In spite of reduced funding and rising costs, San Francisco's public school district runs a balanced budget, earns respect from Wall Street, and has plans to keep it that way. Do you ever wonder where money for schools comes from and where it goes? Here is a primer.

Where does it come from?

Every year, the San Francisco Unified School District receives money from federal, state, and local sources. Some of the funds are earmarked for specific purposes such as building maintenance, and others are for even more defined uses, like intensive algebra instruction or professional training for teachers.

In budget speak, money that is applied to the day to day operations of schools and is not designated for specific projects, is called unrestricted general fund money. For example, most classroom teachers are paid through unrestricted general fund money whereas voter approved bonds to fix up school buildings are not general fund money, and cannot be used for anything other than school facilities.

In all, the total amount of general fund money brought in to run SFUSD last year was approximately $485 million. By comparison, Boston pub-

Where does it go?

A school district budget may seem confusing with its alphabet-soup line items and a myriad of different uses for funds. Like a family household budget, SFUSD’s expenses have to cover everything from daily dish detergent to new plumbing.

Each school has a unique student population and a set of needs that varies from school to school. One way the budget allocation process works to ensure schools have adequate money to educate their particular students is a system called the Weighted Student Formula (WSF).

WSF resources are distributed to schools based on student needs such as a student’s English proficiency, whether the student needs special education, and the student’s family income. This is calculated as an actual dollar amount that travels with the child to all the schools the student attends in SFUSD. Every district school builds its academic plan and the budget to support that plan each

A Budget in the Balance

Like the cost of heating your household, some expenses can rise more quickly than expected. In the last seven years, for example, the district’s mandatory contribution to health care coverage for retired employees alone has increased from $7 million to $28 million per year. And while costs rise, revenues have decreased over the past decade with the decline in enrollment due to families with children leaving the city. In the last five years, SFUSD’s drop in enrollment has meant a loss of $20 million dollars per year because schools are funded based on the number of students in attendance (known as ADA).

The most recent threat to funding for San Francisco schools came in the form of massive school funding cuts proposed by the Governor. If enacted, these would be the largest one-time cuts ever in the history of California public schools. These cuts could reduce SFUSD’s budget for the

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Career Switchers Bring Learning to Life

by Karin Little Jones
and Julia Stuart

As both an emergency medical and a cardiovascular technician at UCSF, Richard McDowell treated people with health problems only after they had occurred. After years in his profession, he decided that even though he wanted to continue contributing to society, he wanted to be in a position where he could prevent problems before they happen.

For McDowell, teaching felt like a natural transition. After earning his teaching credential he worked as a substitute teacher in various schools across the district, eventually becoming an art teacher. But when administrators at Galileo High School learned he had a minor in biology and had worked in the health care industry, they were eager to find him a position at SFUSD teaching science. Though reluctant at first to give up teaching art, he agreed. He says he hasn’t looked back.

Mr. McDowell says “I love helping young people become passionate about learning, and I love teaching what I believe in.”

McDowell is one of many San Francisco Unified teachers who have entered the teaching profession after a successful career in another sector. Known as “career switchers,” they bring a wealth of experience with them by the time they arrive in their classrooms.

Former NASA and IBM engineer Richard Damien is another one who became a teacher later in life.

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FRIENDLY DEBATE - Student Tiffany Zhang, 16, took this photo of fellow students Wolfgang Welch, Sarah Jane Calub, Ramzi Nijem, and Emma Franklin as part of her black and white photography class in the afterschool program Out of Site. Under direction of teacher Emilio Banuelos, Zhang used a manual camera and made the print in a professional darkroom.
Program Puts Students on Early Teaching Path

by Dina Wright

In an effort to meet the projected shortfall of teachers in the coming years, The San Francisco Unified School District has launched a “Grow Our Own”-type program at Abraham Lincoln High School.

Known as the Teacher Academy, this is a two-year program coordinated by Lincoln High School teachers Dina Wright and Valerie Ziegler. This year students are taking elective classes in Psychology and Human Development and applying what they learn in actual classroom settings at Robert Louis Stevenson and Dianne Feinstein Elementary Schools where over 30 teachers supervise, serve as mentors, and model effective teaching methods for their high school protégés.

During the summer, Academy students also have the chance to work in paid internships in SFUSD summer schools while earning college credit at City College San Francisco. When students complete the academy and pass the California Basic Education Skills test (CBEST), they are eligible for paraprofessional positions in SFUSD schools and are encouraged to continue their education and meet the requirements to become SFUSD teachers.

