

YCUSD facing 'difficult choices' in budget cuts

[By Ryan McCarthy/Appeal-Democrat](#)

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Saving \$580,000 by ending prep periods for teachers at two schools and eliminating \$40,000 of Yuba City Unified funding for Shady Creek Outdoor School trips are among budget proposals trustees take up today.

More than two dozen potential cuts confront trustees at the study session that will be followed by Tuesday's meeting when they're expected to act on reductions spurred by a budget shortfall of up to \$6.2 million.

Nearly half of that amount would be saved by a proposed 2.7 percent salary reduction for all employees and a freeze in pay increases that together represent savings of \$3.1 million.

"None of the options are easy," said Baldev Johal, deputy superintendent for business. "They're difficult choices."

Prep periods involve teachers at Gray Avenue and Andros Karperos schools.

Dina Luetgens, president of the local teachers union, said a teacher at Yuba City High has at least 160 students over a year and that instructors use prep time to contact parents, assess students, grade papers and confer with colleagues.

Losing prep periods would represent a significant change in teacher workloads, Luetgens said, and would have to be part of contract negotiations with the school district.

Larry Sand, president of the statewide California Teachers Empowerment Network — which says it seeks to provide fellow educators with more information than unions give — said ending the preparation time represents a pay cut for instructors. Teachers in the state typically resist reducing their salaries to save jobs of other instructors, Sand said, adding that teacher layoffs based on seniority mean newer instructors lose work.

"It's never the bad teachers," he said.

Luetgens said seniority avoids using subjective standards to decide which teachers keep their jobs.

"Sometimes we try to apply a business model where things are more black and white," she said, calling teaching as much an art as a science. "There's so much more to teaching than: Did you get this student to pass that test?"

The proposed end to \$40,000 in school district funding for Shady Creek would also allow schools to decide whether to include the outdoor education site in Nevada County among field trips for students, Johal said.

Sharman Kobayashi, president of the board of trustees, said Yuba City Unified has reduced funds "over the years as our budgets shrink" for the five-day-long environmental instruction costing \$216 per student.

The Sutter County Superintendent of Schools Office, whose \$5.1 million bond in 2008 paid for the 130-acre Shady Creek site outside Nevada City, continues to contract with schools in eight counties for students to attend.

"But every school is looking at every program," Sutter County Superintendent Kathleen Hansen said of the impact of budget cuts.

Kobayashi said Yuba City Unified's financial situation, as state funding for education decreases, is the most difficult since she began serving on the board in 1996.

"There's nothing that compares to this," she said.

Deciding what will be cut, Kobayashi said, "is very much like a 'Sophie's Choice,'" referring to the book and later movie about a character choosing between unbearable options.