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The public will have a number of occasions to show its numbers to MPUSD in the coming weeks.

A good advocate

HOW TO HELP EFFECT MPUSD REFORM

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Infelise



Foss



LeBoeuf



Lauterbach



Noriega



Troutman



Villa



Eggers

Need to save your child's program or school from the budget-cutting ax of the Monterey Peninsula Unified School District?

There are ways to go about doing it — and ways not to. The coming round of board meetings and budget forums will be taxing for parents and school officials alike. To survive the next few weeks with your wits intact, just use some preparation, consideration and a little savvy.

The key advice from the experts: Get the numbers.

District trustees face a \$6.3 million deficit and are under immense pressure to slash the budget — and possibly to close as many as three schools. They know emotions will run high when the public puts in its 2 cents, but they're determined not to let their hearts rule their heads.

"This is a business proposition, partly," said Trustee Marjorie Troutman. "Emotionalism doesn't fit in well with business. That's why we need facts."

Two years after a similar crisis, the school board discovered late last year that it again faces insolvency unless it makes some deep cuts. Why? Declining enrollment, rising costs and failure to carry out some previous cuts.

Want to save your school or program? Then be prepared to show how efficient and effective it is. Tout test scores, growth and achievement. If you're trying to save a school, Troutman said, show that it's "really working to improve academic

Where to vent

Here's a list of important MPUSD meetings and dates. District officials caution, however, that the groups below might add more meetings in a race to make deadlines.

FEBRUARY

- 5 Community budget forum, King Middle School
- 6 Budget advisory committee meeting
- 6 Community budget forum, Fitch Middle School
- 11 Board meeting *Special time: 6 p.m.
- 12 Community budget forum, Colton Middle School
- 13 Budget advisory committee meeting
- 13 Community budget forum, Los Arboles Middle School
- 19 Board meeting
- 20 Budget advisory committee meeting — Members hope to finish their list of recommended reductions
- 25 Board meeting — Trustees should begin deciding on cuts

MARCH

- 4 Board meeting — Target date for end of trustees' main budget deliberations
- 5 Election Day — Bond results
- 11 Board meeting
- 15 District must warn the teachers it might lay off

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District trustees know emotions will run high when the public puts in its 2 cents, but they're determined not to let their hearts rule their heads.

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Advocate

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achievement and doing something about getting kids involved in the community and the community involved in the school."

But don't stop there. Trustees are big on the "Don't come to me with problems — come to me with solutions" attitude.

Board member Rob Eggers said supporters of the Gifted and Talented Education program have impressed him in recent presentations.

"They're giving us options, giving us ways to save it without encroaching on the general fund," he said.

GATE supporters have made presentations — complete with charts — listing financial reasons why MPUSD should not cut the program. Handouts are chock-full of numbers. They include financial analysis, survey results and even four detailed options that would save the program — and details on how each would affect the district's budget.

Looking for a role model? Check out local activist Ewalker James, who has been attending school board meetings for years. When he talks, MPUSD Superintendent Bob Infelise listens.

By simply offering data and solutions, James has successfully advocated for minority rights, lobbied for the creation of a nonprofit district foundation and persuaded the district to allow a UC Santa Cruz team to help beef up instruction at King Middle School in Seaside.

James "is a quiet, articulate spokesman," Infelise said. "He's a very effective advocate."

James offers one tip to nervous parents: If you're with a group, demonstrate the size of your contingent without being repetitive. If you can present your case in three minutes or less, have one person act as spokesperson. After the speech, the speaker "should turn around and say, 'Will all of you supporting me from the audience please stand.' That gets the board's attention."

The public will have a number of occasions to show its numbers in the coming weeks. Here are the three main arenas:

► Budget advisory committee meetings.

This is where the nuts and bolts of MPUSD financial cuts are discussed.

The committee, made up of representatives from the board, administration and community, analyzes the financial impact of all proposed budget cuts. Soon, members will debate which reductions to make, and they hope to present the board with a list of proposed cuts by Feb. 20.

These meetings are a snoozer for most people, and they're not the place for the public to advocate. But anyone is allowed into the cramped board room at MPUSD district headquarters, and those interested in how the district is thinking financially might want to sit in.

► Community budget forums. Here's where Infelise hopes the public will voice its concerns. Each will be held at one of the district's four middle schools. Infelise said he, district managers and budget advisory committee leaders are the ones people will address. Board members probably will be in the audience listening — at least those representing the trustee area for that particular school.

If people offer practical suggestions, Infelise said, "We'll try to incorporate them. Our proposals are fair game."

► Board meetings. This is where the hard decisions will be made. The public can always address the board here, but because of legal restrictions, trustees won't be able to respond.

The board probably will begin identifying which cuts it'll make when it meets Feb. 25. By then trustees should have the budget advisory committee's list of proposed reductions.

Infelise said he hopes the board will decide on its first big round of cuts by the end of the March 4 board meeting. That's because the district has to warn all teachers it might have to lay off by March 15.

But Infelise stressed that not all cuts have to be made by that date — just those affecting the dismissal of teachers and similar personnel.

And cuts won't actually be set in stone until the board approves next year's budget in June.

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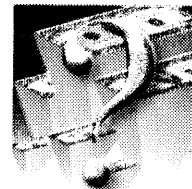
Meeting protocol

DO:

- **Do your homework.** Research your issue as much as possible. Know what you're talking about.
- **Back up your arguments with numbers.** If you are trying to show the benefits of saving a program or the hidden costs of cutting it, provide accurate numbers as proof.
- **Provide alternatives and solutions.** If you don't want your program cut, suggest alternative cuts or ways the program can be funded.
- **Keep the number of speakers to a minimum.** Show your numerical strength by asking backers in the audience to stand in a show of support.
- **Give trustees information sheets if you have facts and figures to present.** The best ones are simple, easy to read and highlight the most important points. Include your name, phone number or e-mail address so that board members can contact you for more information.
- **Remain calm and professional.** Speak clearly.
- **Use visual aids.** Illustrate your point by using overhead projectors, PowerPoint presentations or just simple graphs and charts.
- **Practice your speech before you attend a meeting.** You'll feel more comfortable, speak more clearly and know whether your presentation will fit into the three-minute time limit.
- **Attend more than just one board meeting.** Show your dedication and persistence. Better yet, participate regularly at board meetings throughout the year so that trustees get to know you.

DON'T:

- **Attack board members personally.**
- **Be repetitive.** A lot of people will want to talk. Each person supporting a particular cause should talk about a different aspect.
- **Abuse the time limit.** Trustees will usually cut people a little slack, but a run-on talker taxes everyone's patience.
- **Rely on pure emotion.** Trustees will remember a person's facts and figures long after the memory of someone's drama has dissipated.
- **Be flaky.** Showing up only when there's a crisis, lashing out and then disappearing leaves you with little credibility.
- **Harass board members at home.** If you need to get your point across outside of board meetings, try writing them a letter or leaving a message on their voice mail.



MPUSD

The \$6 Million Question

Board meetings

- Instructional Materials Center, 540 Canyon Del Rey, Monterey
- 7 p.m.

Budget advisory committee meetings

- Board room, MPUSD District Office, 700 Pacific St., Monterey
- 4 p.m.

Community budget forums

- 6:30 p.m.
- King Middle School, 1713 Broadway Ave., Seaside
- Fitch Middle School, 999 Coe Ave., Seaside
- Colton Middle School, 100 Toda Vista St., Monterey
- Los Arboles Middle School, 294 Hillcrest Ave., Marina

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