The teacher academy is growing in popularity - a new academy is planned to begin this fall at Thurgood Marshall Academic High School.

To that end, Roth scours books, newspapers, and other materials for visualization to clear up the students’ confusion. In time, they were able to solve not only the problem they were working on, but similar problems, demonstrating to me that they understood the concept.

I could see my students were confused. I drew pictures and used objects for visualization to clear up the students’ confusion. In time, they were able to solve not only the problem they were working on, but similar problems, demonstrating to me that they understood the concept.

I was thrilled to see Jonathan jumping up and down to answer my questions. At that very moment, I knew I had made a difference. Ever since then, I saw Jonathan’s progress.

Students want to know that their teachers care. When they are reassured that the teachers want to help them, they are more motivated to try to succeed.

Interested in Teaching at SFUSD?

To find out more about teaching in San Francisco’s public schools, go to www.sfusd.edu. Under the Job Seekers tab you can view a list of open positions and fill out an online application via EdJoin.org.

Applications for the next school year are now being accepted. Strong applicants for math, special education, and counseling positions will be considered for our fast-track hiring process.

Questions? Email teach@sfusd.edu.

Marshall High Teacher Recruits for Diversity in College Level Course

by Mitzi Mock

At the beginning of the year teacher Robert Roth warned his advanced placement (AP) government seniors at Thurgood Marshall High School, “I call on everybody.” But he is quick to clarify, “I’m not picking on you. Calling on you is a sign of respect. I want to hear your voice.”

The value of many different voices is a critical theme in Roth’s class. In fact, the class motto is “pop up and speak”—and students do. Today, sitting in groups of three or four, classmates are spiritedly discussing stories they’ve read from Free at Last, a publication that profiles lesser-known figures from the Civil Rights movement. Many students express disbelief that they have never heard about the impact of these individuals before.

For Roth, teaching is all about “trying to engage students so they see themselves as actors in the process of changing their own world.” But he believes that in order for students to grasp the potential agency of their own voices, they need to know “nothing happened because of one famous person—it took many different people.”

To that end, Roth scourbs books, newspapers, magazines, and other resources, in search of materials that lend fresh perspectives to the class curriculum.

For instance, earlier this year, students studied Mendez v. Westminster, a 1943 desegregation case brought by Mexican parents in Los Angeles that, while much less famous than Brown v. Board, set a powerful precedent for school integration. To better imagine what it was like to stand in the shoes of the parents who waged this battle, students composed persuasive essays from the position of the plaintiffs.

Since day one of his twenty-year teaching career, Roth has seen himself as a social justice activist. But over time, the tenets of that personal mandate have evolved. For Roth, social justice in the classroom is not limited to the telling of alternative narratives or the discussion of systemic inequalities, it’s also about ensuring that every student has the tools necessary to participate fully in society.

“Expository writing skills are a matter of social justice,” he urges. “Students need core skills...there needs to be a sense of rigor.”

While Roth infuses his class with supplemental materials, his students are also thoroughly studying the standard curriculum in preparation for their AP exam this spring. The coursework is demanding, and students are tested frequently. Following this afternoon’s civil rights discussion, they have an 8-part homework assignment that not only asks them to explain the nuances of the Equal Protection Clause, but to provide analytical responses to questions about past Supreme Court decisions.

“You miss a day in his class, it’s like missing a whole week of school,” says student Aida Best, who credits Roth’s class with helping her build her writing skills and improving her confidence in test-taking.

As heavy as the course load is, “his classes are never scary,” says Assistant Principal Han Phung, who often refers Roth as a role model for new teachers. “He always checks in with students, and asks, ‘Where are you struggling?’ Then he makes the time to go over the material.”

Roth and his colleagues at Marshall are adamant that AP and honors classes not be a privilege limited to students with overt academic success. But with low participation of Latino and African-American students in AP classes nationally, the teachers are cognizant that leaving the gate open isn’t enough to fill and retain a class.
In 8th grade I started thinking about school in a new way. While I liked my previous teachers, school often felt like a place where information was regurgitated and memorized. But Mr. Bream’s social studies class was different.

Mr. Bream followed the Socratic Method, posing mind-bending questions to his students, not simply feeding us with answers. This process not only forced me to think critically about what I knew, but made me reflect on how I think.

