Esteemed Parents, Students, Staff and Community Members,

The single greatest challenge we face as a school district in the next eight months is financial. Our district’s multi-year budget projection (3 years) indicates that we are facing a dramatic budget shortfall. Specifically, we have been directed by the San Diego County Office of Education (our fiscal oversight agent) to reduce our budget projection for the 2020-21 school year by more than $19 million dollars. Almost every school district in California is facing this same financial challenge. In fact, the research organization WestEd. published a comprehensive guide explaining this problem called “Silent Recession - Why California School Districts are Under Water Despite Increases in Funding.” For a historical perspective, there are three factors that have caused the current fiscal challenge:

- First - Vista Unified has been experiencing a consistent decline in student enrollment for over five years. Specifically, Vista Unified has lost over two thousand students in the past five years to declining enrollment. It is important to note that many other school districts in San Diego County and throughout the entire state are faced with the same impact of declining enrollment.
- Second - The California Department of Education has required every school district in the state to dramatically increase the contribution to CalSTRS (State Teachers Retirement) and CalPERS (Public School Employees Retirement System). EdSource provided a detailed review of this topic in the article, “New Data Detail Soaring Costa of California School Pensions.” This increased funding demand directly impacts the district’s general fund that is normally intended for general education programs and staffing. As a result of declining enrollment, there are a number of schools in Vista Unified that are significantly under enrolled. Schools operating with a smaller student population are not able to cover the costs for basic school operation (electricity, building repairs, administrative and secretarial staffing, etc.). This additional cost must come from the general fund.
- Third - Vista Unified, along with every other school district in the state, is required to comply with all state and federal regulations to provide special education services. This mandate does not come with the requisite funding to address the increased financial burden to the district. As a result, the district must make up the difference in cost with general funds that were intended to fund general education programs.

Additionally, we have just recently completed a comprehensive fiscal audit by FCMAT (Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team) that corroborates the need to reduce our budget for the 2020-21 school year. This, as you can imagine, will have a dramatic impact on programs and services across the district.

It is important to note that the district has weathered budget storms like this before (late 1990s and 2008). While the impacts and effects of these budget challenges are real, Vista Unified has always endured and emerged from each budget crisis stronger. The central focus of our school board members, as they address this challenge, is to work collaboratively with the community to keep students at the center of all financial decisions.

The purpose of Vista Unified School District is to inspire every student to persevere as a critical thinker who collaborates to solve real world problems.
The timeline for addressing these required budget reductions is compressed in order for Vista Unified to comply with a directive received from the San Diego County Office of Education on September 20, 2019. The school board will need to submit a list of budget solutions (more commonly known as reductions) during the First Interim Budget report at the December 12, 2019 School Board Meeting. In the spirit of transparency, we will be posting the budget solutions to the Vista Unified web page the day after each board meeting. In fact, we have already started with the first Board Meeting Action Update posted on Friday, October 18, 2019. The board has set three board meetings in the coming month to review community feedback, discuss budget solutions, and, ultimately, make budget reductions.

In order to fully engage the Vista community in discussions about potential budget solutions and to gather input and recommendations, we have set a series of LCAP and Budget Community Forums to take place in the next four weeks. We will have Spanish interpretation available at all forums. Further, we will be posting to the Vista Unified web page a link to a digital feedback form for all community members who are not able to attend a forum in person. We will also be fully engaging our bargaining units (Vista Teachers Association and the California School Employees Association), as well as the District English Language Advisory Committee, District Parent Advisory Committee and the Vista Parent Teachers Association in feedback and recommendations for budget solutions.

- **LCAP & Budget Community Forums Dates:** October 29th, November 5th, November 13th
- **Special Board Meetings:** November 4th at 6:30 p.m., November 6th at 5:00 p.m.
- **Regular Board Meeting:** November 14th at 6:00 p.m.
- **Regular Board Meeting, First Interim Report:** December 12th at 6:00 p.m.

It is important for us all to recognize that this budget reconciliation process will be difficult. This is our opportunity as a community to pull together as a collective team to keep our focus on students at the center of every decision. Now more than ever before, we need to adopt an innovative mindset to identify novel solutions that keep us moving forward as an organization and continue to build our reputation as the model of educational excellence and innovation that all of our students so richly deserve.

Sincerely,

Matt Doyle, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Vista Unified School District

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