

Budget crisis forces deep cuts at Calif. schools

by TERENCE CHEA
APWriter

RICHMOND, CA—California's historic budget crisis threatens to devastate a public education system that was once considered a national model but now ranks near the bottom in school funding and academic achievement.

Deep budget cuts are forcing California school districts to lay off thousands of teachers, expand class sizes, close schools, eliminate bus service, cancel summer school programs, and possibly shorten the academic year.

Without a strong economic recovery, which few experts predict, the reduced school funding could last for years, shortchanging millions of students, driving away residents and businesses, and darkening California's economic future.

"California used to lead the nation in education," US Education Secretary Arne Duncan said during a recent visit to San Francisco. "Honestly, I think California has lost its way, and I think the long-term consequences of that are very troubling."

The budget cuts will be especially painful for struggling schools such as Richmond High School, where more than half of its 1,700 students are English learners and three-quarters are considered poor. The East Bay area school has failed to meet academic standards set by the federal No Child Left Behind Act for more than four years.

Now Richmond High stands to lose 10 percent of its 80 teachers. Electives such as French and woodshop will be scrapped. Some classes will expand to more than 40 students. And many special education and English-language students will be placed in mainstream classes.

"We're going to see more and more students slipping through the cracks as those class sizes increase," said Assistant Principal Jen Bender.

Richmond High students are worried about how the cuts will affect their education and ability to attend college.

"I think we won't be able to learn as much," said freshman Andrew

Taylor, 15. "They should put more money into schools. If you take money away from schools, you're going to end up with more people going to jail."

Slammed by an epic housing bust and massive job losses, California faces a \$24 billion budget deficit and could run out of cash by late July if Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Legislature cannot reach a budget deal.

To balance the budget, the governor has proposed closing more than 200 state parks, releasing prisoners early, selling state property, laying off state workers and cutting health care.

Under the governor's plan, K-12 schools and community colleges would lose \$5.3 billion over the coming year on top of billions of dollars in recent reductions and payment delays.

The state would spend \$7,806 per K-12 student in 2009-10, almost 10 percent less than two years ago, according to the Legislative Analyst's Office.

Federal stimulus funds have prevented deeper cuts to a public school system that educates 6.3 million children, of which about a quarter do not speak English well, and nearly half are considered poor under federal guidelines.

School districts have already issued layoff notices to more than 30,000 teachers and other employees, and they could issue more pink slips this summer, according to the state Department of Education.

"All of the things that make schools vibrant and help students learn are on the chopping block, if they haven't been cut already," Robin Swanson, a spokeswoman for the Education Coalition, which advocates funding increases. "When school doors open in the fall, it's going to be a very different public school system."

Many Democrats and school advocates are calling for tax increases to lessen the impact on schools, but Republicans oppose raising taxes. They say California should live within its means and school districts should be given more flexibility to spend their funds. ■

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sumer market dominated by products from Japan, South Korea and the United States.

Calling themselves as "inventors," Quebengco said their group is attempting to merge the regular LCD TV and personal computer.

He said their group is now in talks with various manufacturers interested in mass-producing the Illumina.

According to Quebengco, they have already signed non-disclosure agreements with the US' leading chip maker Intel, and local electronics companies Integrated Microelectronics Inc. (IMD) of the Ayala group and EMS Inc. to discuss possible mass production.

The Inovent Electronics team is composed of Quebengco as its founder and leader; chief marketing "inventor" Mark Ruiz; senior design "inventors" Peter Can, Jonas Peralta, and Jaed del Mundo; junior program "inventor" Ryan Bitanga; and junior "inventors" Victor Yu and Nikko Garcia, who are undergraduates at the De La Salle Univer-

sity (DLSU) taking up electrical engineering and electronics and communications engineering (ECE), respectively.

Quebengco is a professor of industrial design at the DLSU, aside from being an entrepreneur.

The group had produced the Illumina literally from scratch in the garage and different dorm units of the team members.

The Inovent team had presented an "alpha" unit or rough prototype of the Illumina last Nov. 30.

"We have made it sexier," Ruiz said in the presentation yesterday at the Magnet Café in Bonifacio High Street mall at the Bonifacio Global City in Taguig City.

The Illumina boasts of a complete multimedia device with access to Google Gadgets, Plasma Widgets, and Mac OS X dock Widgets.

It is said to be the first convergence product made in the Philippines that synthesizes the functions of an LCD television and a personal computer. ■

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