

Serrano  
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Sometimes an Albatross is more than a Large White Bird

Remember the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

“Water, water everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink”

If Samuel Coleridge were alive today, he might be describing the albatross, a large white bird that the the mariner in the story carries around his neck, similar to our current economic woes. The phrase could read “Money, money everywhere, nor any penny to spend.”

As much as we might like to talk about learning and services, the education budget for the state of California right now is all about money and our restricted ability to spend greatly reduced budgets on children and classrooms.

Education has a guaranteed percentage for funding under Proposition 98. However, again due to economic downturns, Prop 98 guarantees are also reduced. Although education is the largest piece of the Governor’s budget, cuts in education, which now equate to personnel and classroom cuts, are happening even in the most fiscally sound and well run districts. With the California budget the way it is, the cuts have been unavoidable. The money is just not there.

The Governor is proposing two options for this year’s budget. One is a ballot initiative that would continue the temporary taxes which are currently in place for another five years. Under the Governor’s proposal, if the initiative passes, schools would receive almost the same amount of funds for 2011-12 as were received 2010-11. In other words,

schools would be “flat funded.” If the initiative doesn’t pass, option two proposes another \$9 billion in education cuts. That could mean \$8.5 million out of El Dorado County Schools or more.

It’s easy to go on with hand-wringing about the woes of the budget. We all do that over coffee or while watching CNN. But hand-wringing doesn’t seem to have much effect on changing the situation. In El Dorado County we are continuing to look for ways to make the best of a difficult situation. Are there additional ways to consolidate services without losing programs for students? Can we make equipment and supplies last longer? Can we rebuild that bus engine rather than buy a new bus? These are the same types of questions schools typically ask themselves each year when developing their budgets and this year the answers will become more critical than ever.

Our particular albatross is causing us to do a great deal of soul-searching and changing of behaviors. There are no easy answers. There are, however, concerned and dedicated individuals who are willing to put the time and effort into finding solutions. Schools and communities alike will need to work together to fix this one. It may not be easy, but we will find ways to do so.