

# Save Ojai Schools - SOS

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

QUESTION	ANSWER
<p>What is the “Save Ojai Schools” (SOS) Campaign?</p>	<p>SOS is a collective effort of the Ojai Education Foundation (OEF), parent organizations from ALL Ojai Unified School District (OUSD) schools (except Chaparral which doesn't have a parent organization), to raise awareness of the public schools' budget crisis and to raise \$330,000, or approximately \$100 per student, for the specific purpose of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Keeping all schools from closing; and</li> <li>2) Keeping class sizes from increasing (grades 4-12)</li> </ol> <p>The OUSD Board also endorses the campaign and agreed at their April 22, 2008 meeting to establish a restricted fund account as specified above.</p>
<p>When will a decision to close schools be made?</p>	<p>The School Board must have a balanced budget by the end of June. At its June 3, 2008 meeting they will decide whether to close any schools. Criteria by which to evaluate which school to close will be discussed at their May 27<sup>th</sup> Board meeting.</p>
<p>What is the deadline for raising the funds?</p>	<p>Contributions will to be accepted up and until the June 3, 2008 OUSD Board meeting, however, OEF has set a target of May 22 for responses to its direct appeal so that an assessment can be made prior to the Board meeting on May 27 regarding funds raised to-date.</p>
<p>What specific efforts are taking place in connection with the SOS Campaign to raise funds?</p>	<p>The SOS Campaign was kicked off on April 20 with a rally at the District Offices, with speakers providing information to the public. In the first week of May a direct appeal has been issued to the community. Each school is also hosting “town hall” meetings to inform parents of the impact the budget cuts can potentially have to each specific school site. Through out the month there are various community activities with individuals and organizations donating proceeds to the SOS Campaign. Businesses will also be approached to request their support and the public can identify these businesses by a SOS window cling, or noting the names of businesses in a weekly ad that will be posted to the Ojai Valley News.</p>
<p>I'd like to make a donation. How do I decide which organization to send my contribution to?</p>	<p>The Ojai Education Foundation (OEF), or parent organizations such as PTA/PTOs at each school site, or directly to the Ojai Unified School District have each established restricted fund accounts that are earmarked specifically for the “Save Ojai Schools” purpose.</p> <p>We recommend making your check out to “OEF” or “Ojai Education Foundation” and note “SOS” on the memo line that this is for Checks can be mailed to:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Ojai Education Foundation P.O. Box 1769 Ojai, CA 93024</p> <p>OEF also accepts credit cards online at <a href="http://www.ojaief.org">www.ojaief.org</a>. For more information OEF can be contacted at <a href="mailto:info@ojaief.org">info@ojaief.org</a>, or calling and leaving a message at: (805) 850-5068.</p>
<p>Is my donation tax deductible?</p>	<p>Yes! OEF is a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation and your donation is tax deductible. If you need a receipt, please let us know, otherwise please use your cancelled check or credit statement as receipt of your donation.</p>

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<p>Why did SOS choose these two priorities? What about teachers and all the other items that could be cut?</p>	<p>OEF chose two budget items that we felt were closest to the vast majority of the children on as many campuses as possible. We recognize that all of the activities and services that teachers and staff provide to our students affect the children's educational experience. All of the possible cuts that the School Board is faced with evaluating are unfortunate. Students, teachers, staff, parents and neighborhoods are all the victims of the state budget crisis. We fully support the teachers and support services groups and their goals, and hope that they can also support the goals of SOS.</p> <p>We view school closures as something that has significant impact on the students, families and neighborhoods whose school campus could be closed, AND to the receiving campus as well when they're then faced with extra portable classrooms, crowded playgrounds, busy morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up traffic, etc.</p> <p>Closing a school can have significant consequences for the children and the surrounding communities since schools often serve as neighborhood hubs. Children are not the same as, say widgets or business facility -- the emotional effects on the children, and greater societal effects of the community that school closures can have are a concern that many parents have shared with us.</p> <p>Keeping class sizes from increasing is also of concern because this would affect grades 4-12. There are already complaints of classrooms with 30+ students, and this could be raised to a point where more effort must be used for classroom management than teaching. Keeping class sizes from increasing can affect staffing levels so in this way it also allows us to retain our great teachers. Thus, we felt that this priority would benefit both students AND teachers.</p> <p>OEF has as its goal to 'create a vibrant, rich, inspiring educational experience for the children of Ojai,' and as such had to make the hard decision of which cuts we felt we could reasonably help to mitigate and that would have the most adverse effect on the children and their learning experience if implemented.</p>
<p>Why \$330,000 as a target? Don't we need \$2 million?</p>	<p>The total gap that the School Board is facing in order to reach a balanced budget is in the neighborhood of \$2 million.</p> <p>OEF and the PTAs/PTOs selected the \$330,000 because at the time it was the figure that was estimated in order to prevent school closures although we also know that this number could change during the course of the budget decision making process.</p> <p>As the School District administration continues to review the financial picture, which is affected by dynamic variables such as student enrollment, negotiations, and ultimately State budget decisions (which may not be decided until well after June 1<sup>st</sup>), the remaining "gap" is continuing to be refined. Because a balanced budget is required from the School Board by June, OEF and the PTAs/PTOs did not feel it was feasible to wait until a more "firm" number was available before initiating the SOS Campaign.</p>
<p>What is a normal elementary school size and how do Ojai's schools compare?</p>	<p>The national average school size for an elementary is approximately 390. In California the average is closer to 500. The elementary schools in Ojai have an average of 340 students; excluding Summit School which is has only 48 students.</p>

