

2/28/09

GB schools group issues SOS

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Faced with the most severe budget cuts to schools in recent memory, the Eureka Schools Foundation is issuing an S.O.S.

Organizers hope the acronym – for a campaign called “sustain our schools” – will get the message out as they embark on what they’re calling the most important fundraising effort ever.

Popular ESF-funded programs such as music, band, Spanish and library support “will go away if we can’t sustain the level of funding we’ve typically had in the past,” said Julie Guerrero, the nonprofit’s executive director.

So homeowners in the Eureka Union School District boundaries – not just district parents – are receiving letters in the coming weeks asking for monetary donations.

The goal: to take in at least the \$500,000 or so ESF’s Annual Giving Campaign has raised in the past by requesting respondents donate at least a dollar a day.

ESF officials know that’s a tall order in an economy that has seen many families hit hard, even in the affluent Granite Bay and east Roseville area the district serves.

To that end, the pitch will ask residents to make smaller, recurring monthly donations “that could be much more easily budgeted into a family’s budget instead of one big one,” Guerrero said.

Then there’s the home-values argument. ESF says the enrichment programs that are its mission pay dividends beyond the classroom, as they support the area’s home prices. As Guerrero says, “great schools keep the local area distinguished.”

It’s unclear whether the message will resonate with those who don’t have children in the district. Non-child households are traditionally less apt to support school bonds, for instance, and ESF hasn’t reached out much to them in the past.

But it’s clear the group will either have to broaden its fundraising base or ask parents for more in the current budget climate. The challenge is compounded because the school district serves fewer students these days, narrowing the traditional pool of donations.

But residents won't be hearing the pitch over the phone. The foundation decided not to use a phone bank this year, Guerrero said, and instead is pushing donations through its Web site, www.eurekaschoolsfoundation.org.

"We pushed away from that so people could see the larger picture," she said. "Instead of threatening them with a phone call, let's give them the math and let them see what's in front of them."

Next year, the 16-year-old foundation will have to find even more funding for programs as the district is expected to pull back on programs that are only partially funded by ESF.

"Moving forward, they're wanting us to fund 100 percent of the programs we partially fund now," Guerrero said. "That would be \$800,000."