



RIO RANCHO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

As you may be aware, due to the ongoing economic downturn in New Mexico and nationwide, the State of New Mexico is facing a significant budget deficit for the current year (FY10), along with a shortfall in balancing last year's budget (FY 09). The most recent numbers put the FY 10 budget deficit at somewhere in the \$600 - \$700 million range plus a \$230 million shortfall left over from for FY 2009. With these significant deficits, the state's operating budget, which includes funding for public schools, will have to be reduced. The state budget is approximately \$5.5 billion; the loss of \$700 million amounts to approximately 12.7% of the state budget.

There has been considerable discussion in Santa Fe over whether state funding for K-12 public education will have to be cut and if so by how much. Public education accounts for about 43% (\$2.6 billion) of the state budget. Some legislators contend that it will therefore be impossible to avoid cuts to education without decimating the rest of state government. While the Governor and other legislators have until now opposed any cuts to K-12, the most recent figures indicate the deficit has grown substantially. Even some of the staunchest opponents of cuts to education are now suggesting that schools cannot be completely spared the budget axe.

As we have previously informed you, cuts in the 3% - 5% range of the state-funded portion of revenue allocated through the state funding formula have been under consideration, and figures have been provided to districts outlining what a 10% reduction would look like. In Rio Rancho, a 3% - 5% reduction would amount to \$3 million - \$5 million and a 10% cut amounts to \$9.6 million. This would devastate our current programs and staff. The cuts would be particularly acute in Rio Rancho because our district does not have other sources of revenue such as federal money to fall back on. In the latest year for which state data is available, our district ranks dead last in the amount of federal funding it receives per student, and this also translates to direct aid through the federal stimulus.

The state has already cut school budgets once, last January. Many of you have already seen the effects of these and other cuts in Rio Rancho in the form of larger class sizes and tighter budgets. Now, the Rio Rancho school board has directed that the district begin preparing options for their consideration if additional state school budget cuts are mandated this year. State law limits the options we can consider: for example, we cannot legally move money from school construction into operations.

Until we have a better picture of what cuts to education might look like, we do not want to speculate on specifics. However, it is certain that programs which are valuable to student success could be reduced or eliminated and that layoffs could occur. At the state level, the discussion includes the possibility of salary cuts, increased class sizes, reductions in educational days, cuts in athletics, electives, extracurricular programs, fine and performing arts, and school services including school bus transportation. As we have in the past, we emphasize that our priority is to keep our loyal employees on the job and in the classroom in these difficult economic times. Job losses are devastating to families and to the economic life of the community.

The Governor has called a special session of the Legislature for this coming Saturday, October 17, in order to address the revenue shortfall. Our legislators face a very challenging situation and we understand they will have to make some very difficult decisions. We have been in touch with the members of our legislative delegation and will closely monitor the session to assure our legislators are fully informed of what cuts would mean to our students, staff, and community.

We do not want to unduly alarm people, but feel it is important that parents, our partners in education, fully understand what is at risk. I want to assure you that we will continue to do everything possible to provide a quality educational experience for your child. I will also do everything in my power to support minimum cuts to public education. If you wish to contact our legislators and let them know how you feel about cutting school district budgets and especially what the impact could be on your children, contact information is provided below. It just takes a few minutes and clicks of the mouse to send an e-mail, and the education of our students is at stake.

Thank you for your understanding and support during this difficult budget year.

V. Sue Cleveland, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools