May 15, 2020

To Staff and the Twin Rivers School Community,

Let me start by applauding all of you for stepping up to meet the challenge of this unprecedented COVID-19 public health crisis. I know it’s an incredibly stressful time as the pandemic continues to hit us hard on so many different levels.

From a financial standpoint, COVID-19 is wreaking havoc on K-12 budgets. In just a few months, the pandemic has dramatically shifted California’s financial situation from surplus to deficit—a projected $54 billion budget shortfall. On Wednesday, the Governor released a revised budget with a proposed 10 percent cut to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), the primary source of funding for K-12 education. The proposed education cuts for the 2020-2021 budget will be devastating at a time when students need more support than ever before. As political leaders and members of the public turn to D.C. for assistance, our District is considering the fact that we may have to contend with a series of devastating budget cuts.

It is imperative that we remember a budget shortfall of $3.7 million was our reality before the pandemic, as shown in the following graph:

In addition to this already planned $3.7 million in required budget reductions for the coming year, with new COVID-19 operational expenses along with anticipated cuts in state funding, we could face an additional $7.6 million in reductions by December 2020. This is a projected total of $11.3 million in reductions needed.
Building and balancing a district budget is not unlike building and balancing a household budget. You begin with your income and build a spending plan based on priorities. This Board has set student needs as the unwavering priority. Therefore, we suggested closing campuses and consolidating operations so that we could prioritize people – the people who serve and support our students.

The Board of Trustees, at its May 5 meeting, gave clear direction that it would not close a campus in order to help balance the budget. We still face some tough decisions and painful conversations in the weeks and months ahead. Furlough days, layoffs, a hiring freeze and pay cuts are all possibilities to address the serious financial realities we, along with districts across the state, are forced to address.

The entire budget process is a complex undertaking under normal circumstances. Now, it’s further exacerbated due to ongoing uncertainty over funding and the fact that we don’t know how long this public health crisis will last. We remain committed to putting students and supports for schools first, as we navigate and address the financial issues confronting not just our district, but also every district across the state.

I know this is hard to absorb. Each year we always hope for the best while planning for all possibilities. No one wants this to be our new normal, but if ever there was a school community to get through this, it’s ours.

We Are TRI Strong.

Respectfully,

Steve Martinez, Ed.D.
Superintendent, Twin Rivers Unified