

Voices: Tough times means hard choices for Placer County school board

By Dave Delgado, Sacramento Bee

When the only choices available are lousy ones, chances are, the final decision rendered will be bad. Trustees of a Placer County school district are faced with decisions to reduce offerings in music, increase significantly the number of students in classrooms, nearly eliminate paraprofessional instructional assistants, discontinue the department that purchases and distributes textbooks and materials, and reduce by 20 to 25 percent the number of educators supporting staff from the district office. This after shuttering a school three years ago.

All bad choices. But lately, there are no good choices to be had.

The school district has a long history with tremendous frugality of budget. The operating tenet always was "Take care of the kids and take care of the people who take care of the kids." Historically, more dollars were spent in classrooms – closest to the kids – than in nearly any district in the state of California. The ratio of administrators to staff was among the lowest.

Yet it was not the case that the teachers were close to the highest paid in the area. Quite the opposite. Money was channeled toward small classes, paraprofessional support, robust teacher training, up-to-date curriculum and supplies, tremendous libraries and computer labs, and very well maintained facilities.

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