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## Foundation raises funds for Eureka Union schools

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Published Monday, Feb. 21, 2011

Walk onto the Oakhills Elementary School campus in Granite Bay and it's clear: The budget crisis hasn't hurt this school.

Students at the K-3 campus have plenty of computers, after-school Spanish courses and a school librarian.

Teachers use high-tech amplification systems, interactive whiteboards and a computer program that allows students to vote on whether they comprehend material.

The elementary school isn't unique in the Eureka Union School District. All of its schools have these programs and technology, and more.

How do they afford all this stuff?

Parents and community members – specifically, via the Eureka Schools Foundation – annually raise about \$500,000 a year to help fund district programs and salaries, said Renee Nash, foundation president.

Last year the organization's 30 board members and hundreds of volunteers raised \$526,000. The group held its usual fundraisers – the Auction Gala, Foundation Cup Golf Tournament, 5K Fund Run and an auction of student artwork. It also asks for donations through an annual giving campaign.

Without this money the school would have had to shutter the library, cut out all music programs and suspend all enrichment programs, Nash said.

Much of the foundation's funds help pay for technology to teach students 21st century skills – a focus of the district.

On Tuesday, Abby Burke's fifth-grade students at the district's Ridgeview Elementary School were learning about outer space on their laptops in preparation for a field trip to a flight simulator at the Discovery Museum Science & Space Center. The foundation helped pay for the students' laptops and interactive whiteboard and overhead projector used by the teacher.

Burke is ecstatic about the technology the foundation has provided. "It's revolutionized the way we teach," she exclaimed. "It's the world the kids live in. It's a digital world."

The school district is in the upper-income enclave of Granite Bay, but it isn't immune to state budget cuts. The tiny district of 3,300 students at seven schools has had to close a school and lay off teachers to bridge three years of budget gaps.

It also has one of the lowest levels of state funding in California – earning only \$4,900 per student, said Melody Glaspey, chief business officer.

So foundation funds pay the salaries of the district's music teachers, accompanists for its choir, librarians and technology staff, as well as stipends for junior high school coaches.

The group also contributes a portion of the cost for the school's after-school Spanish language program and pays \$30,000 to fund a summer program to improve the instructional skills of district teachers.

The number of education foundations is growing nationwide, said Jim Collogan, executive director of the National School Foundation Association.

"Daily, I hear from districts that want to learn to fundraise better, smarter," he said.

He said that foundations, especially those representing individual schools, are on the rise in California.

They are paying for summer school, enrichment programs like foreign language and music, and staff development, which were once paid for by school districts, said Susan Sweeney, executive director of the California Consortium of Education Foundations.

And increasingly they are being asked to help with the basics – offering grants to teachers for classroom materials and supplies, as well as other needs.

Sweeney said the state's 650 foundations raised \$230 million for its schools in 2008-09.

She said education foundations are generally successful because they resonate with the community. "It's money that is locally controlled, to go to what that community thinks is important and is missing – to address local needs that otherwise wouldn't be addressed," Sweeney said.

Banding together to help fund the education of children fosters a sense of community and togetherness, Nash said.

The group's leaders are encouraging other communities to start foundations for their schools. Anyone can start one, said Tiffany Jones, Eureka Schools Foundation board member.

She said the secret to a foundation's success is to educate parents and businesses about the school budget crisis, involve the community in the fundraising and be transparent about where the money is spent.

Nash, a tax attorney, says she often spends 20 hours a week on foundation business. "It's what we have to go through instead of paying for private school," she said.

"A public education is free, but a good one is not."

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