Commentary: Classroom cuts, limited resources remain top concerns at education summit

By Dave Cortese
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My office, in partnership with the Silicon Valley Education Foundation, recently took a group of 130 local residents to Sacramento to talk with legislators about their concerns with the current state of education funding. The group of parents, educators, school officials, civil rights leaders, government officials and students met with Sens. Alquist, Yee, Simitian and Hancock, Assembly members Hill, Fong, Ruskin, Beall and Coto and staff from Sen. Romero's office. The group also met with state Superintendent Jack O'Connell; Dr. Sadidi Siamaat, education program consultant for the California Department of Education; and Estelle LeMieux, a California Teacher's Association legislative analyst.

During the event, small delegations of attendees were able to meet with Sen. Corbett and Assembly members Block and Caballero. Education issues the group discussed with legislators included concern about increased class sizes, lack of counselors to guide students and cuts to/elimination of art, music and after-school programs. The group also discussed problems with the budget process that affect education funding, such as the two-thirds voting majority required in the Legislature to pass a budget. The group urged legislators to stick with the promise made last summer: "No more cuts to education."

This year, we added a new feature to the annual trip to Sacramento. Prior to boarding the bus we held an education summit a few days that was attended by a group of 54 concerned individuals. We were fortunate to hear different perspectives on the governor's proposed budget (and how it would affect us locally) by a panel of education leaders including Cathy Giammona (East Side Union High School District), Jeanine Hawk (San Jose-Evergreen Valley Community College District), Paul Miller (Kidango) and Don Dawson (California Teachers Association). After the panel, the audience broke into small groups to discuss the impact they are seeing in their own schools and selected the top two issues. This information was then synthesized into our action agenda for the bus trip and delivered to the legislators.

I am grateful to the community organizations who supported our efforts and sent representation on this important trip: East Side Union High School District, Alum Rock Union School District, ESUHSD Latino Coalition, Matsumoto Parents for Better School Funding; Evergreen Elementary Community in Action, Building Respect Through Dance, District 8 Community Roundtable, San Jose Police Department, Indo-American Senior Center of San Jose and La Raza Roundtable. Of particular note was the participation of 33 students from the East Side Union High School District (organized by school board member Frank Biehl), who spoke out on the direct impact the funding cuts have on their schools.

I would like to thank the Silicon Valley Education Foundation and the community organizations who supported our efforts on this important trip.
Foundation for its partnership and financial support of this trip as well as Preeti Suri from Subway Sandwiches (1243 East Calaveras Blvd. in Milpitas) for providing food for the education summit.

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