest Reserve School Funding Debate and Updates

By Jim French, Bob Douglas and Melissa Brown

Trinity County is a large, rural, mountainous county in Northern California. It receives the second largest share of Forest Reserve dollars in California. Forest Reserve funding has been an integral part of Trinity County school funding and is essential to continued success. Many schools and small school districts in California are affected by Forest Reserve funding allocations.



These funds provide for instructional aides in multi-graded classrooms, and help implement the federal No Child Left Behind requirements. They provide funding for school nurses, counselors, art and other programs needed to enrich student learning. In an era of declining student population, and declining school revenues, Forest Reserve funding is an important source of funds. It helps schools and districts meet their financial obligations.

In counties such as Trinity County, the declining student population is due in great part to the changing forest practices, an associated local economy loss, which in turn necessitates greater need for Forest Reserve funds. The Trinity County situation is a common one in rural resource dependent America.

Resource Advisory Committees (RACS)

The Trinity County Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) has a successful track record using forest reserve funding. Below are some of the ground rules for that success:

1. The Trinity RAC established clear strategies and agreed to focus on reduction projects that helped to protect rural communities at risk, watershed projects, and reduced sediments in their streams, and rivers. Ten percent of Trinity County Title 2 funds were distributed to allowable projects such as train maintenance, and work with Native American communities.
2. The RAC identified many partners to collaborate on the program of work leveraging matching dollars as part of the project.
3. The RAC asks their County Commissioners to identify their share of Title 2 funding early so they have ample time to plan, and implement projects.

The Forest Reserve School Funding Debate

The National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition (NFCSC) in Red Bluff, California is a leading advocate for forest reserve school funding. Bob Douglas, NFCSC President, and over

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160 NFSC members converged on Capitol Hill from September 12th to 13th, 2007 to deliver a single powerful message – “Act Now to Reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act (SRSCA) and Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Program for the next five years!” For the first time since its 1994 reauthorization, PILT would be funded at its full authorized amount, beginning in FY 2008 and each year thereafter until FY 2011.

U. S. Senators propose a new Safety Net formula starting in FY 2007. The new formula would distribute funding based partially on counties’ historic revenue sharing receipts (as did the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act of 2000 which expired last September), and partially on counties percentage of total National Forest acreage. It includes a “need factor” to steer some added dollars to more economically distressed counties. In FY 2008 counties would see a one percent decrease and then a ten percent reduction each year until the program sunsets (or is reauthorized) in FY 2011. The Senators estimate that most forest counties nationwide will see significant increases under the new formula, especially when considered with a fully funded PILT program.

However, the National Association of Counties disagrees. They point out that counties in California, Oregon and Washington would see significant decreases under the new formula. To soften that blow, the agreement calls for counties in the “Big Three” states to be held harmless in FY 2007. Then, their annual payments would be reduced by ten percent each year in FY 2008, 2009 and 2010 before going to the new formula in 2011 (somewhat larger than ten percent reduction).

Bob Douglas, National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition President provides an update of critical House and Senate bills affecting forest reserve funding in the sections below.

HR 3058 – Approved by House Natural Resources Committee

The effort to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act took a monumental step forward on September 26th, when the House Natural Resources Committee approved HR 3058 (DeFazio) on a unanimous voice vote. The bill was modified on a bipartisan basis to provide a four year reauthorization of the Secure Rural

Schools and Communities Act and a ramping up of PILT funding to the 100% of authorization level in year four of the bill. These provisions were inserted into the bill in order to fit into the available natural resource based budget offsets available to the Committee. The Coalition is encouraging leadership of both parties to move quickly to move the bill to the Senate for concurrence in a Conference Committee.

House Bill and Senate Bill Differ but are clearly Reconcilable in a Conference

The House bill calls for a four year reauthorization, a four year ramping down of Secure Rural Schools and Communities payments, and a four year ramping up of PILT payments. The House bill does not reauthorize Title II and III, and it holds eight states harmless in 2008 from a decline in payment levels instead of three. On the other hand, the Senate Amendment (SA 709) calls for a five year extension of Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act (SRSCA), only three states being held harmless from declining payments in 2008 (Oregon, California, and Washington), and full funding of PILT in the last four years of the bill. The Senate version also amends and reauthorizes Titles II and III of SRSCA.

