

An Important Message from TEA President Steve Courter

It has taken some hard work and perseverance on the part of TEA and other employee groups, working with district staff, but we have two promising developments to report:

- 1) The district has committed to continue its practice of covering the HMO premiums for full-time employees (\$4,445.60 for the 2008-09 school year). Benefits will continue to be prorated for eligible part-time employees.
- 2) The furlough days are officially off-the-table. The district had contemplated requiring all employees to work two fewer days than normal, resulting in a pay cut. This was no idle threat at the time the district first proposed furloughs in certified negotiations, and warned those employees on May 15 of a general salary reduction. At that time, TUSD was facing a \$20 million deficit, and was looking for every possible means to balance the 2009 budget.

These positive developments do not mean the district's budget woes are resolved. The 2009 budget is only balanced pending more cuts in central administration, cooperation from the school sites in making extracurricular activities self-sustaining rather than depending in part on Maintenance and Operations (M&O) funds, and there are still some unknown budget factors, such as the final cost of the ELD Bloc.

TUSD was also fortunate that the state increased its funding for TUSD's special education and ELL students. More crucially, the 2009 state budget largely protects education funding from any dramatic cuts, despite the state's huge deficit for that fiscal year.

We need to remember, however, that state assistance to local districts is apportioned on a per-student basis. TUSD's student enrollment, or ADM, dropped by 1,300, which has resulted in millions of dollars of lost funding. We must all look for ways to reverse this drop in our student enrollment.

I am proud of the excellent work that has been done by TEA staff and officers, and our outstanding bargaining team. Countless hours have been spent in poring over the complex district budget and related data, meeting with district officials, and communicating with Governing Board members. Just as crucial have been the e-mails and phone calls from members demanding that the district take every measure possible to avoid furlough days or any other decrease in compensation.

The district has actually made progress in reducing central administration, at this point by over 80 positions. Difficult decisions affecting programs, services and sites resulted in reductions in certified, classified, blue collar, and administrative positions as well.

All of these measures reflect the painful reality of a district beginning to come to grips with the reality that we have experienced a significant reduction in student enrollment, due to a number of factors. But this effort to trim TUSD to accommodate this enrollment drop is not finished. As employees and a community, we have many more difficult discussions and decisions ahead, or we will not succeed in reaching maximum efficiency in providing student services and employees being paid fair salaries, wages and benefits.

For now, we can be grateful for these two positive developments. Please look for further information as we draw negotiations to a conclusion.