Mr. Bream would concoct hypothetical scenarios that challenged us to question the thinking process that shaped our behaviors. Once, he asked us to imagine that a Japanese gymnastics team was coming to California, and our class got to select two students to give them a tour of our school. But in this scenario, the team had a bias against people with blue eyes and blond hair. When it came time to vote for the student tour guides, classmates with blond hair and blue eyes didn’t even want to participate because they felt like they were at a disadvantage from the start. All the students who weren’t discriminated against wanted to participate.

Lessons like these caused me to reflect on, and stand up against, prejudicial thinking in my own life. Social justice in our schools starts with ensuring that every student has access to an education that enables them to think critically and creatively. This can’t happen without good teachers in every classroom.

But this is a reality we cannot achieve without a competitive compensation strategy that recognizes the value of our excellent teachers. World class schools need to hire world class talent. And for our kids to reach the heights of their own potential, we need to equip teachers with the resources and professional support they need to do their job.

Tell us about a teacher who influenced you. Write to newsline@sfusd.edu
Where does it come from? cont. from page 1

lic schools, which educates approximately the same number of students, $6,000, worked with a general fund budget of approximately $750 million last year.

Annually California spends an average of $1,900 less per student than other states, yet our cost of living is certainly not average. The state ranks 43rd in the nation for per-pupil spending. Proposition 13, the voter-approved initiative passed in 1978, severely restricted property taxes and transferred control of that revenue from the local to state level. Many districts have relied local commitment to supplement inadequate state funding by passing local ballot measures.

In 2004, San Francisco voters approved Proposition H, creating the “Public Education Enrichment Fund,” which has begun providing new librarians, physical education teachers, and visual and performing arts. Additionally, in November 2006, San Francisco voters approved Proposition A authorizing SFUSD to issue $450 million in bonds to pay for capital improvements for over sixty schools.

The first $100 million for the 2006 school bond was issued by SFUSD in March 2007 at favorable rates, which will result in lower interest payments for San Francisco taxpayers. In fact, SFUSD maintains credit ratings in the “Double-A” category from both Moody’s (Aa3) and Standard & Poor’s (AA-). These ratings are higher than those of most California school districts and are based on San Francisco’s large and diverse tax base, the District’s moderate debt burden, management practices, and other factors that lead to a strong and stable financial track record.

Where does it go? cont. from page 1

spring based on its projected WSF. In total, $204 million, or about 60 percent of the district’s unrestricted general funds, are allocated through the WSF.

The next largest expenses are for special education programs, building maintenance and custodians, substitute teacher salaries, utility bills, and security.

Central administration – costs associated with school district operations such as supervising principals, hiring personnel, and legal costs – amounts to approximately $12 million, or just under four percent of SFUSD’s unrestricted budget.

Gentle Blythe, Myong Leigh, and Heidi Anderson contributed to this article.

A Budget in the Balance cont. from page 1

2008-2009 school year by as much as $40 million, and may require interim year budget cuts as early as this March.

“Regardless of the challenges,” schools superintendent Carlos Garcia says, “the district is committed to responsible stewardship of public funds. We are going to maximize what we have and continue to be strategic about how we educate our kids.”

The independent accounting firm that reviewed SFUSD’s financial statements provided a “clean” audit in January, finding the district to be in good fiscal health and implementing high-quality financial management practices.

SFUSD’s annual budget can be viewed on the website, and audited financial reports are shared at public Board of Education meetings and available by request.

Careers Switchers cont. from page 1

After working 70-hour weeks in Silicon Valley, Damien was looking for a change. He now teaches physics at Washington High. He says that the most challenging part of becoming a teacher was learning how to motivate his students. He was also surprised by how under-funded public schools are.

“But I like the sense of completion I get and how we start fresh every year,” says Damien.

In particular, he adds, he likes working at Washington High.

“The staff, students, and parents make it a pleasure to come into work every day.”

The real-world experience and contacts that career switchers carry with them helps to bring lessons alive for students.

In fact, Richard McDowell helped to start the Health Academy at Galileo. Students who participate in the Health Academy get real world experience in the health care industry.

With his background in the health field, McDowell has built relationships with California Pacific Medical Center and others to show his students different parts of the industry. Through visits to local hospitals, students understand that health care is more than doctors and nurses; there is work in fields such as x-ray technician, respiratory therapist and administration.

“It helps students see the connection between what they’re learning and why they’re learning it,” says McDowell. And this essential connection is something that career switcher teachers are especially well suited to make.