

Westmorland Union Elementary School District

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March 13, 2024

Dear Education Stakeholders,

This communication is to address some critical fiscal challenges that Westmorland Union Elementary School District is currently facing. Navigating budget constraints is never an easy task, especially in a small, rural school district like ours. As a valued education stakeholder, it is imperative that you are informed about the situation and understand its implications. Despite our best efforts to allocate resources efficiently, factors beyond our control have contributed to this shortfall.

Declining enrollment, changes in state funding and increases to benefits, have all converged to create a financial gap we must address. District student enrollment has decreased from the 2019–2020 school year to the 2025–2026 school year, from 395 to 335 respectively, which affects our Average Daily Attendance (ADA), which has subsequently decreased from 365.96 to 294.40 over the same timeframe. This reduction is significant because our state funding is directly correlated with the number of students attending our schools.

Another budget constraint is the increase in staff salaries and benefits, which have risen by over 26% in the past five years. With Cost of Living (COLA), being projected to be funded at 0.76% for the upcoming school year, the sustainability of such salaries is not possible.

Moreover, our district has been reliant on short-term or one-time funds, over the past four years, amounting to \$4.7 million, which have now expired. The expiration of these funds has left a significant gap in our ability to continue the current staffing services.

Given these circumstances, our district is faced with limited options and tough decisions, including the potential release of staff. All staff members are valued and important. This was an extremely challenging task for administration and the governance board.

I want to emphasize that these decisions are not taken lightly, and we recognize the immense dedication and hard work that each and every one of our faculty and staff members brings to our district every day. Their commitment to our students and our community is truly commendable, and it is deeply painful to contemplate the impact that these cuts will have on our staff and their families as well as our students.

As we move forward, I assure you that we are exploring all avenues to address these challenges. We have reached out to School Services of California to conduct a comprehensive review of our district's budget. Please know that we are committed to approaching this process with transparency, fairness, and sensitivity. We will do everything in our power to support those affected by these changes and to minimize the impact on the quality of education we provide for our students.

However, the road ahead is difficult, and the support and understanding of our community are crucial at this time. I urge everyone to come together as a community during this challenging time. Let us lean on one another for support, empathy, and understanding as we navigate these difficult decisions and work towards ensuring the long-term sustainability and success of our school district.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I believe that through collective effort and collaboration, we can navigate these challenges and continue to provide a high-quality education to our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'RJC', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard Cordero, Superintendent
Westmorland Union Elementary School District