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<p>Maybe a school should be closed because there are just too few kids, or so that other programs can be saved. And what about next year?</p>	<p>The national average (elementary) school size for a rural area is around 390 students; we have an average of about 340 (not including Summit). Thus Ojai elementary schools are not outside of this average. Because of funding issues in California, the average school size is closer to 4-500 students; California ranks 46th in the nation for per-pupil funding – thereby forcing schools to consolidate. Numerous research studies show that the optimal size for elementary schools in terms of achievement, behavior, participation/inclusion, parental involvement, cost savings, safety, etc. is 300-400 students (independent of class size).</p> <p>Closing a school can also have indirect repercussions to the neighborhood. Closed campuses aren't available to offer students after-school activities and this can invite opportunities for the children to loiter or be unsupervised. Closed campuses also mean that children will need to be transported to a school that remains open, causing increased traffic in the morning and afternoons. The campuses that remain open will become crowded with less playground/open area since additional portable classroom units must be brought in, specialized programs may be eliminated because of lack of a vacant classroom due to the enlarged student body, etc.</p> <p>Fortunately, declining enrollment looks like it will flatten over the next two years and when it does hit the "bottom," revenue losses due to this will slow down or cease. If there are no new funding reductions from the State and enrollment stabilizes, this will also stabilize matters for OUSD as well. However, we recognize that school closures may need to be evaluated again next year until we can be assured of stabilized funding. Another year of keeping our schools open would allow such a decision to be well thought out whereby the "intangibles" can be considered, and the process carefully planned and judiciously carried out; one where parents and the community can be included in defining and implementing that plan instead of it being the result of a desperate reaction to a crisis.</p>
<p>What if the SOS Campaign doesn't raise the entire \$330,000?</p>	<p>In the unfortunate circumstance that the entire amount is not be raised or even a partial amount is insufficient to keep all schools open. This is a very difficult decision that will have to be made by the School Board Trustees.</p> <p>In such event that the School Board decides that school closures cannot be prevented, then those funds will be used specifically to keep the class sizes from further increasing.</p> <p>As a final "catch all" the SOS Campaign expressly asks the School Board to ensure that funds are used to directly benefit the students' learning experience.</p>
<p>\$330,000 is a lot to raise – HELP of Ojai, the Skate Park, they're all asking looking for donors."</p>	<p>This is a tough time for many non-profits and these and many others are all great causes. It's important for individuals to respond to those issues for which they care.</p> <p>Ojai's economy benefits with strong public schools – even realtors will include "In Ojai School District" when listing properties because it implies great schools. Strong public schools provide societal benefits as well such as reduced truancy, less crime or gangs, more families wanting to live in Ojai and buying from Ojai merchants, etc.</p> <p>The \$330,000, while it sounds ambitious, is roughly \$100 per student, or just slightly more than \$8 a month when annualized. We've heard from many individuals and families receiving the Economic Stimulus rebate, which provides \$300 per child and \$600 per adult that they plan to donate what they can.</p>

