

# Board Of Education Warned To Hold Line

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Assemblyman John Vasconcellos, D-San Jose, chairman of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, told the state Board of Education Thursday to hold the line on school finance or risk even more cutbacks in the already beleaguered public school system.

More people are in school, on welfare and in prison than originally predicted in the current state budget, Vasconcellos told the board, with severe deficits expected if immediate measures are not taken.

"These are simple figures," he said. "We need to live with them and not be naive. The best we can do is hold what we have and cut \$1 billion."

Vasconcellos said he is "inclined" to avoid cutbacks in education, but he cautioned an already divided state board against "asking us to do a lot of new things that cost a lot of new money."

State schools superintendent Wilson Riles was sharply critical of an "educational establishment which has not been able to get together" on crucial issues. Like Vasconcellos, he warned educators against pushing for new funding when existing school programs are threatened. He said he has been meeting with representatives of the major statewide school and teacher groups in



JOHN VASCONCELLOS

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an effort to reach consensus on major issues.

"There is a crisis, and the first thing that has to be done is to get our act together and not go off in a hundred different directions," Riles warned.

His views were echoed by board pres-

ident Ann Leavenworth, who cautioned educators against "getting into battles with other local agencies" over the shrinking public dollar.

The bulk of the board's regular monthly meeting concerned the increasingly grim subject of school finance — from legislative "sunset review" of programs targeted for evaluation and possible extinction to federal threats to cut off \$79 million in aid to handicapped students.

Riles said many of the programs targeted for review affect students with special needs — those with language problems, handicapped students and minorities. "As long as I am in this office, we are not going to roll back the clock for those kids who have been denied opportunities for years," he said.

An unusually angry Riles also denounced — for the second time this week — a federal report that found California is in violation of rules prohibiting segregation of handicapped children in the state's schools. Riles has said he will tell the federal government to keep its \$79 million in assistance for special education, rather than comply with what he sees as "bureaucratic interference."

Riles said he has advised U.S. Education Secretary Shirley Hufstедler that he "strongly resented" the federal report, which he says is based on inaccurate or outdated information.

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WILSON RILES  
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Privately, state education officials say they do not expect to lose the \$79 million federal share of the nearly \$1.9 billion state education budget for handicapped children. But, as a "last resort," Riles said his staff "will not waste time negotiating mandates that constitute

unwarranted federal interference in our efforts to meet the needs of handicapped children."

Riles said California has been a leader in programs for the handicapped. "Let me emphasize that we are not perfect," he told the board. "But we are more perfect than any other state in the union, and we are putting more money per capita into programs for these kids."

While largely hamstrung by financial concerns, the board made several efforts to deal with what is offered students in California public schools. Expressing continued alarm over declining achievement test scores, the board discussed several suggestions for improving school curriculum.

Louis Honig Jr., a Marin County schools superintendent and chairman of the board's Policies and Program Committee, urged his fellow board members to adopt policies that will strengthen curriculum standards — mainly by requiring more basic and advanced study and more homework.

Honig believes achievement and college board scores among high school students have fallen in California because of a general "watering down" of curriculum. He cited statistics showing that "substantially fewer" college-bound students take advanced courses. And for those who do, he said, course content often is poor.

"In the name of equality, talented children, black and white, Latino and Anglo, rich and poor, are being ignored," Honig wrote in a recent issue of the California School Boards Association Journal. "We all must re-examine our curriculum to determine if we have set our sights high enough and to assure that we are insisting that our students come in contact with the best that has been thought, written and achieved."

Honig said a series of hearings on local school curriculum will be held by the board in February and March. He said board members are unified on the need to improve California school curriculum.

Board members remain at odds, however, on other key issues — usually when it comes to establishing board "priorities" and committee assignments. Longtime observers of the state board say disagreements are more acrimonious — and public — than ever before.

In an effort to defuse public disputes, the board's executive committee decided this week to schedule a "retreat" so that board members can get their irritations out on the table and, it is hoped, learn to work together.

An Education Department spokesman said the retreat, tentatively scheduled March 21 at Stanford University's Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, would be financed at state expense.