

Student's forum

Answers to Last Week's Question: What are the advantages/disadvantages of being a leader of the student body?

I enjoy being involved in student government because it gives me the opportunity to practice being a leader.

A.B.

I think it's good to be involved in student government because my parents say that it looks good on a college resume.

Z.A.

I would like to do student government but I have a difficult time in school and I'm afraid that I wouldn't have time to study. Maybe if my grades get better I might try it.

D.F.

I think student government is dumb and for the "goodie goodies."

T.T.

Being a part of student government has helped me manage my time better. I'm learning how to manage extra-curricular activities while maintaining a good GPA. The experience will only help me in college and in the work force. I recommend it to everyone. If student government isn't for you, I would recommend being involved in some type of club or organization.

G.G.

This Week's Question: How many people do you count as friends?

Send all submissions to:
students@heraldpublications.com



EarthTalk®



Pictured: The recently retrofitted Hornblower ferry to Alcatraz and Angel islands in San Francisco, which runs on several alternative energy sources, including a hybrid diesel-electric system powered by solar cells and wind turbines right on deck. Image by John K, courtesy Flickr.

From the Editors of E/The Environmental Magazine

Dear EarthTalk: I've heard that hybrid engine technology is now being used to power boats. What's happening with that?

-- D. Smith, Portland, ME

With concerns about climate change and the fate of the world's imperiled oceans and waterways at an all time high, it makes sense that the boating industry would be looking into greener ways to try to do their part and to attract some of those increasing numbers of environmentally conscious customers.

Americans spend 500 million hours zipping around in recreational boats each year. But until recently the engines on these boats were held to much lower efficiency standards than their automotive counterparts. Last year the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced new more stringent emissions standards for marine engines—both in-board and outboard—that will go into effect in 2010. In fact, several hybrid boats are already on the market, boasting emission ratings well below the new standards.

The 24-foot Endeavor Green Electric Hybrid can run all day on an electric charge that costs only 11 cents and generates no emissions, kicking into a small diesel generator only if the boat's eight batteries run dry. And when owners can charge the batteries via solar or wind power, the boats have a zero carbon footprint. Florida-based Craig Catamaran Corp. last year launched a hybrid version of its compact catamaran-style speedboat. The sporty little two-seater, which is light enough to be towed by a Mini Cooper or Smart Car, can run for eight hours on less than a gallon of gas, and costs less than \$6,000 all in.

For those looking for a larger, more luxurious ride, the 25-foot Frauscher hybrid might be just the ticket. The speedy \$155,000 Austrian-built pleasure boat combines an electric engine with a 256 horsepower Steyr

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Understanding the School Funding Model

By Darren Sepanek

An understanding of how schools in California are funded is the first step in appreciating how the budget shortfall impacts school districts and why it is so important that there be some local control of school funding like that provided by the Manhattan Beach Education Foundation. The California school funding model is rather complex but boils down to four primary elements: General purpose state funding, categorical aid (state and federal), local and private funding, and lottery Funds.

California property taxes are all sent to Sacramento and from here, funds are allocated to school districts across the state. There are several laws that principally shape this system today.

In 1971, the California Supreme Court ruled in *Serrano v. Priest* that California's system of school finance based on locally controlled property taxes was unconstitutional. The legislature developed a new system making revenue per pupil across districts more equitable regardless of differences in property tax wealth of each district. Proposition 13 passed in 1978, taking away the ability to have property taxes set locally and limiting the sum of all property taxes in any particular locale to one percent of assessed property value. Property tax revenue in the state plummeted.

In 1998 voters approved Proposition 98, a state constitutional amendment that sets the minimum level of state and property tax revenue guaranteed to K-12 schools. In stable economic years, education is entitled to the same allocation of funds as the previous year. However, in difficult economic years the state is allowed to allocate a lesser amount (and should restore the shortfall in the year that revenues grow sufficiently).

The state lottery accounts for only 1.3 percent of total K-12 revenues, or about \$900 million. Although every bit of funding is valuable, the lottery is not making a significant impact on public education funding in California.

State leaders largely control how much funding each school district in California receives. Proposition 98 funding (i.e. annual school funding) comes to school districts in the form of either categorical aid (such as special education or instructional materials) or general purpose funds, which can be spent at a district's discretion. Currently, about one-third of school funding is earmarked by the state for about 70 categorical programs. The courts do not require categorical aid to be evenly distributed, which gives the state latitude in allocating resources as they see

fit. Only 15 percent of Manhattan Beach Unified School District (MBUSD) funding comes from state and federal categorical aid.

The amount of general purpose funding or "revenue limit" is based on the school district's average daily attendance (ADA). Schools do not get paid for students who are absent. In 2009-10, MBUSD will receive only \$5,274 per pupil in ADA. This revenue limit is thousands of dollars less than per pupil funding in states like Connecticut or New York and well below the national average. Depending on the source, California ranks anywhere from 24th to near last in per pupil funding.

Supplementing State Funding

In light of the constitutionally controlled school funding situation, how are school districts to fund a quality educational program — especially in tough economic times? The answer lies in bringing some funding and control back to the local level. It is for this reason that many school districts in California have a local parcel tax and/or an education foundation similar to the Manhattan Beach Education Foundation (MBEF).

Parcel taxes are being used more and more by school districts to supplement state funding. Parcel taxes are generally a flat rate assessed per parcel, regardless of its size or value. These revenues may be used for ongoing expenses, programs or buildings at the local agency's discretion. From 1983 through 2008, 468 (school-related) parcel tax elections were held in California. Of these, 250 (53 percent) passed by the super majority required two-thirds voter approval, and another 180 (38 percent) achieved a majority vote but did not pass. In 2008, 73 percent of parcel taxes for education succeeded, demonstrating the desire of California citizens to provide a first-rate public education.

Many of the top-ranked school districts in California receive parcel tax funds. Of the top five districts (Palo Alto, San Marino, La Canada-Flintridge, Piedmont and Manhattan Beach) only Manhattan Beach does not support its schools with a parcel tax.

Many districts receive significant income from contributions or grants from individuals and local businesses. Based on reports to the California Consortium of Education Foundations (CCEF), there are more than 600 education foundations supporting local schools in California. In 2007, educational foundations served about 4.5 million students and raised more than \$150 million, according to the CCEF. MBEF is providing eight percent of MBUSD's overall funding for the 2009-10 school year.

"The best school districts in the state are

supported by significant parcel taxes as well as strong education foundations," said Erika White, MBEF President. "Private donations to the Manhattan Beach Education Foundation are currently the primary way for us to fill the gap between what the state provides and what is needed to fund quality schools."

There is no doubt that local and private funding for public education is not a luxury but a necessity. Education foundations like MBEF play a significant role in providing an educational system that is of the highest quality.

MBUSD Revenue Breaks Down as Follows for 2009/10:

- General Purpose (Per Pupil Revenue Limit × Average Daily Allowance)
\$33,135,299 (69 percent of total budget)
- Categorical Aid (State and federal funding for specific programs)
\$7,386,538 (state is 12 percent; federal is three percent of total budget)
- Lottery \$848,664 (two percent of total budget)
- Miscellaneous Local and Other Funding* \$6.75 million (14 percent of total budget)
- Total District Revenue
\$ 48,149,500
- Breakout of Local Funding
 - MBEF \$4,100,000
 - City of MB \$1,300,000
 - Rentals and Leases (not including Waller Stadium) \$600,000
 - PTA (replacing SLIP funds) \$300,000
 - Manhattan Beach Athletic Foundation \$240,000
 - Interest \$100,000
 - Interagency Agreements (SELPA and other miscellaneous funds) \$110,000
 - Total Local Funding \$6,750,000 •