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<p>The OUSD Administration is “top heavy.” What cuts are they making there to help reduce the budget gap?</p>	<p>For 2008-2009, OUSD Administration will be cutting \$130,000 in administrative positions or administrative support positions. Prior to this, over the past 6 years, administrative positions at the district level have been reduced by 5 positions, for a savings of approximately \$1.2 million.</p>
<p>How much is the District budget and how much does the \$2 million gap represent?</p>	<p>The District budget is approximately \$25 million; thus the \$2 million gap is a little less than 10% of the total budget.</p>
<p>What’s driving the OUSD budget deficit?</p>	<p>There are three primary drivers of the budget deficit for Ojai:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Our 9<sup>th</sup> straight year of declining enrollment, approximately \$800,000 reduction in revenues.</li> <li>2) State reduction of funding, approximately \$400,000 reduction in revenues.</li> <li>3) Cost increases, such as utilities (water, electricity, gasoline), health benefits, and step-and-column increases (increases tied to teacher tenure and training).</li> </ol> <p>OUSD has lost about 150 students per year. While other districts in the Ventura County and throughout the State have also been declining, Ojai was “ahead of the curve” and was among the first in this trend. As a result, efforts have been made in the past years to keep budget cuts out of the classroom to the point of where OUSD is a very lean and efficient organization. It appears that enrollment will begin to flatten out in about 2 years.</p> <p>As with the general public, utilities and health insurance premiums continue to climb. “Green” initiatives such as light sensors, heat/air conditioning timers, more efficient heater and pump for the Nordhoff pool, etc. are being implemented that will help reduce costs.</p>
<p>We’ve had declining enrollment for many years now, this situation should not be a surprise. Why is this an issue now, or why wasn’t this anticipated?</p>	<p>We’ve had declining enrollment in Ojai’s schools for the past 8 years and we are (unfortunately) “ahead of the rest” in this trend. In prior years cuts were made that didn’t compromise the learning experience of the students. In fact, over the past 6 years the district has saved close to \$9.5 million. After so many years of cuts, however, coupled with reduced state funding this year, the cuts are deeper this year. What changed at the State level was that the past couple of years there have been slight increases in funding and in fact up until the end of 2007 another increase was anticipated, however, it was at the end of January when the Governor’s proposed budget presented reductions based upon state revenue projections.</p>
<p>What is included in the \$300K or \$133K numbers used in the Budget worksheet for school closures?</p>	<p>Most of the savings from closing schools comes from the salaries of support staff. This includes the principal, the librarian, the computer technician, the secretaries, some custodial, and some food service workers. The rest of the costs (teachers, utilities, etc.) are transferred to the receiving schools since extra classrooms will be required for the new students.</p>
<p>Does the \$300K or \$133K in closing a medium or large elementary include the cost of the portables that would be required to accommodate so many students?</p>	<p>The cost of portables comes from the Capital Expenditure budget which is separate from the General Operating budget that is used to pay teachers, librarians, computer technicians, secretaries, nutrition services, custodial services, transportation services, etc. Therefore the cost of leasing portables is not considered here.</p>

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<p>Will the cost of leasing the portables deplete the budget for facilities?</p>	<p>While leasing portables will reduce the Capital Expenditure budget, it will not deplete it and funds would remain for other work on or improvement to our facilities. The district has insurance coverage in the event of catastrophic damage to facilities.</p>
<p>The OUSD Administration doesn't recommend closing schools or increasing class sizes to the Board, so is there really a threat to these two items?</p>	<p>Although the Administration does not recommend closing schools or increasing class sizes, these are still possible options that must be considered by the Board to arrive at a balanced budget.</p> <p>Through multiple meetings, public input opportunities, and discussion, the OUSD Board has agreed to allow the District Administration to proceed with assuming \$1,498,000 in cuts. This leaves a balance of \$271,055 of cuts that must still be made in order to balance the budget (as of May 6, 2008).</p>
<p>I've heard the Administration already has plans for leasing its offices, closing Meiners Oaks Elementary, and moving everything including Chaparral and the transportation yard to the present Meiners Oaks campus.</p>	<p>The Administration has many plans that have been discussed in prior years of cuts and that must be examined even now. There are many configuration options for the business offices of the District to move in order to consider revenue opportunities by leasing the current buildings. One option includes moving District offices to Nordhoff High School, or splitting them among several campuses where there are available classrooms.</p> <p>It would be negligent of the District Administration to not review contingency plans such as these in light of the fact that a \$271,055 budget gap still exists (and this figure may change as the Board continues to deliberate all possible options), and that if school closure is necessary the plans must be immediately implemented in order to ensure schools are ready to receive students in August.</p>
<p>School Site Closure teams have been to my school – does this mean the decision has already been made?</p>	<p>No, the decision by the School Board has not been made (as of 5/6/08). The district has purposely requested the School Board to postpone that decision until its June 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting to allow as much time as possible for the SOS Campaign to raise funds from the community.</p> <p>That being said, if in the unfortunate circumstance the School Board is forced to make the dreaded decision to close one or more school campuses, then the district employees must be prepared to implement the closure and move of teachers, etc. to the new site so that they are prepared to receive the new students when school begins in August.. Therefore, the district has had to collect information from the school sites.</p>
<p>School closures can't be a reality because a committee hasn't been formed, or criteria haven't been published; what are the criteria for choosing which school(s) to close?</p>	<p>A District Advisory Committee (7-11 Committee) is not required for school closures. A DAC is required if the property will be used after a closure in some cases. Originally, OUSD Administration asked the Board to form a committee to review closure and discuss lease of property. We have since discovered an alternate option that allows a district to lease but does not require a DAC.</p> <p>Possible closure criteria to the Board will be presented to the OUSD School Board at the May 27, 2008 Board meeting so that they can review and discuss this, should closures become a reality. The Education Code requires that the district involve the community in discussions about school closure which has been consistently sought at public input opportunities and scheduled campus "town hall" meetings.</p>

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<p>What if legislators approve to not make cuts to education after the June 3, 2008 School Board meeting? Can the decision to close a school be rescinded?</p>	<p>The District has identified June 3, 2008 as the cut off date by which a decision must be made by the Board regarding school closures because sufficient time to implement the facility changes and teacher moves, etc. must be allowed so that students can be notified and classes are ready to start in August.</p> <p>If the State decides to not cut the K-12 education budget, then depending upon when this decision is made, the issue will be what irrevocable costs have been incurred up to that point and the amount of additional resources (time and money) required to revert back to the point of all schools remaining open. Costs will need to be looked at and decided upon by the Board.</p>
<p>What about selling or leasing the District offices along Ojai Avenue to create a revenue stream?</p>	<p>Revenues from selling district facilities, whether the administrative offices or a campus, can only be re-used for capital investments in facilities or facilities improvements. It cannot be used for the general operating budget: teachers, librarians, services and programs.</p> <p>The District is however looking at options of leasing the building since those revenues can be used for general operating expenses. There are many variables, however, that affect this possibility such as defining terms of leasing, finding interested tenant(s) and moving District functions to alternative locations, such as vacant classrooms at school campuses. Chaparral High School, however, cannot be on the same campus as another school and sufficient space at a new location for the transportation yard must also be resolved.</p> <p>Revenues from leasing the District office space would not be realized for at least 18 months at the earliest.</p>
<p>If an elementary school site were to be closed, how would students be distributed among the remaining open schools?</p>	<p>In the unfortunate event that school closure is necessitated, student distribution would be determined by new boundaries created for the remaining schools. After the boundaries are adopted, students would be notified of their new school placement. A student may apply to attend any school in the district and all requests will be granted if space is available.</p>
<p>Why can't the District use its reserves to cover the budget gap?</p>	<p>The District is mandated to have 3% of its budget in reserves. This is meant to be used for extraordinary circumstances.</p> <p>By using its reserves, in the first year the District would be considered in a "qualified" state. Any monies that come into the District thereafter must be used to return the reserves to the mandated level of 3% BEFORE any operating expenses. If the District is unable to achieve fill its reserve and continues to have operate without a balanced budget, then the District would be considered in a "negative" state. At this point the State will step in and take over operations of the District without concern for any local issues.</p> <p>Thus, using reserves is something that is fiscally risky: its bond rating would be downgraded, and placing the District in a situation where we could lose local control.</p>

