

West Contra Costa Unified School District  
*Office of the Superintendent*

**Friday Memo**  
**November 22, 2019**

**Upcoming Events – Matthew Duffy**

November 25-29: No School

November 28-29: Thanksgiving Holidays

December 3: Agenda Setting, Superintendent's Office 4:30 PM

December 4: Richmond High Band Festival, Gym, 6:00 PM

December 5: MDAC, Helms, 6:30 PM

December 5: Pinole Area Band Festival, PVHS Gym, 7:00 PM

December 6: MDAC, Kennedy, 9:00 AM

December 5-6: El Cerrito Student Plays, Theater, 7:00 PM

December 5-7: CSBA Annual Education Conference, San Diego

December 9: Districtwide Budget Forum, DeJean, 6:00 PM

December 10: Hercules Area Orchestra Festival, HMS Gym, 7:00 PM

December 10: DeAnza Area Festival, DA Gym, 7:00 PM

December 10, 11, 13: Hercules Jazz Dance Performance, HHS Theater, 6:30 PM

December 11: El Cerrito Area Band Festival, Korematsu Gym, 7:00 PM

December 11: Hercules Area Band/Choir Festival, HMS Cafeteria, 7:00 PM

**No Friday Memo on November 29**

Because of district offices will be closed during the Thanksgiving holidays, there will be no Friday Memo on November 29.

**Bond Ratings - Surveillance Review - Tony Wold**

This past week both Standard and Poors (S&P) and Fitch completed Surveillance reviews of the District's bond ratings. These ratings are used by investors to determine the rates they are willing to pay for district debt. Higher ratings ensure the best possible tax rates for our community. The current budget situation in the District was reviewed by both agencies including the likelihood that the District could have a qualified certification at the First Interim and will be utilizing reserves and the recommendation to use OPEB trust funds as part of the current year budget solutions. While we are waiting for the formal report from S&P, we have received favorable reviews from both agencies that there is confidence from the outside financial markets in the management and leadership of the district to follow the budget process that has been presented to the Board. The ratings from both agencies will remain the same for future bond issuances at this time with S&P revising the outlook from Positive to Stable.

This is fantastic news for the District to have validation on our strong property values and tax management work in conjunction with KNN and the confidence in District leadership to implement a process that will complete budget reductions appropriately moving forward.

West Contra Costa Unified School District  
***Office of the Superintendent***

**NCS Football Playoffs - Marcus Walton**

The football teams at Kennedy and De Anza high schools are one step closer to North Coast Section titles after breezing through their first round games last week.

Kennedy (10-1) entered the first week of the North Coast Section playoffs as the top seed in Division VI and beat No. 8 Arcata 35-6 on Nov. 15. De Anza (10-1) is the fourth seed in Division V and won 41-21 over visiting San Marin.

Both teams continue their NCS championship dreams with semifinal games tonight.

The Eagles host No. 4 Justin Siena-Napa at 7 p.m. The Dons travel to face top-seeded Encinal-Alameda at 7 p.m.

**Media Articles of Note - Marcus Walton**

The following news stories may be of interest. Copies are attached.

<https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/west-contra-costa-unified-school-district-celebrates-native-american-heritage-month-2019/> - WEST CONTRA COSTA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT CELEBRATES NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH 2019

<https://edsource.org/2019/amid-budget-worries-east-bay-board-approves-575-million-bond-measure/620373> - East Bay board agrees to ask taxpayers to vote in March to approve \$575 million bond measure

<https://edsource.org/2019/csu-leaders-appear-ready-to-move-forward-with-requiring-extra-year-of-high-school-math-despite-concerns/620322> - CSU leaders appear ready to move forward with requiring extra year of high school math despite concerns

<https://edsource.org/2019/supporters-urge-board-to-keep-east-bay-superintendent-despite-budget-crisis/620199> - Supporters urge board to keep East Bay superintendent despite budget crisis

<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2019-11-18-inside-a-news-literacy-camp-where-the-newsroom-becomes-the-classroom> - Inside a News Literacy Camp, Where the Newsroom Becomes the Classroom

<https://www.sfgate.com/news/bayarea/article/School-Board-May-Vote-Friday-To-Fire-West-Contra-14838778.php> - School Board May Vote Friday To Fire West Contra Costa Schools Chief

<https://edsource.org/2019/east-bay-board-may-consider-firing-superintendent-amid-fiscal-crisis/620069> - East Bay board may consider firing superintendent amid fiscal crisis



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Friday, November 22, 2019

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## WEST CONTRA COSTA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT CELEBRATES NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH 2019

BY [MIKE RACCOON EYES KINNEY](#) / [CURRENTS](#) / 22 NOV 2019

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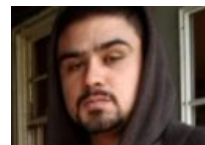


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## NOVEMBER IS NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Published November 22, 2019

**RICHMOND, Calif.** — On Tuesday- November 20, 2019, Friends and allies showed up to the West Contra Costa Unified School District in Richmond, CA. at the WCCUSD school board meeting where they had a resolution celebrating & acknowledging Native American Heritage Month. The school district has over 31,000 students attending from six cities that consist of making the district.

I was there as the State



Mike Raccoon Eyes

Chairperson representing the United Urban Warrior Society-California Chapter, we have over 2500 members state wide. Among the allies were the Sikh community from the local temple that has supported our yearly United Urban Warrior Society- California Chapter's Indigenous People's Walk for Sobriety with financial support and food during our Sobriety Walk.

