

School District Budgets Are Not Static Documents

California school district revenues and expenditures are subject to constant change. School district budgets are not static documents, but instead are constantly being revised to respond to decisions at the state and federal level, as well as to the expenditure needs of the local agency.

Acceptance of the constant revision in district numbers is one of the biggest challenges in understanding a local agency budget. Yesterday's numbers are not today's numbers, and it almost seems as if someone is making up the statistics. But while there is a base cost of service, school districts operate on such a narrow income margin that even a small swing in revenues or costs can have a major impact on local agency decisions.

School district budgets are initially adopted in June of each year, but the changes in revenue and expense occur so often during the year that almost every school board meeting will include some new change in either district income or expense. The cycle of budget changes, however, has some rhythm so that it is possible to identify by month the most significant budget change dates.

CYCLE OF BUDGET CHANGES

Early July

- Adoption of the state budget that determines the marginal change in school district revenues. In many cases it is the marginal revenue that has the most significant impact on district expenses.

August

- Recording of prior-year estimated expenses and determination of the unaudited current-year beginning balance.

Fall-Spring Reports

- Certification of reports that the district's income will be based upon, including attendance.

Mid-December

- Presentation to the Governing Board of the First Interim Report, which reflects district income and expense to October 31 and a projection of income and expense for the balance of the year.

March

- Presentation to the Governing Board of the Second Interim Report, which reflects district income and expense to January 31, and a projection of income and expense for the balance of the year. The Interim Reports show a projected net ending balance for the district, which is a very important indicator of district fiscal health.

These are just some of the important budget change points during a typical school year. Note that most of the list does not even include changes in the cost of district materials or supplies. A district budget must also be constantly revised to reflect the change from estimated to actual cost for goods and services. School district budgets, just like a home budget, must be revised to reflect updated expenditures on everything from the cost of accounting services to the cost of worker's compensation, from the cost of air conditioning to the cost of video machine repairs. Accurate school district budgeting is a never-ending process.