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Times wrong about education cuts

joseph a. ovick | From county education

By Joseph A. Ovick guest commentary
Article Launched: 04/18/2008 11:04:36 PM PDT

THE CONTRA COSTA Times' Sunday editorial used U.S. Census Bureau data to mislead people into believing that California's schools won't be impacted by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposed \$4.8 billion in funding cuts.

As the Contra Costa County Superintendent of Schools, I've seen first-hand how these cuts have already impacted our schools and students. More than 500 pink slips went out in Contra Costa County on or before March 15, as required by law. More than 20,000 educators statewide have received pink slips. Every pink slip that is issued means fewer resources for our students, whether increasing class sizes and reducing individual attention for grade-school students, or denying high school students the resources they need to graduate.

The fact is, in what he claimed was supposed to be the "Year of Education," the governor proposed an across-the-board budget cut of 10 percent. There have not been any other budget proposals put forward since then, so how the cuts were suddenly and dramatically reduced to 1.9 percent is a mystery. Or worse, it is new "spin" put out by the governor's office in response to the thousands of parents and teachers who have protested these devastating cuts to our schools. The truth is, California is already at the bottom of the barrel in per-pupil spending, with the nonpartisan Education Week ranking our state 46th out of 50 states.

Attempting to cherry-pick information from a U.S.

Census Bureau report to make the case that our state is only "just below" the middle of the pack is equally as misleading. When factoring in cost of living, this report actually shows that California ranks 40th out of 50 states on school spending per \$1,000 personal income.

Even the U.S. Census Bureau report shows that California spends \$652 less per student than the national average — and that's before cost-of-living adjustments! The recent "Getting Down to Facts" studies show that California seriously underfunds its public schools and would need to spend 40 percent more (\$17 billion) to ensure that all students meet the state's rigorous academic standards.

No matter which way you slice it, the fact remains that every cut hurts our students. It is certainly a travesty that the Times has decided to abandon our children at a time when they need us the most.

Ovick, Ed.D., is superintendent of schools for Contra Costa County.

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