The month of November is recognized as Native American Heritage Month. The West Contra Costa Unified School District recognizes the contributions of Native Americans to the culture and history of this region and this country and encourages schools to conduct appropriate commemorative exercises to

BY LEVI RICKERT



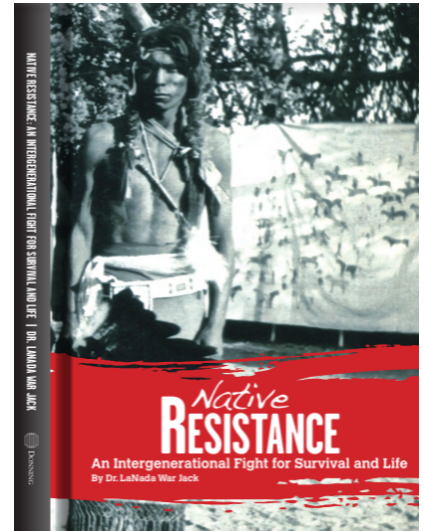
**Repatriation Panel Examines History of Stolen Cultural Patrimony on Four Continents**

BY NATIVE NEWS ONLINE STAFF



**Cherokee Nation Unveils New Art Honoring Wilma Mankiller**

BY NATIVE NEWS ONLINE STAFF



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HIGHLIGHTING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

## East Bay board agrees to ask taxpayers to vote in March to approve \$575 million bond measure

*New funds would be for facilities. No help to close district's \$48 million deficit.*

NOVEMBER 22, 2019 | THERESA HARRINGTON



THERESA HARRINGTON / EDSOURCE

**A** San Francisco Bay Area district has decided to go to the voters in March asking them to approve a \$575 million construction bond measure so it can build and upgrade school facilities.

If voters approve the measure, West Contra Costa Unified — which includes Richmond and surrounding communities — could only use the money for construction, renovation, technology or other facilities upgrades.

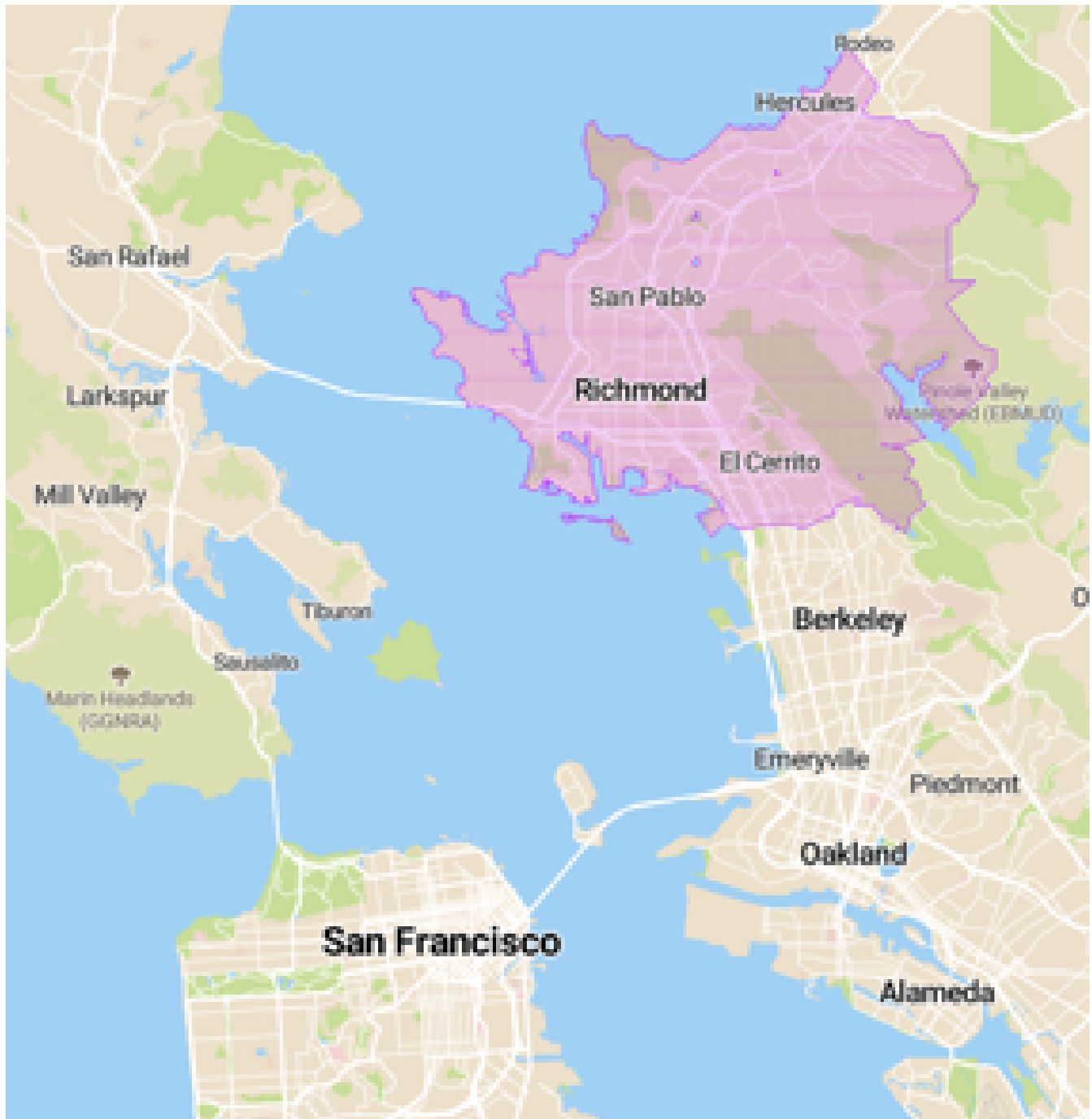
to work with Superintendent Matthew Duffy to find ways to close its budget gap.

West Contra Costa is considering spending cuts and use of budget reserves to close its budget gap, which surfaced since last spring, in part to fund a 17 percent cumulative [raise](#) for the district's teachers from July 2017 to July 2020 in order to attract and retain high quality teachers. Officials [said](#) the district may return to the voters next November to ask for a new parcel tax to restore any programs, services and staffing that it [cuts](#) to balance its 2020-21 budget.

