

Fresno Unified urged to spend more money to get parents involved in school

By Hannah
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Fresno Unified Superintendent Michael Hanson in a January 2014 file photo.

CRAIG KOHLRUSS — THE FRESNO BEE

Fresno Unified School District needs to spend more money on engaging parents and not just through workshops or Parent University, a group of parents, youth, health and family organizations told school trustees at their Wednesday meeting.

The group of more than 20 organizations is asking trustees to spend 1% of the money the district gets through the state's new Local Control program on hiring a staffer for each school to work with parents. The district estimates it will get about \$594.7 million in Local Control money for next school year.

Maria Ceballos, a program manager at Reading and Beyond, said those hired for the new position would be responsible for inviting parents to school site council meetings and aid parents who have concerns about their child's education or issues going on at home.

The request comes amid the district's budget planning for next school year. This is the second year the district is budgeting using the state's Local Control formula, which doles out money to districts based on its number of low-income, foster and English-learner students. The new funding method also requires districts to collect input from parents and students on how the money should be spent.

The district already spends about \$7.8 million on programs meant to engage parents. A lot of that money, about \$2.3 million, goes toward the district's Parent University, which offers parent workshops on topics like applying for college.

Schools split another \$3.4 million to use as they see fit to work with families. About \$2.1 million pays for district child welfare attendance specialists and social workers.

But Ceballos said the organizations would like to see an estimated \$5.5 million go toward creating new positions, which the groups are calling community connectors, to work directly with parents who have questions.

Parent Ying Yang told the board through a translator that she hopes to see the 30 schools with the highest-need children get a community connector first.

Several other parents who spoke at the meeting said they'd also like schools to hire more interpreters or staff who speak languages other than English. Many parents don't speak English and have trouble finding out information about their child's education, parent Maiso Lee told the board through a translator.

Later in the meeting, Superintendent Michael Hanson said the district has in recent years injected more money for parent outreach. He said many schools no longer have concerns about having enough translators on site for parents.

"I'm not saying it's perfect but we're a lot closer to it," he said.

District spokeswoman Amy Idsvoog said additional resources will be part of the district's ongoing budget talks.

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