

Concerns remain as new funding rules take effect

By Hannah
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School advocates say some districts may struggle to use new money as the Legislature intended when creating the [Local Control Funding Formula](#).

Steve Ward, legislative analyst for Clovis Unified, said it wasn't long after the funding changes went into effect that districts were thrown a curve ball. This summer, Gov. Jerry Brown signed legislation that ups school districts' annual contributions for teacher pensions by millions of dollars — money that Ward worries will come out of the new local control dollars.

Every school district is chipping in more. It's part of a plan to eventually fill a \$74 billion shortfall in the teacher pension plan statewide.

Now, Ward says, there is a push and pull on how to spend the new school funds. This year, Clovis Unified got an [extra \\$27.2 million](#) to work with, money that has gone toward school resource and student liaison officers, and parent workshops, among other things. Having to pay significantly more toward teacher pensions each year could thwart district plans to continue such programs.

Districts face other challenges, like finding time for staff to solicit input from the community and actually sit down to draft a plan. Unlike past years, when districts received a set amount for specific programs, districts now have more options on where to spend their money.

"It really taxed the system as a whole, because for the first time you have to make decisions about what programs you're going to fund and what programs you're not going to fund," Sanger Unified Superintendent Matthew Navo said.

"It did require a lot more personnel to manage the development, the community input and the writing of the (spending plan). It was not an easy process; you honestly have to consider hiring someone (to do it)."

The result was a mix of messy final plans, said Daniel Humphrey, a senior researcher for [SRI International's Center for Education Policy](#) research nonprofit in Menlo Park. In October, Humphrey published a [study](#) on the early implementation of the new funding law.

"They're all over the place," Humphrey said of the funding plans he examined. "The biggest problem I found with the (local control spending plans): it's just really hard to tell what they're doing ... it was supposed to communicate to the community, and if you've ever read one, you know they don't do that."

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