The district bond measure is different from the statewide \$15 billion construction bond [measure](#) that will also appear on the March ballot, because the West Contra Costa measure only applies to residents in the district and would require them to pay additional property taxes to fund it. The statewide measure, on the other hand, would be funded as part of the state budget and could provide matching funds to districts such as West Contra Costa, if they have their own local funding. The state measure requires a district match in most cases, but the percentage varies based on the type of project and the demographic makeup of students. The state bond [may](#) cover up to the entire project cost for some districts that qualify for financial hardship. The state measure requires a majority vote to pass, while district measures require 55 percent voter approval.



# West Contra Costa Unified



The school board on Wednesday voted 4-1 to place the measure on the March 3, 2020 ballot to be used to rebuild and renovate 21 schools considered priorities based on the district's [facilities master plan](#), while also providing air conditioning and technology districtwide.

isn't much time to drum up support for the March measure with holidays coming up. He said he was also concerned that the project list was too broad and vague.

The bond measure would require property owners to pay \$60 per \$100,000 in assessed value through 2052-53. That would increase the property tax rate from nearly \$238 to almost \$300 per \$100,000 of assessed valuation. The rate would drop every year as other measures are paid off.

Board member Consuelo Lara said she was "excited" about the planned projects, including air conditioning, career technical education, arts facilities and health centers.

"Everybody's going to benefit," she said. "These are things I'm passionate about."

Board member Mister Phillips said some of his neighbors have told him they are experiencing financial hardships and have to choose between feeding their families and heating their homes.

"I want us to realize when we talk about putting a bond or a parcel tax on the ballot, this money we're trying to get is not free money," he said. "It's coming from our neighbors and some of those folks are struggling."

Tony Wold, associate superintendent of business services, said the district recognizes that even without the new tax, "our community is feeling the burden of taxes." But he said the district has identified more than \$1 billion in facilities needs "and that is only going to go up" if the district waits.

The school board has not yet identified the specific projects to be funded with the money. The bond measure states that the final costs have not yet been determined and that based on these costs, some projects "may be delayed or may not be completed."

The district plans to pay for placing the bond measure on the ballot, estimated at \$256,700 to \$385,000, from revenue in its operating budget set aside for legal fees, which won't be needed this year, Wold said.

HIGHLIGHTING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

## CSU leaders appear ready to move forward with requiring extra year of high school math despite concerns

*Vote on the proposal is scheduled for January; opponents called for a further delay.*

NOVEMBER 20, 2019 | MICHAEL BURKE



MICHAEL BURKE/EDSOURCE

California State University leaders signaled Wednesday they will move forward with a [controversial plan](#) to require a fourth year of high school math for freshman admissions — despite opposition from civil rights organizations, education groups and state leaders.

During a CSU trustee meeting Wednesday at the system's headquarters in Long Beach, opponents reiterated [concerns they have voiced for months](#): that CSU has not provided sufficient evidence showing the change is necessary to improve student achievement and that



Among those who criticized the proposal Wednesday were Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond and representatives from the California Faculty Association, the Los Angeles Unified School District and leading advocacy groups, such as the Campaign for College Opportunity and The Education Trust-West.

Those critics asked trustees to further delay a vote on the proposal, originally scheduled for Wednesday and now expected in January.

But outgoing CSU Chancellor Timothy White said the change is a necessary step for the nation's largest four-year public university system, saying that the "nature of work in the future will require more quantitative reasoning."

"We want underserved students to be competitive in the future of work," he said. "There are numerous safety valves in this proposal to ensure it is not going to be hurtful to a single student. We need to have the courage to give the support to these young men and women to be competitive in the workplace of tomorrow."

Under the proposal, CSU would require freshman applicants to take a fourth year of high school math or a quantitative reasoning class, such as computer science or personal finance.

CSU [made minor changes to the proposal](#) ahead of Wednesday's meeting, including delaying the planned implementation from 2026 to 2027 and adding an automatic exemption waiver for students who attend schools that don't offer the required courses. Previous versions of the plan would have required students to seek the exemption on their own.

Opponents on Wednesday dismissed those amendments as insufficient.

"These changes don't address the significant concerns that we have raised. It's kind of like trying to fix something that's completely broken by doing a tweak here or there," Michele Siqueiros, president of the Campaign for College Opportunity, told EdSource.

CSU administrators have said that by requiring a fourth year of high school math students will come to college better prepared and their completion rates will improve.

Kounalakis, the lieutenant governor, said CSU's rationale for the change does "not add up" and doesn't "create a foundation for such a dramatic change." She encouraged trustees to reject the proposal and pointed to CSU data showing that 93 percent of students already enter the system with four years of high school math.

"Adding a fourth year of quantitative reasoning is not going to impact significantly our graduation rates if 93 percent of the students are already coming in with a fourth year," she said. "I would encourage the members not to support the implementation of a new requirement that is beyond what is required even in the [University of California] system that would impact largely those students who are coming from communities where they are already at a disadvantage."

Activists have said many schools lack the teachers to offer the courses that would be required under the proposal and that those schools overwhelmingly enroll black, Latino and low-income students. CSU officials have denied that charge, [saying that more than 99 percent of California high schools](#) offer at least one course that would satisfy the proposal.

[The 74 reported Monday](#) that fewer than 25 percent of seniors at LA Unified in the 2018-19 school year took a math or quantitative reasoning course, the type of course that would be required under the CSU proposal. Under the current CSU admission requirements, 46 percent of graduating LA Unified students were eligible in 2018-19, according to district data. About three-quarters of LA Unified students are Latino and more than 80 percent qualify for free- or reduced-price meals.

Elisha Smith Arrillaga, executive director of The Education Trust-West, said in an interview with EdSource that the report from The 74 is further evidence that the proposal is a "threat to equity."

of high school math — and fears that the new proposal will prevent students like her from attending CSU.

“With this quantitative reasoning proposal, you would knowingly be adding barriers for people from underrepresented communities,” Linares added.

Peter Taylor, chair of the Committee on Educational Policy, which is taking up the proposal, indicated during Wednesday’s meeting that the committee plans to move forward as scheduled in January with a vote.

“This will not linger on forever. ... We are going to get to a point where I promise we will make a decision one way or another,” he said.

*This story was corrected to clarify The 74 's report Monday that the percentage of students who had taken a math or related course refers to all LAUSD seniors in 2018-19.*

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*of the most urgent challenges facing many urban districts in California. West Contra Costa Unified includes Richmond, El Cerrito and several other East Bay communities.*

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### Comments

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promote awareness of the contributions of Native Americans to California's history. Val Cuevas, school board member is a Yaqui Indigenous woman read the resolution to the audience during the televised meeting. The audience at the school board meeting with close to a 1000 people went wild with applause when we received the resolution. There numerous group photo-ops with the School Board and other Allies.



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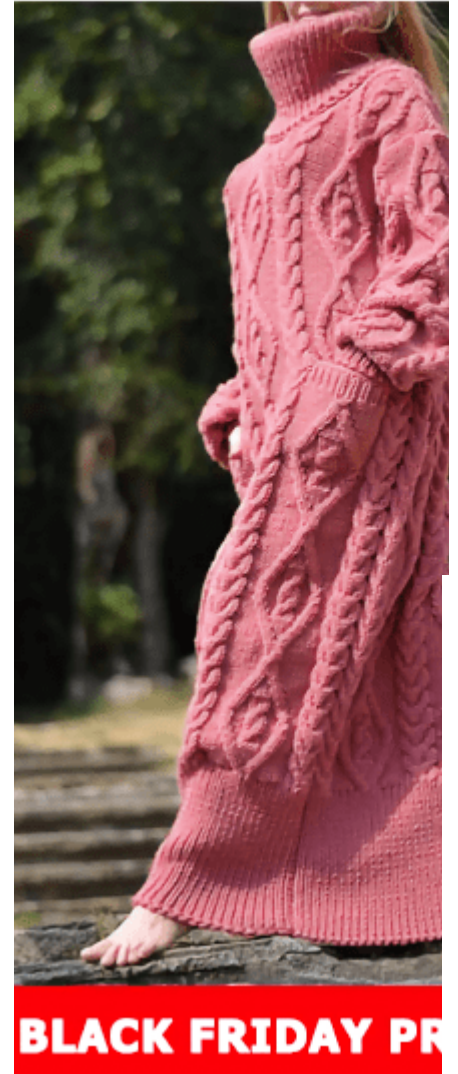
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## Supporters urge board to keep East Bay superintendent despite budget crisis

*District focuses on finding ways to cut \$48 million from its budget.*

NOVEMBER 19, 2019 | THERESA HARRINGTON



THERESA HARRINGTON / EDSOURCE

**A** San Francisco Bay Area superintendent whose job appeared to be in jeopardy was spared from termination after about a dozen community members asked the school board to keep him.

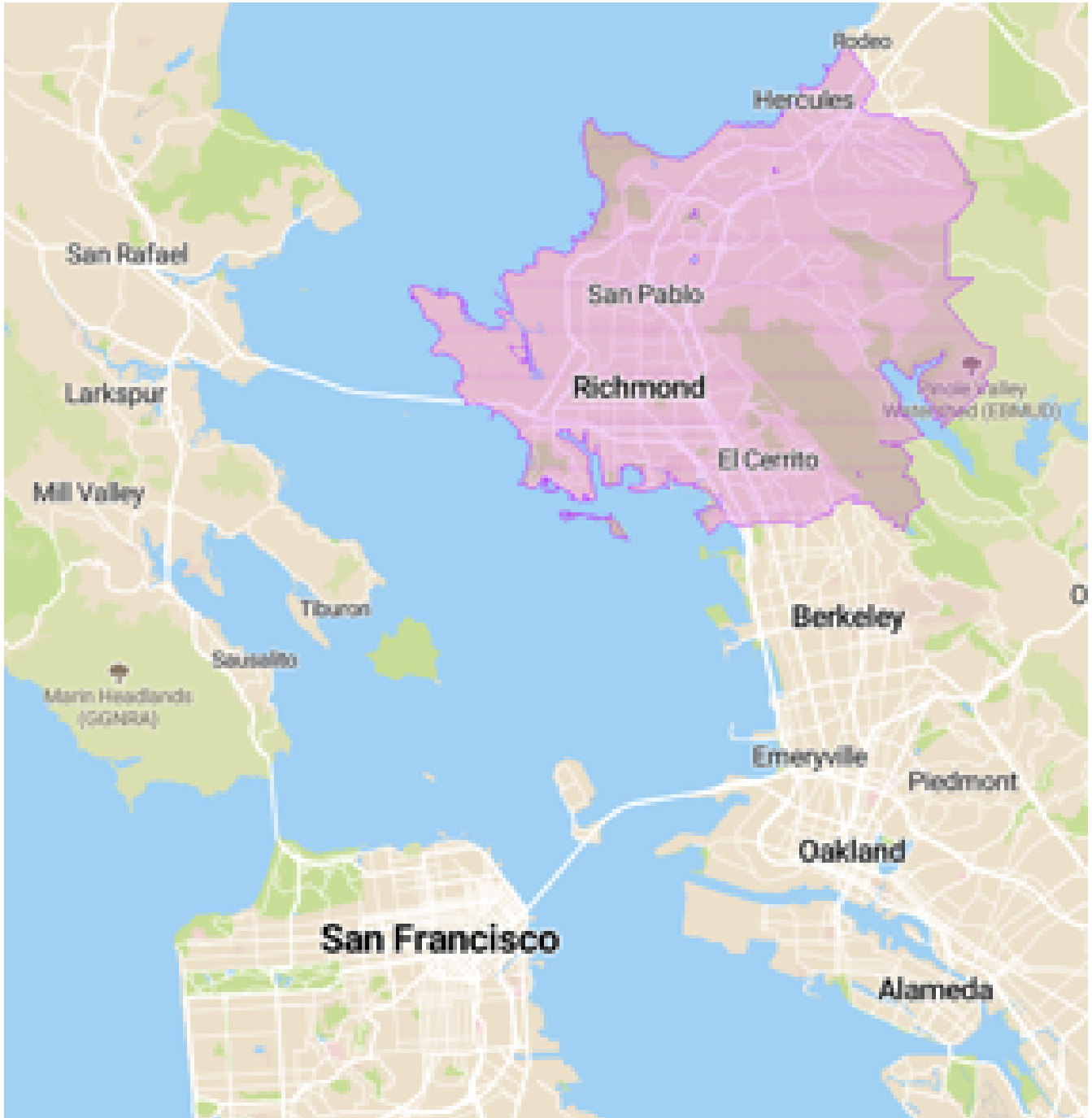
“I thank the board for reviewing my leadership and look forward to continuing the work we are doing on behalf of our students,” said Matthew Duffy, superintendent of West Contra Costa Unified, in a written statement to EdSource on Monday. Duffy was hired to his first job as superintendent in July of 2016.

According to an EdSource review, 17 superintendents in the state's largest 30 districts have been in the job for four years or less. Only one has been in the job for more than 10 years — Long Beach's Chris Steinhauser, who has been superintendent for 17 years.

During the meeting on Friday night, several residents of the district, which includes Richmond and surrounding communities, said Duffy and the board should be held accountable for the district's deficit, which appears to have ballooned from about \$10 million to \$48 million since June. But they stressed before a special closed board meeting that now is not the time to fire Duffy for a variety of reasons, including lack of a succession plan or a longtime staff member who could assume leadership of the district as an interim superintendent. Duffy's cabinet includes three associate superintendents hired or promoted within the last few months and two hired last year.



# West Contra Costa Unified



PTA representative Leslie Reckler said the board needs to plan for succession and treat the superintendent with respect if it expects to attract “best of class” administrative leaders to the district.

way we want students to treat one another?...Let him finish the year. Do it the right way.”

Other members of the public said the district would need to conduct a costly search for a new superintendent, which could further destabilize it and drain its resources at a time when it needs to focus all of its attention on solving its deficit.

Sandra Falk, who described herself as a “longtime supporter of the district,” said she and many of her friends who are PTA members urged the board “not to terminate this superintendent, especially not at this time and especially not if it costs one penny of your bare bones budget.” She said the board should bring the community together to solve its problems and “stop spending millions on outside contracts.”

“You need to stop pointing the finger,” she said. “Stop finding a scapegoat and take responsibility for our students and our community.”



THERESA HARRINGTON / EDSOURCE

*A sign supporting West Contra Costa Unified Superintendent Matthew Duffy is propped up at a special board meeting Nov. 15, 2019.*

consider the performance of the superintendent and to consider if the board would take any action. The board unanimously agrees that it will not take any action at this time.”



**West County Schools**

@WCCUSD

Board President [@tompanas](#) read the following statement:

The purpose of the meeting was to consider the performance of the superintendent and to consider if the board would take any action.

The board unanimously agrees that it will not take any action at this time.

20 9:37 PM - Nov 15, 2019

[18 people are talking about this](#)

Panas told EdSource after the meeting that “the board really worked as a team this evening,” but he declined to discuss specifics about how or why it decided to keep Duffy at the helm.

Board member Mister Phillips publicly stated before the meeting that he expected the board to discuss the superintendent’s termination, which he opposed. He told EdSource on Monday that “the board made the right decision” and he appreciated the public comments, but he declined to say whether he believed they influenced the board.

The board will meet again Wednesday to discuss its budget options before the district holds community meetings next month asking for input into possible cuts. Short-term, the board could dip into \$25 million in reserves and borrow \$15.6 million from an irrevocable trust to pay for retiree health benefits this year. That would cover nearly \$40 million of the deficit and avoid mid-year cuts. But the district would need to pay back the trust next year and cover an additional \$8 million projected in 2020-21.

Tony Wold, who was hired in August as the district’s associate superintendent of business services, is asking the board to determine cuts by identifying which services are considered





THERESA HARRINGTON / EDSOURCE

*Tony Wold, associate superintendent for business services in West Contra Costa Unified, presents a budget report to the board on Oct. 23, 2019.*

“Hard decisions may be required regarding support services” according to a [Powerpoint presentation](#) Wold will deliver to the board Wednesday, which is attached to the meeting agenda. Previously identified board and district priorities include: implementing a new English language arts curriculum, expanding dual language immersion programs, increasing support for African-American students, focusing on building positive school climates and supporting the redesign of Stege Elementary school, while also making necessary cuts to achieve balanced budgets for the next three years.

The district’s budget crisis is the result of ongoing deficit-spending since 2016-17, along with increased costs for special education, insurance, goods and services and staffing — including recent pay [raises](#) for teachers and other staff — “at percentages higher than revenues received and anticipated,” according to Wold’s presentation. In addition, West Contra Costa — like all



THERESA HARRINGTON / EDSOURCE

*West Contra Costa Unified Superintendent Matthew Duffy, right, discusses the district's budget with John al-Amin, associate superintendent of business services, who resigned in May, during a 2018 board study session.*

John al-Amin, the previous associate superintendent of business services who resigned in May, told EdSource on Monday that he showed the superintendent numbers that revealed a deficit of about \$20 million before he left, based on the district's overspending and failing to cut costs sufficiently to pay for teacher raises which went into effect in 2018 and continue to increase through 2021.

In order to present the board with a budget that appeared balanced, the district removed many known expenses in June, then added them back in after the budget was adopted, said al-Amin, who was hired in August, 2018. He said this had also been done in the district in the months before he arrived, but that the previous associate superintendent of business services Christopher Mount-Benites created a separate reserve fund "to force the superintendent's hand" and require him to seek board approval before dipping into reserves, instead of depleting the district's unallocated ending fund balance.

When expenses continued to outpace revenues, al-Amin said, “I think everyone was looking for someone to blame.” He said instead of adding expenses after the budget was adopted, the district should have included all known expenses in the original budget presented to the board for approval, along with cuts necessary to balance it.

Regarding the idea of borrowing \$15.6 million from the irrevocable trust to cover retiree benefits costs, al-Amin said that’s not something that is routinely done.

“But the reality is given the severity and magnitude of this deficit,” he said, “unless the district is going to make significant reductions, it’s a fund source that could be utilized.”

The board on Wednesday will also discuss possibly placing a \$575 million construction bond measure on the March, 2020 ballot to help upgrade or rebuild aging facilities.

*Editor’s Note: As a special project, EdSource is tracking developments this year in the Oakland Unified and West Contra Costa Unified School Districts as a way to illustrate some of the most urgent challenges facing many urban districts in California. West Contra Costa Unified includes Richmond, El Cerrito and several other East Bay communities.*

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## [Digital and Media Literacy](#)

# Inside a News Literacy Camp, Where the Newsroom Becomes the Classroom

By [Tony Wan](#) and [Wade Tyler Millward](#)

Nov 18, 2019



San Francisco Chronicle editors conduct their morning editorial meeting in front of educators, as part of the News Literacy Camp event

[Photo Credit: Tony Wan](#)

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SAN FRANCISCO — Thursday morning, like any other at the San Francisco Chronicle, the newspaper’s editors gathered around to discuss the news of the day, what they’ll cover and where it will run in Friday’s edition.

But unlike most days, the editors held their meeting not in a conference room but on a stage before 55 teachers and librarians. They heard which stories performed well yesterday—there’s been a lot of interest in the San Francisco Giants’ new manager, for instance—as well as what news might resonate tomorrow. How much attention should they give to the long-stalled proposal for another bridge over the Bay?

The educators were there not for a sneak peek at the next day’s headlines, but to learn about the business of news—how it’s produced, and how decisions are made. More importantly, they sought ways to bring those lessons back to their classroom, along with ideas on how to talk to students about making sense of the world.



The Chronicle was the latest participant of a series of events nationwide organized by the [News Literacy Project](#), a nonprofit that helps educators teach students how to examine news and information with a more critical eye in the age of memes, Photoshop and “[deepfakes](#).”

Also listen to our [podcast interview with Peter Adams](#), senior vice president for education at the News Literacy Project.

The news literacy camps, or NewsLitCamps, brought together reporters, columnists and editors to educate the educators on how they determine what’s newsworthy to report on, and how they gather information. Staffers with the News Literacy Project also showed off ways to spot manufactured images and videos, and how to verify online information for accuracy.

“Helping people understand what we do in journalism and newspapers is critical, especially in this environment where people question the news more than ever and what is trustworthy in the media landscape,” says Jill Tucker, the Chronicle’s K-12 education reporter who has been there for over 13 years, in a follow-up interview.

She lives the generational gap that many educators may experience in their classroom: Her own 18-year-old son doesn’t read newspapers and instead relies on YouTube for news, she says.

The Chronicle hosts visits for local teachers and students on a regular basis. This event was also just as much an opportunity for the newspaper as for the educators—Tucker solicited invitations to sit in on classrooms and observe classes. Chronicle opinions editor John Diaz asked educators to suggest students to submit articles for the newspaper, as a way to give them professional writing experience. And editor-in-chief Audrey Cooper told the educators the newspaper is always in search of new readers.



Audrey Cooper, editor-in-chief of the San Francisco Chronicle, speaks to teachers at a session on news media bias. (Photo credit: Wade Tyler Millward)

## Verify Everything

The nonprofit News Literacy Project was [launched in 2008](#) by an investigative reporter at The Los Angeles Times, and has since received financial support from a long [list](#) of individuals, companies, foundations and news outlets.

It wasn’t until April 2017 that it began hosting these workshops in newsrooms. The idea came from a Chicago Public Schools official who thought it would be a neat professional development opportunity for teachers, according to John Silva, director of education at the News Literacy Project. Silva’s team contacted The Chicago Sun-Times newspaper and made it happen.

Since then, the organization has held 17 NewsLitCamps—this one in San Francisco being the latest.

“We always try to partner with a specific newsroom and a specific school district, and we try, whenever possible, to do it in the newsroom,” says Silva. “We want to get teachers out of the classroom environment.” His team tapped the San Francisco Unified School District and Berkeley Unified School District to invite their teachers, and also help spread the word to other districts. Several teachers said the event counted as credit for their professional development.

The day’s program included a session on how reporters write about race, injustice and inequality. Another covered digital forensics and telltale signs of fabricated images. (Reverse Google image searches are handy.) Throughout the day, teachers learned about ways to detect common forms of misinformation, such as pictures of high-profile people juxtaposed with quotes they never said.

Alison Schmidt, a history teacher in the West Contra Costa Unified School District about 20 miles northeast of San Francisco, says a Chronicle columnist gave her tips on talking to students about news events involving racial relations. She also realized she should search sites other than National Public Radio for when looking for articles to use in class.

Her colleague, Pedro Uriostegue, says the event offered helpful ways to show his students that not everything they see online is trustworthy. “Kids are on their phones all day and looking at memes,” says Uriostegue, who’s taught for about five years. “They think some of that is factual. They have to verify everything.”

Persuading newsrooms to host NewsLitCamps has gotten easier over time, according to Silva. “Editorial boards are realizing that they need to do more to make sure the public understands how journalism happens.” Sometimes they even chip in—The Chronicle paid for the day’s food and refreshments.

One challenge that has emerged for the Project’s work is how different parts of the country respond to different media brands, which sometimes shape the conversations that happen at these camps. For example, while Fox News is considered anathema to many people in the liberal-leaning Bay Area, it is viewed as a fair and balanced source in many other parts of the country.

“Some teachers are nervous about approaching the idea of news literacy because there’s so much of the phenomenon today where, ‘I only get my news from X and I will not get my news from Y.’ And X and Y are different in different parts of the country,” says Silva.

Educators should dissuade students from evaluating the quality of information based on how it aligns with their beliefs, Silva says. Instead of using a phrase like “fake news,” educators should explicitly show how to spot misinformation.

Still, “there’s also a sort of political pressure within the administration in the school district, and sometimes that comes from the parents,” he adds. “So news literacy can be a very tricky thing for teachers and advocates.”

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## School Board May Vote Friday To Fire West Contra Costa Schools Chief

Bay City News Service Published 1:52 pm PST, Friday, November 15, 2019

RICHMOND (BCN)

A special closed-door meeting of the West Contra Costa County School Board Friday may feature a vote to fire the district's superintendent.

The agenda on the board's website lists two items: public employee discipline, dismissal release, and/or complaint; and public employee performance evaluation: superintendent.

A description of any possible actions by the board was not included with the agenda items, nor was any staff reports that might detail the precise nature of the closed-door discussion.

Marcus Walton, a spokesman for the district, declined to comment on the possible firing of Superintendent Matthew Duffy but issued a statement saying that the public will have a chance to address the board before they go into closed session and that any action taken by the board will be reported "once the open session of the meeting resumes."

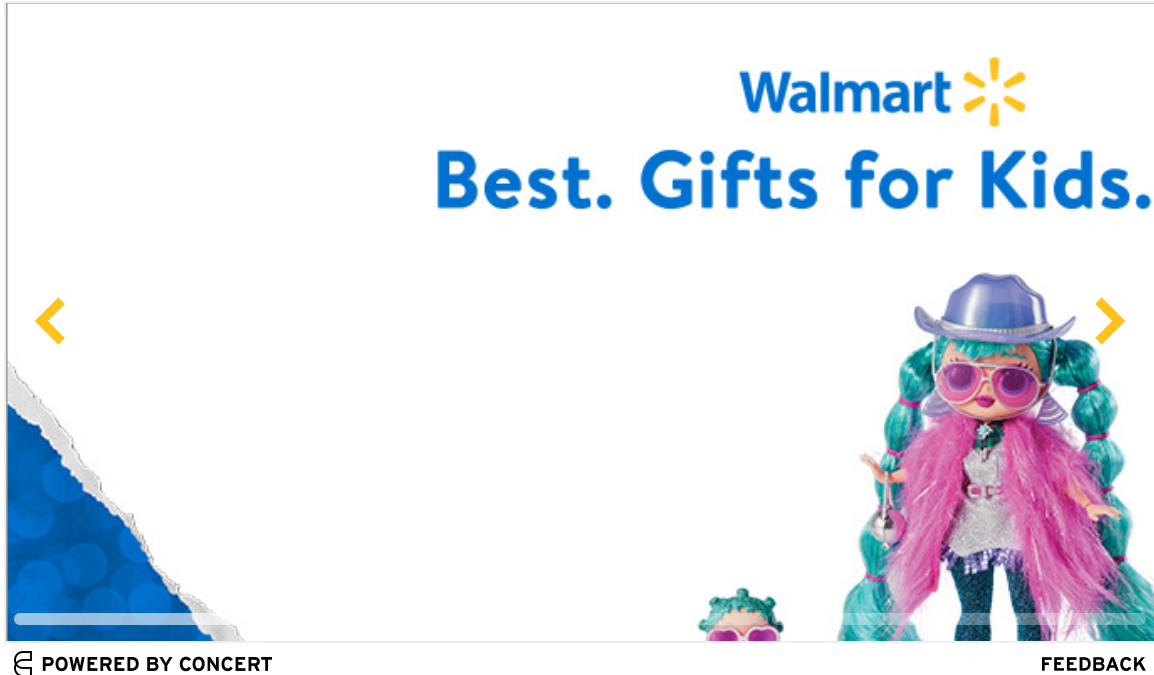
Board President Tom Panas did not immediately return a call for comment, but Board Trustee Mister Phillips posted on his website Wednesday that he believes "President Panas will attempt to terminate the superintendent at this meeting."


While Phillips says in his post that he's been Duffy's "toughest critic" and while the district is facing a \$48 million budget deficit, "I do not believe the current board can fix the problem without a superintendent."

The United Teachers of Richmond, the union that represents teachers in the district, also issued a statement urging the board to vote against firing Duffy.



"We absolutely believe that Superintendent Duffy and his staff must be held accountable for the current financial and academic state of the district," according to the statement signed by UTR President Demetrio Gonzalez. "At the same time, we believe that if Mr. Duffy's decisions got us to this place in our finances, then he needs to be held responsible for working with us to fix it this year."


The meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. Friday at Lovonya DeJean Middle School, 3400 Macdonald Ave., Richmond.





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HIGHLIGHTING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

## East Bay board may consider firing superintendent amid fiscal crisis

*West Contra Costa Unified faces a \$48 million budget deficit*

NOVEMBER 15, 2019 | THERESA HARRINGTON



THERESA HARRINGTON / EDSOURCE

*Updated on Nov. 17: After meeting behind closed doors for two-and-a-half hours, West Contra Costa Unified school board president Tom Panas announced that the board unanimously decided to take no action. Before going into closed session, the board heard from 15 public speakers, most of whom urged board members not to terminate the superintendent's contract.*

**A**mid a deficit that has ballooned from \$10 million to \$48 million in a few months, a San Francisco Bay Area superintendent's job is on the line as attention focuses on keeping the district solvent.

The board of West Contra Costa Unified — which includes Richmond and surrounding communities — will hold a special closed [meeting](#) at 6 p.m. Friday to discuss Superintendent

The board is responding to the size of the deficit and the fact that they have little information on how it grew so quickly from \$10 million last spring, board members said.

