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Marin Independent Journal

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BUDGET DECISION

School head warns Mill Valley board

Transitional kindergarten can't be cut, county superintendent says

By Keri Brenner kbrenner@marinij.com

The Marin County schools superintendent warned Mill Valley School District officials this week that they must rescind their decision to eliminate transitional kindergarten next year or face strong repercussions from the state.

John Carroll, addressing district trustees at their board meeting on Thursday, said the program is mandatory for basic aid districts, which are community funded through property taxes.

"The California Department of Education will enforce that mandate by pursuing all avenues available, including litigation and withholding funding provided by the department," Carroll said.

Carroll delivered the warning during the public comment portion of the meeting. The board cut him off before he finished, saying he was out of time.

Elizabeth Kaufman, the district superintendent, said Friday that she could offer only a brief response to Carroll's comments.

"Due to ongoing proceedings and a quickly evolving situation, the district is limited in the information it can provide at this time," she said.

"Our highest priority remains providing a high-quality education for all students. We recognize and support the value of early childhood education provided through TK programs."

Kaufman gave no indication as to whether the district would accept \$500,000 in donations a group of parents has raised to fund the program for next year.

Several parents from the group spoke during the public comment period, asking the district to open transitional kindergarten registration immediately so families

MILL VALLEY » PAGE 4

SAN RAFAEL EXHIBITION

100 years of Marin's fair in pictures, memorabilia

Retrospective runs through May 30 at Civic Center



PHOTOS BY SHERRY LAVARS — MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL

Helen Willms, left, a former Marin County Fair organizer, joins county officials Libby Garrison, center, and Jenn Olvera at the "Marin County Fair: 1925 to 2025" exhibition at the Marin County Civic Center in San Rafael.

By Cameron Macdonald cmacdonald@marinij.com

A century of cows, concerts, ugly weeds and creatures from "a galaxy far, far away" at the Marin County Fair is on display in San Rafael.

The exhibition — "Marin County Fair: 1925 to 2025" — includes fair posters, photographs and other memorabilia. The retrospective runs through May 30 in the galleries on the first and third floors of the Marin County Civic Center.

"They always represent the community — that's what I love about fairs," said Helen Willms, a former county cultural services commissioner who helped organize the fair. "I just think it's the heartbeat of every county, and that's why we work so hard to keep it going."

The exhibition includes a 1925 photograph of a man proudly standing next to a cow at the first fair in a field along the Redwood Highway



Helen Willms stops to look at a poster from the 2011 event at the Marin County Fair exhibition.

"He called it a 'good time place,' and he wanted the community to be able to come here, not just to do their county business or jury duty or civic things we have to do as citizens, but to also have a place where you can go to the fair."

— Libby Garrison, referring to Civic Center architect Frank Lloyd Wright

in Novato. In 1946, the event and Garden Center in Ross, where it was promoted as an

arts fair.

Organizers moved the fair to the Civic Center grounds in 1971. The fair was part of architect Frank Lloyd Wright's concept when he designed the campus during the 1950s.

"He called it a 'good time place,' and he wanted the community to be able to come here, not just to do their county business or jury duty or civic things we have to do as citizens, but to also have a place where you can go to the fair," said Libby Garrison, a county marketing official.

The exhibition features competitions such as the "ugliest weed" contest in the 1960s. A boy won with a homegrown specimen that had gnarled branches and thistles the size of golf balls.

The exhibit also has a photograph of mulleted visitors posing with the "Star Wars" droids R2-D2 and C-3PO at the 1988 fair, which showcased Lucasfilm. At the

FAIR » PAGE 4

DEI CUTS

California sues Trump over teacher training

Program helps increase instructors in STEM fields

By Jaweed Kaleem Los Angeles Times

California joined seven Democrat-led states that sued the Trump administration Thursday, seeking to halt hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to teacher training programs designed to increase instructors in direly needed STEM fields as well as educate students who have disabilities or are learning English.

The suit, filed in federal district court in Massachusetts, zeroes in on two Obama-era grants Congress created to address teacher shortages in rural and urban areas and encourage college students studying STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and math — to take on teaching jobs in K-12 education.

