

California's Drought Triggers Drop In School Attendance

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Schools on the east side of Fresno County are already feeling the impact of California's ongoing drought.

Education officials from the Kings Canyon Unified District say they have seen a significant drop in attendance this year.

Superintendent Juan Garza says families have been forced to relocate, taking their school aged children with them.

Come August of next school year, there may be even less kids having fun on the playground.

"We were projected to grow this year as a district and we're down 78 students and that's significant because last year we grew by 118 and the year before by 72."

Garza estimates even more children have left the district since the report was released last October.

"I would guess that were double that, we're probably at about 150 kids down."



This is a huge concern. With a district like Kings Canyon, covering 650 square miles with 10,000 students throughout 20 schools, losing students means losing big money.



"For our students we get about 6,000 a year, it's about 34 to 40 dollars a day per student. This impact to the district is about million and half dollars less."

"Between now and at least December I don't see anything getting better for our families." - Juan Garza.

The district is worried the worst is yet to come. Kings Canyon serves several farming towns including Orange Cove and Reedley, where a large number of residents work in agriculture.

Garza says in most cases "what usually happens in situations like that is families make a decision and they inform the schools on Fridays and they leave over the weekend and they relocate and they're gone."

The sudden change not only hurts the district. Garza says the move can have a big on a student's education and personal growth.

"They're impacted by the fact that 'now I don't know the teachers anymore, I don't know the expectations, they don't know me, they don't know what my needs are."

Garza wants to be hopeful but the reality indicates the opposite.

"Between now and at least December I don't see anything getting better for our families."

Despite the significant drop in school attendance, Garza says the district won't have to lay off teachers.

As for the funding, the Department of Education says it is going to work with schools most affected by the drought to make sure they don't lose money.

Garza hopes that's the case.

"They may be able to pass some resolutions to try to say you're still going to get that money but we don't know yet. So, our hope is that they do follow through."

Last month, the district's board passed a resolution in support of an emergency water relief plan requesting officials to help resolve the current water crisis.