Rather than make mid-year cuts, Tony Wold, the district's new fiscal officer is expected to recommend that the district borrow \$15 million from its retiree health insurance fund and repay the money next year after making budget cuts. An update is expected on Nov. 20 with budget recommendations on Dec. 11. The district could also draw \$25 million from its \$38 million in reserves to close the budget gap.

Duffy did not respond to a request for comment.

Board members Mister Phillips and Consuelo Lara said they expect the meeting was called to discuss the possible termination of Duffy's contract, which does not expire until June 30, 2021.

"It would be unwise to terminate the superintendent at this time," Phillips said in a statement posted on his [website](#). "As the community knows, the school district has a \$48 million budget deficit. The board only has seven months to fix the problem. I do not believe the current board can fix the problem without a superintendent."

Lara said terminating Duffy "would be the worst thing we could do. It would be a catastrophe."

The public can comment before the board goes into closed session at the De Jean Middle School. Board action will be reported to the public when the board comes out of closed session, said Tom Panas, board president.

Panas would not confirm whether the board intends to discuss releasing Duffy from his contract.

"The meeting is being called to discuss the superintendent's performance," he said, adding that he would not comment further because it is a "personnel matter." He also declined to comment on Phillips' statement.

The teachers' union issued a **statement** Friday against Duffy's removal, but supportive of holding him and his staff accountable for the district's fiscal distress.

"If the purpose of the meeting was to fire the superintendent, then we find the timing of this to be irresponsible and disrespectful to staff and families who are working incredibly hard at all our school sites at a time when we need stability, not uncertainty," said Demetrio Gonzalez, president of the United Teachers of Richmond union. "We absolutely believe that Superintendent Duffy and his staff must be held accountable for the current financial and academic state of the district. At the same time, we believe that if Mr. Duffy's decisions got us to this place in our finances, then he needs to be held responsible for working with us to fix it this year."

Panas and Lara said they are getting feedback from the community.

"I'm hearing from the public and it goes both ways," Panas said.

Lara said she has been receiving "tons of emails from parents, teachers and community members who do not want this to happen — do not want him terminated."

Regarding the budget, Lara said Duffy was given numbers from the previous chief business official "and assumed that they were correct." She said she wasn't sure if Duffy may have "faltered" by not doing more investigation into the budget himself and by not "taking more charge" of the budget process.



THERESA HARRINGTON / EDSOURCE

*West Contra Costa Unified Superintendent Matthew Duffy, right, discusses the district's budget with John al-Amin, associate superintendent of business services, during a 2018 board study session. Al-Amin resigned in May.*

“But because it happened under his watch, of course it’s his responsibility and he’s going to have to take ownership of that,” Lara said, adding that she didn’t think he caused it and that the board should also have been paying closer attention to the budget.

Duffy assumed leadership of the district in July of 2016, following the previous superintendent who retired after a decade. He left in part due to district controversies including questionable spending of construction bond funding. Last year, the board extended Duffy’s three-year contract another two years, after he received a positive evaluation.

But since that time, Duffy has grappled with the growing deficit and the loss of key cabinet-level administrators — including John al-Amin, chief business official, who resigned in May — prompting Duffy to seek assistance from the Contra County Office of Education to create the district’s 2019-20 budget.

In June, the board approved a 2019-20 budget of \$360.7 million that left out many essential items such as salaries for critical vacant positions that Duffy told the board would be added the following month. At the end of the 2018-19 school year, the board was told the deficit was \$9.1 million.



make deep budget cuts and dip into reserves. Panas and board members Valerie Cuevas and Stephanie Hernandez-Jarvis approved a resolution asking Duffy and his staff to identify budget cuts by Nov. 30, along with possible spending of a portion of the reserves so the district could pay all its bills for the next three years without deficit-spending.

Phillips and Lara voted against this resolution, saying it would make more sense to wait until Wold, the new chief business official, began working in the district in August and updated the budget. Last month, Wold told the board the district needs to cut \$39.9 million this year and another \$7.9 million next year, bringing the total reductions or additional revenue needed to \$47.8 million.



THERESA HARRINGTON / EDSOURCE

*West Contra Costa Unified Chief Business Official Tony Wold presents a budget report to the school board and superintendent on Oct. 23, 2019.*

“That is a herculean task going forward,” Wold told the board on Oct. 23 during a briefing on the budget.

Lara told Wold she thought the problem was overspending.

“We continued to spend even though we didn’t have the money,” she said, adding that she wanted more information about controls being put in place “that are going to prevent that” from happening again.

Hernandez-Jarvis complained that board members and the public did not receive the budget materials until the night before the meeting, which didn’t give them ample time to review them.

“For me to ask informed questions, I need to have time to study this,” she said. “We need systemic changes to prevent these things from happening.”

Cuevas shared these frustrations.

“I need to find out exactly where things are,” she told Wold. “How fast can you figure that out?”

As Wold continued to take heat from the board, Duffy stepped in.

“I know there’s a lot of frustration,” Duffy said. “I can feel that. I want to make sure we direct that productively. I think certainly, if there’s frustration, some of it should be directed here towards me. I don’t want to see us taking our new budget leader and going at him too hard. He’s a good guy and can certainly handle it, but we’re going to have to stay in this together. Certainly if there’s some frustration, some of it deserves to be my way....I want us to balance the urgency and the accountability with the support (for staff) so we get this done in a really productive way.”

*Editor’s Note: As a special project, EdSource is tracking developments this year in the Oakland Unified and West Contra Costa Unified School Districts as a way to illustrate some of the most urgent challenges facing many urban districts in California. West Contra Costa Unified includes Richmond, El Cerrito and several other East Bay communities.*



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Where is the oversight of the county boards of education and the states in these school budgets? Sweetwater Union High School District in San Diego County also suddenly faced huge deficits from what is being investigated as illegal budgeting, but the county office of ed didn't act until the damage was done. The real losers from the lack of meaningful oversight are the students, whose programs and services are cut--in some cases mid-year--to ... [Read More](#)