The Department of Education cuts amounted to roughly \$148 million in California and \$102 million for the other states that have sued: Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Illinois, Wisconsin and Colorado. Nationally, the funding losses totaled \$600 million. No Republican-led states have filed suit. Three teacher groups filed a separate complaint this week in a Maryland federal court.

TEACHERS » PAGE 2

INSIDE STORY

Musk in middle of explosive Cabinet meeting

Officials clash with Trump adviser over staff cuts

By Jonathan Swan and Maggie Haberman The New York Times

WASHINGTON » Marco Rubio was incensed. Here he was in the Cabinet Room of the White House, the secretary of state, seated beside the president and listening to a litany of attacks from the richest man in the world.

Seated diagonally opposite, across the elliptical mahogany table, Elon Musk was letting Rubio have it, accusing him of failing to slash his staff.

You have fired "nobody," Musk told Rubio, then scornfully added that perhaps the only person he had fired was a staff member from Musk's Department of Government Efficiency.

Rubio had been privately furious with Musk for weeks, ever since his team effectively shuttered an entire agency that was supposedly under Rubio's control: the U.S. Agency for International Development. But, in the extraordinary Cabinet

CABINET » PAGE 2

ECONOMY

Fed chairman: Interest rate cuts are on hold

Jerome Powell says Fed likely to keep its key interest rate unchanged amid growing economic "uncertainty." PAGE A8



WAR IN EUROPE

Russian air attacks hit Ukraine energy sector

Dozens of missiles and drones strike Ukrainian energy facilities, hobbling ability to power weapons factories. PAGE A9

BUSINESS

- ▲ Dow Jones 42,801.72 (+222.64)
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CALIFORNIA

High-speed rail leader says new funds needed to guarantee plan's completion

By Colleen Shalby Los Angeles Times

Two weeks after the Trump administration announced a compliance review of California's high-speed rail project...

will continue to communicate with the governor's office, the state Department of Finance and the Legislature.

a state-appointed advisory group say private investment will be necessary to finish the project.

miles under construction." Construction on the project has been limited to a stretch in the Central Valley...

FIRE RECOVERY

Palisades water supply cleared for drinking

By Matt Hamilton Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES » Residents and businesses in Pacific Palisades will be able to safely use water this week...

all the way to the meter," said Quiñones, who called on residents to finish the flushing process inside their homes...

Fair

FROM PAGE 1

time, Lucasfilm was based at Skywalker Ranch near Nicasio.

The "Star Wars" theme fueled a record fair attendance of 130,000.

"We had cars backed up clear down the freeway to get in," Willms recalled.

Willms said Huey Lewis and the News, which featured Mill Valley's 2 a.m. Club on its "Sports" album cover...

Mill Valley resident Rob Ermatinger recently stopped to admire the posters at the first-floor gallery.



SHERRY LAVARS — MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL

A Marin County Fair exhibit highlights the "Star Wars" theme at the 1988 event as part of the "Marin County Fair: 1925 to 2025" retrospective...

"I was talking to one of the custodians and I was saying, 'What a time machine!'" Ermatinger said.

gether," Ermatinger said. "It gives you a sense of purpose and place. I think Marin is unique that way."

posing near rolls of toilet paper, which was scarce during the COVID-19 economic shutdown. The fair returned to the fairgrounds in 2023.

This year's fair theme, "Bug-Tastic!", focuses on insects and their importance to the environment.

The 2025 Marin County Fair will be held July 2 to 6.

Mill Valley

FROM PAGE 1

can plan. Transitional kindergarten programs prepare 4-year-olds to enter kindergarten at age 5.

"California's TK mandate exists to give all kids — regardless of family income or address — access to quality early education," parent Jordan Shively said.

Shively said he knew of two families who are moving out of Mill Valley because of the controversy over transitional kindergarten.

"Ignoring the state mandate is not just illegal, it's unethical," Shively told the trustees and Kaufman.

Siddharth Vanchinathan, a leader of the parents group, said he estimates there are at least 150 potential transitional kindergarten students for 2025-26.

"Saving transitional kindergarten is an equity issue," parent Jonathan Kathrein said.

The district has approved plans to eliminate 11 classes of transitional kindergarten to close a fiscal deficit that last year sent the district's budget into uncertain territory.