The Coalition supports both versions of the bill and we believe that a compromise bill can be put

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SSDA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November 2007

- * **November 5:** Executive Committee Meeting
- * **November 12:** Veterans Day
SSDA Office Closed
- * **November 22:** Thanksgiving
SSDA Office Closed 22nd - 23rd

December 2007

- * **December 25:** Christmas
SSDA Office Closed 24th - 31st

January 2008

- * **January 1:** New Year’s Day
SSDA Office Closed
- * **January 21:** Martin Luther King Jr. Day
SSDA Office Closed
- * **January 29:** Executive Committee Meeting

(Virtual, continued from page 4)

district, implementing virtual programs to augment the AP and A-G requirements, and by placing the district in the position to offer high speed internet services to the community at large thanks to a grant from the Bureau of Land Management.

Recently, when this model was presented at the NSBA T&L conference in Nashville, a critical question was asked, “Why would anyone bother for only 11 students?” Once again we must not forget that simply because small school districts don’t have large numbers, it does not mean that we can’t offer a successful virtual program to meet the needs of our students. Our students need and deserve the same access as those living in large communities.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS...We would love to hear your feedback on any of the articles listed in this issue of *Small World*. Please send us an e-mail at shannon@ssda.org. If you have any suggestions for future articles or have any topics you would like to see let us know.



LEGISLATIVE WATCH

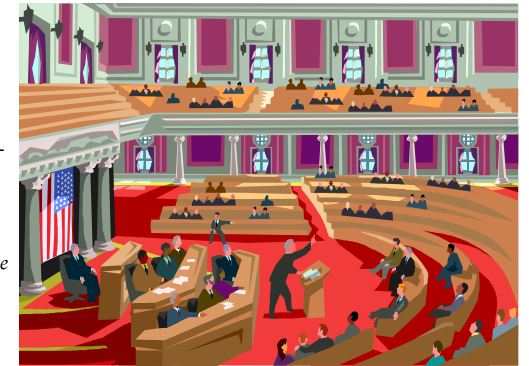
State Budget Update

By Dave Walrath

- On November 6, 2007, Governor Schwarzenegger announced that he is requesting state agencies to prepare 10% cuts in their budget. While I have been predicting next year will be an ugly year, I do not believe it will be this ugly. It is in the Governor’s best interest to overly state the problem now, to give him more room to thin his budget in January.

SSDA will continue to oppose mid-year reductions and continue to advocate across-the-board full funding for the 2008-09 COLA. I will provide an update of the LAO budget projections after they release their report on November 14.

- For more information on any of these stories go to www.ssda.org or contact Dave Walrath, SSDA Legislative Advocate at dwalrath@m-w-h.com



(Forest Reserve, continued from page 3)

together in a Conference Committee that reflects the best elements of each. In particular we believe the final bill should be for five years, provide for full funding of PILT after the first year, provide hold harmless protection for all eight states (Oregon, California, Washington, South Dakota, Texas, Louisiana, South Carolina and Pennsylvania) that would experience declining payments in 2008 under the new formula, and include the Senate language for the revision and reauthorization of Titles II and III of SRSCA. Such a bill would provide economic stability and predictability to forest counties and schools for five years, give leaders in these counties opportunities to explore new technologies, new economic development opportunities, and time to restore an ecologically sustainable level of forest management in our forest counties.

Next Steps – A Continuing Call to Action!

We need to keep up the pressure on Members of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Encourage both of the respective bodies to take prompt action to include the contents of SB 709 (Senate bill) and HR 3058 (House bill) in legislation that is headed to the President’s desk for signature.

We believe that it is imperative that Congress acts to approve full funding of PILT and extension of the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act before they go home in November. We, as leaders of our communities, must not let up! The grassroots pressure on Congress to act now must be maintained at a high level of intensity!

Please contact your Congressperson and Senators. Ask them to contact the leadership of their party and insist that approval of a multi-year extension of SRSCA and PILT is absolutely essential before Congress adjourns. Tell them that this must be done to avoid the layoffs and service disruptions that will start in January 2008.

Jim French is the Trinity County Superintendent of Schools, Bob Douglas is the President of the National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition, and Dr. Melissa Brown is the Executive Director of the Small School Districts' Association.

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