



UPDATE

September 6, 2006

• A Publication of the All Faculty Association at Santa Rosa Junior College •

First the Good News: State Budget Looks Very Positive for SRJC

by Janet McCulloch, AFA President

Welcome back to another year of educational enrichment at Santa Rosa Junior College. The State Budget as passed is very favorable to California Community Colleges with a serious exception in the area of equalization. That budget included NO provision for equalization, but deferred the resolution of the formula to Senator Jack Scott's trailer bill, SB 361. On August 23, SB 361 passed out of the Assembly 76 to 0 with abstentions from some Republicans who said that they had not had sufficient time to review the language. On August 29 we received the good news that the more bi-partisan Senate had also passed the bill and would be sending it on to the Governor for signature. He has until September 30 to approve SB 361 to implement the new, improved, equalization funding formula in that legislation or the entire Community College System will be critically underfunded for the 2006-07 budget year. (This legislation could bring as much as \$8 million of ongoing funds to SRJC.) Failure to sign SB 361, of course, would be political suicide for our Governor who last year learned the hard way that not supporting education has serious political consequences.

AFA is really quite hopeful about the eventual outcome of the State Budget and looks forward to implementing the following language negotiated in the 2005-07 Contract:

In recognition of the mutual partnership inherent to interest-based bargaining, consideration of 2006-07 salary adjustments, benefits, and other elements of compensation or faculty support may include discussion of additional funding sources such as greater-than-budgeted ending fund balance, and any new funds (one-time or ongoing) from the State including 2006-07 equalization funds greater than \$1.25 million, redistributed growth funds from 2005-07, new adjunct faculty funding, or funding related to court settlement of Prop. 98 back-funding.

This language, coupled with an agreement with the District to work in partnership toward creating stability in our enrollments, felt very positive at the end of last year. Since we had worked hard to restore the schedule, and consequently many jobs, we began to feel that we would truly be treated as partners.

Now the Bad News: District Has No Interest in Providing Fully-Paid Health Benefits

by Janet McCulloch, AFA President

Notwithstanding language in the Contract, and the mutually agreed upon intent behind the language, this was a difficult summer as AFA met with the District seven times to try to resolve some monetary items in advance of the open enrollment period for health insurance scheduled for October. (SRJC is making a transition to a calendar-year basis for negotiating and implementing health benefit plans with the providers — currently Health Net and Kaiser.) Last year the District informed us of their desire to switch from considering health benefits as an employee “benefit”

to considering the cost of health premiums as part of a “total compensation” package along with salary. AFA has not accepted this approach to health insurance although we did agree to apply the COLA to the cost increases (12% for Kaiser and 13% for Health Net) and negotiate the difference using the language presented above.

At this time we have not reached agreement as to how to pay for the \$63,257 increase in health insurance costs. AFA was presented a draft of a letter to all faculty, staff, and management explaining that

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Bad News *(continued)*

employees might expect to pay for a share of their benefits. We met again on September 1 to try to come to agreement so that this letter would not go out to faculty. **We have been told that the District no longer has an interest in offering health benefits to faculty or staff unless you are willing to participate in cost-sharing of some kind.** There is some concern as to making a settlement unless contractual language clearly states that you may expect to pay in the future. The District says that it does not want to “mislead” you about the unpleasant possibility of cost-sharing in bad budget years; however, there is clearly more than enough revenue to cover the increase this year, so this is actually a moot point. We continue to work to find solutions to the health benefit crisis, but find that we are often working alone. Dr. Michael Beebe’s first and foremost component goal for 2005-06 was to find solutions to this serious problem. To date we have seen little progress in that direction except for the District hiring a health care consultant that AFA brought to them in another moment of extreme frustration.

Please understand that the AFA Negotiating Team has no intention of asking you to pay any portion of your health insurance premiums in 2006-07. We believe that the language we negotiated in our last agreement, as quoted above, means that we are partners in the process of deciding how to allocate new monies. **It is sad that the District does not understand this language in the same way that we do.** The fact that we have reached this point in our negotiations without coming to some

agreement is a source of extreme frustration with a process that appears to violate the principles of interest-based bargaining and the partnership faculty share with the District.

With so much new money in the State Budget, and so much of it coming to SRJC, we begin to wonder what the problem is: Is it the idea that faculty can and should have a share in the spending of this money? Is it a control issue? Is it a threat to the Reserves? Whatever the reason, it is the case that faculty have shared in the bad budget years, but now the District doesn’t want to share in a good budget year.

I am paraphrasing Walter Lippman, but in labor relations, as in any other relations, a policy (or contract) “can only be formed when commitments and power have been brought into balance.” We always strive to achieve and maintain this delicate balance of power and commitment with the District. The AFA Negotiating Team is strongly committed to the partnership with the District and the principles of interest-based problem-solving, sharing of data and timely negotiations. It was only a year ago that the District and AFA participated in the interest-based problem-solving training session, but some of the practices and principles agreed to then seem to have been forgotten by the District. Please support us in voicing your concerns about honoring an ethical negotiating process, one that recognizes that faculty are willing and committed partners in maintaining the health and success of this college, and as such deserve to be treated as the professionals that we are.



ALL FACULTY ASSOCIATION
Santa Rosa Junior College
1501 Mendocino Avenue • Santa Rosa, CA 95401
(707) 527-4731 • Fax: (707) 524-1762