The elimination of transitional kindergarten would involve the layoffs of 11

teachers and 11 teachers' aides, saving about \$2 million that had previously come from COVID-19 pandemic relief grants that expired in September.

The district has maintained that transitional kindergarten is an "unfunded mandate" it need not fulfill. School districts that are funded with state per-pupil subsidies, such as the Novato Unified School District and the San Rafael Elementary District, receive extra state money to pay for transitional kindergarten.

Carroll said basic aid districts do receive funding for transitional kindergarten because they get more in property taxes than they would from just state per-pupil subsidies.

The Mill Valley district, which trimmed its budget last month with about \$6 million in early retirements, layoffs and program cuts — including transitional kindergarten — is now back to

"positive" status, Paula Rigney, an assistant superintendent, said Thursday.

Positive status means having more than the state minimum of 3% in reserves for the current year and two years out. Rigney said the district is now aiming for a minimum of 25% to 35% in reserves in each of the three years of mandatory reporting.

Carroll said he and other officials at the Marin County Office of Education reviewed the district's trimmed-down version of its approximately \$55 million budget.

"The Mill Valley School District can afford to offer TK while still maintaining a healthy fiscal reserve," Carroll said in his speech.

The state deadline for the district to issue layoff warning notices is March 15.

Transit

FROM PAGE 3

a home for its bus fleet. Agency officials have been looking for a site for more than 10 years.

In 2023, the Biden administration awarded the agency a \$31.5 million grant to help it realize its goal. Marin Transit is providing a \$15.1 million local match for a total investment of about \$46.7 million in a new hub.

Last year, Marin Transit purchased 1075 Francisco Blvd. East, a 3.5-acre former car sales lot in San Rafael's Canal neighborhood.

Some San Rafael city officials continued to raise concerns that the engagement plan is more restrictive than they would like.

Vice Mayor Maribeth Bushey, a member of the Marin Transit board, told

her colleagues she wants the agency to be open to all types of comments and suggestions from the public about how the site should be used.

Marin Transit staff said while they welcome all comments, there are constraints.

Sullivan said that ideally the site would be able to accommodate six bus bays, bus washing, charging for 50 buses, parts storage, offices, break rooms and employee parking.

Environmental review is underway. That analysis, the planned community engagement and the design have to be completed in the next two years so the project can be ready for construction in 2027.

"Our approach is to really explore, be honest and up front about what's possible on the site and really ground ourselves in what Marin Transit needs," Sullivan said.

The federal grant to Marin Transit also includes \$2.2 million for workforce development, which involves training and programs aimed at diversifying the staff with new recruits who are women and people of color.

Marin Transit staff has been meeting with nonprofits such as Canal Alliance and Community Action Marin to develop those aspects of the plan, Sullivan said.

Marin Transit staff and board members said they remain committed to continuing a strong partnership with San Rafael leaders, and that city officials will be involved in the various steps of the process.

"I think there is a lot of

potential to build something that is going to reach the goals of Marin Transit and at the same time support the community," said San Rafael Councilmember Maika Llorens Gulati, another transit board member.

She added that it would be good for Marin Transit staff to plan a meeting in Spanish with English translation services provided.

Marin County Supervisor Mary Sackett, a member of the Marin Transit board, said she reviewed the outreach plan in detail and appreciates the staff's approach of setting realistic expectations.

"It's one of the best I think I've seen," said Sackett, whose district includes most of San Rafael.

Budget

FROM PAGE 3

Vivrette attributed the lower expenses to most departments coming in under budget. Spending on disaster preparedness efforts is already halfway through its allocated budget...

Street maintenance costs might go over budget by \$124,500. Town attorney expenses, which involve several firms, are projected to exceed their budget by \$269,000.

"Those are projected to be significantly over because we've been sued for the most part," Abrams said.

Councilmember Michael Ghiringhelli suggested finding room in the budget for road and infrastructure improvements, and recommended around \$2 million more to address the issue.

"I contend that there's money in our budget to find — and not even find, I think it's looking right at us — and we could allocate quite a bit more money to the streets and to infrastructure," Ghiringhelli said.

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