

TK-8 district hopes to save \$4.1 million over three years

By Arden Margulis

The Menlo Park City School District may reduce funding for its library, world language and band programs as it works to trim \$4.1 million from its budget over the next three years, following several years of seven-figure deficits.

The district's budget challenges stem from multiple factors, Superintendent Kristen Gracia told the school board on Jan. 15. One of the largest cost increases in recent years has been the addition of transitional

kindergarten. Because the district is classified as "basic aid" due to its high level of local funding, MPCSD does not receive additional state funding for transitional kindergarten (TK) and was not required to offer the program. The district still elected to offer transitional kindergarten.

"While we deeply value early learning, the cost of adding this additional grade level is an example of why MPCSD is challenged to balance its budget year after year," Gracia said.

According to Gracia, district

officials are looking to cut roughly the same amount as the cost of transitional kindergarten.

Gracia said identifying more than \$1 million in annual reductions is particularly challenging for a district like MPCSD because the vast majority of its budget goes to personnel costs.

Around 90% of the district's \$77.5 million budget is spent on staffing, leaving roughly 10% for what the district calls "operational" expenses, like supplies.

"We run a very efficient organization when it comes to operational expenses so our budget is

and feedback from both the board and community members to develop a plan to present in February.

She hopes to get the "green light" to implement cuts at the board's Feb. 12 meeting so the district can notify staff of any layoffs in March.

About half of the proposed cuts come from the district office with the other half being shared across the district's five schools, according to Gracia. She also said she tried to minimize

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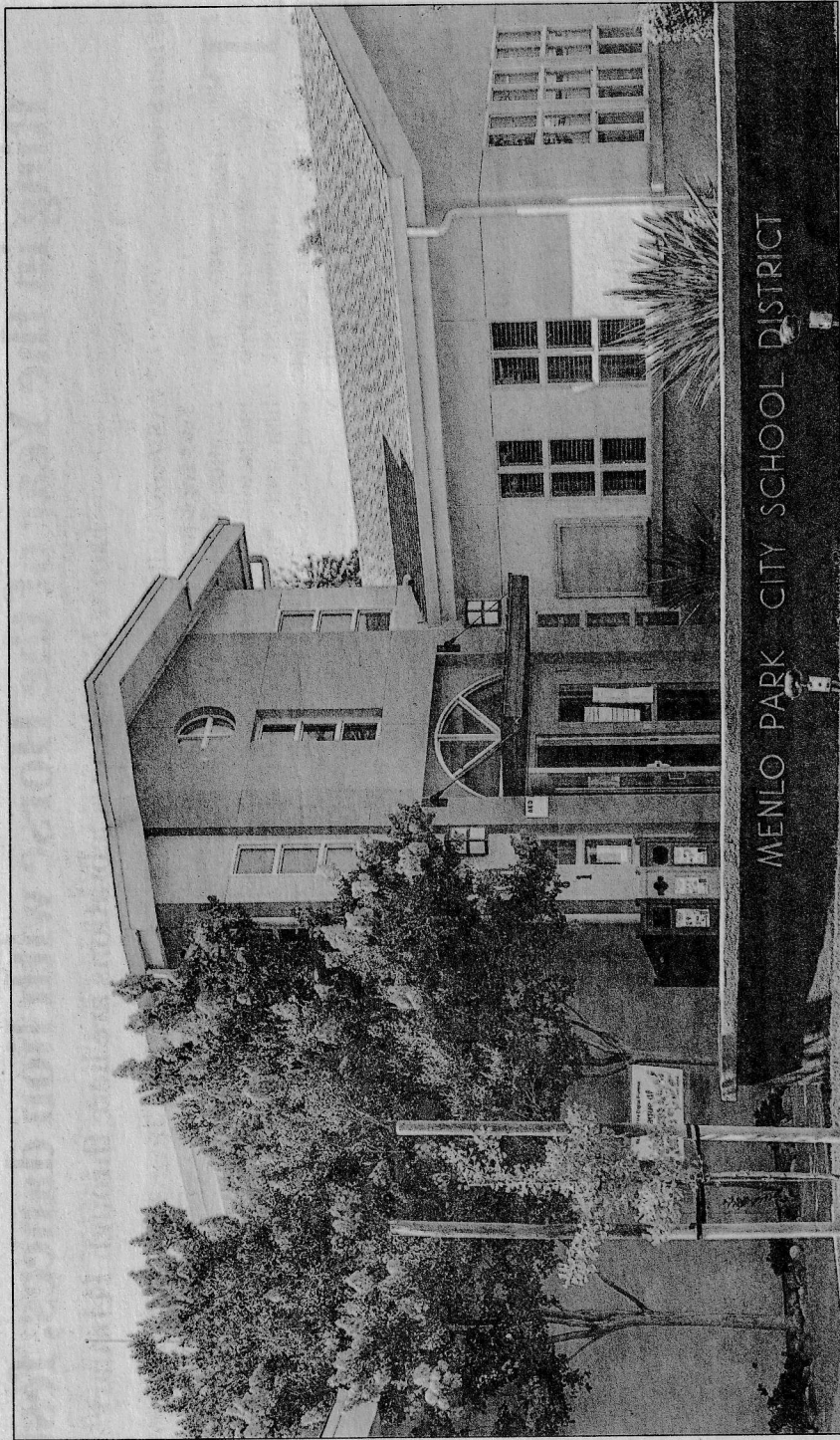
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the effect on "student-facing" positions.

The largest share of cuts proposed comes from restructuring the district's Educational Services Department, which offers schools professional development and support programs. As part of cost-saving initiatives in that department, the district hopes to reduce spending by \$1.57 million over the course of three years.

Starting in the 2026-27 school year, the district will eliminate its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion coordinator (saving \$155,073) and reduce spending and travel for professional development (\$5,600). In 2027-28, the department will cut its world language coordinator (\$160,114) and an administrative staff member (\$66,943). In 2028-29, the department will remove a coordinator focused on data and assessment (\$265,073) and all instructional coaches (\$800,000).

The department also will reallocate funding for the Early Learning Center director (\$117,733) to be funded outside the general fund.



MENLO PARK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Magali Gauthier

The cost of transitional kindergarten has the Menlo Park City School District eyeing cuts to a number of programs across grades.