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<p>The funding of education in California is broken. Why don't we keep more of our tax dollars (to fund education)?</p>	<p>Our property taxes don't go directly to OUSD – they are collected at the State level and then redistributed according to a formula to allow for a more equitable distribution of funds, unless a district's local property taxes exceed the State amount, and then the "excess" can be retained by the district, such as Montecito. This does not apply to Ojai, however. There is a district in Central California that receives close to \$13,000 per student because of oil-based royalties that benefit the town, whereas Ojai will less than half of that amount by a comparison. Even though the funding process needs fixing, unfortunately it won't benefit us this coming school year.</p>
<p>I already pay property taxes that goes to education, why isn't this enough?</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Why does Ojai with its high property values (and therefore high property taxes) have this budget problem?</p>	<p>Property taxes are collected at the state level and then redistributed to school districts according to a formula. This was established in an effort to create a more equitable distribution of funds, especially to smaller rural, less populous districts. Districts whose local property taxes exceed their "revenue limit" (the amount distributed by the state) are classified as "Basic Aid" districts and keep any monies from that are above their revenue limit. Ojai is not a basic aid district.</p> <p>For more detail, here is an excerpt from the <a href="http://www.CaliforniaSchoolFinance.org">www.CaliforniaSchoolFinance.org</a> website that describes the funding model for public education:</p> <p><b>What Are Revenue Limits?</b></p> <p>Public school districts receive funding from a variety of local, state, and federal sources. Some of the funds are earmarked for specific purposes, such as Special Education and K–3 Class Size Reduction, while the rest are for general purposes. The amount of general purpose funding a school district receives per student (using ADA—average daily attendance) is called its "revenue limit." It is a combination of local property taxes and state taxes. Each of the nearly 1,000 school districts in California has its own revenue limit based on its type (elementary, high, or unified), size (small or large), historical spending patterns, and a multitude of other variables, which together make for a complicated and lengthy formula.</p> <p><b>The Bucket Analogy</b></p> <p>State and local funds are combined to make up a district's revenue limit funding. A simple analogy can help illustrate this. Imagine a bucket. Each district has a different-sized bucket, representing its individualized revenue limit. Revenues raised through local property taxes are dumped into the district's bucket, and if the bucket is not filled all the way, the state comes by and tops it off with state tax revenues.</p> <p>If the bucket is completely filled by local property tax revenues, the state has no need to "top off" the bucket. If the bucket overflows with local property taxes, the district gets to keep the overage. Districts whose buckets are filled by local property taxes are called "basic aid" or "excess revenue" districts.</p>

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<p>I hear that teachers are getting a raise and that funding per pupil is over \$11,000 – so what are the “real” numbers?</p>	<p>Different figures are presented when calculating average per-pupil spending. Governor Schwarzenegger’s office includes all federal, state and local spending including dollars that aren’t received by districts such as state debt service on school facilities bonds, adult education and pre-school programs. The number used to calculate the “per pupil” average is the “ADA” or Average Daily Attendance which is the average number of students attending school on particular dates during the school year. This is generally lower than the actual number of students enrolled. Governor Schwarzenegger’s office does not include adults and pre-school children in this per-pupil figure.</p> <p>The Education Coalition uses the per pupil figures provided by Education Week’s 2008 "Quality Counts Survey," that is based on the actual amount of money spent on a student in the classroom and accounting for regional cost-of-living differences (the governor’s numbers do not). This data shows that California spends \$1,900 less than the National Average and is currently ranked 46<sup>th</sup> in the nation.</p> <p>For additional detail, you can also visit <a href="http://www.CaliforniaSchoolFinance.org">www.CaliforniaSchoolFinance.org</a>:</p> <p>“In crafting the 2008–09 proposal, the administration first created a “workload” budget for all state programs, including education. The workload budget starts with the revised 2007–08 funding levels and projects what each program would get based on a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) and changes in workload, which for K–12 schools means average daily attendance. Then the governor proposes an across-the-board cut of approximately 10% for almost all state-funded programs. For public schools, however, the reduction would be 10.9% according to the Department of Finance. The total reduction from the workload budget is \$4.8 billion, with \$4.3 billion from K–12 education and \$500 million from community colleges.”</p> <p>“Education cuts affect general purpose and categorical funds differently. As is the case with the current year reductions, the governor’s budget proposal is specific in its recommendations for how education cuts should be made. For K-12 education, the three-step process for calculating the reductions in state funding looks like this:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. apply to eligible programs the 4.94% cost of living adjustment (COLA) called for in state law to eligible programs,</li><li>2. adjust the program funding for enrollment changes (most programs), which is generally a decrease because of declining enrollments, and</li><li>3. impose a 10.9% cut on the total workload funding for 2008-09.”</li></ol> <p>“School Services of California estimates that for districts’ revenue limit funds, the net result of this calculation is a 2.4% cut statewide. For categorical programs that receive a COLA, the cut averages about 6.5%. A few programs would not receive COLA adjustments and are simply cut by 10.9%.”</p>