



OUT OF COMMISSION  
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# Santa Monica Daily Press

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THE RAIN GO AWAY ISSUE

## School district facing mid-year budget cuts

BY MELODY HANATANI  
Daily Press Staff Writer

**SMMUSD HDQTRS** Budget problems brewing in the state capitol could have the local school district deep in the red within a few years.

A series of different scenarios were outlined in the first interim budget report that the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District recently submitted to the Los Angeles County Office of Education, including a worst case projection showing a \$9 million deficit in the 2011-12 academic year.

The district also faces anywhere from \$3 million to \$9 million in mid-year cuts this year but won't be sure of the damage until officials in Sacramento reach a resolution.

"Every day we hear something else," the district's Chief Financial Officer Jan Maez said. "There is a lot of uncertainty."

The report basically shows a best-of-the-worst and worst-of-the-worst case scenarios, both of which assume the expenditures remain the same as they are today, with the exception of some staffing ratio changes because of declining enrollment.

The better of the two projections assume there is no cost of living adjustment in the state's allocation to the district next year, with a 3.5 percent increase in 2010-11. The scenario projects that the district, which is required to maintain 3 percent of its budget in reserves, would be about \$4 million in the red by 2011-12.

The worst-case-scenario assumes there are no cost of living adjustments for the next two years, resulting in a negative cash flow of approximately \$9 million in 2011-12.

"Our goal would be to make reductions and to eliminate that deficit spending and as we eliminate that deficit spending, we bring ourselves out of the problem with that \$9 million," Maez said about how the district could react if the worst-case scenario came true.

While other districts have responded to the possibility of budget cuts by imposing spending freezes, Maez has suggested that the SMMUSD not react as drastically, rather looking at expenditures on a case-by-case basis.

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## OLD FAITHFUL

Photo courtesy of Rance Costa  
Santa Monica fire fighters on Monday respond to the scene of an accident to find water shooting at least 25 feet into the air from a severed fire hydrant located near an alley on Santa Monica Boulevard. A truck driver crashed into the hydrant, causing the gusher. Fire fighters were able to shut off the water a short time later as a crowd gathered to watch.

## Teacher pleads guilty to assaults

BY MELODY HANATANI  
Daily Press Staff Writer

**AIRPORT COURTHOUSE** A former Lincoln Middle School teacher will spend the next 14 years in prison after pleading guilty on Monday to multiple counts of sexual molestation involving nine female students dating back to 2000.

Thomas Arthur Beltran, 61, sat quietly in his orange jumpsuit and stared straight ahead as Deputy District Attorney Robin Sax Katzenstein read all 10 counts one by one, Beltran only responding when she asked how the defendant would plea.

The 30-year-veteran of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District was arrested in May after a 12-year-old student came forward to investigators that she had been sexually abused. Beltran spent the past two decades teaching English as a Second Language at Lincoln.

Facing life in prison, he entered the guilty plea shortly before the preliminary hearing was scheduled to commence. The sentence by Los Angeles Superior Court Judge William Hollingsworth comes without the possibility of parole.

"He hopes this brings closure to the situation," defense attorney Robert Berke said. "It's a regrettable situation."

The 10 counts involve nine female victims, and include seven counts of continuous sexual abuse, two counts of lewd act on a child and one count of sexual penetration of a foreign object on a child under 14.

Beltran also admitted to sexually assaulting two other students who were not included in the criminal complaint because the crimes took place outside the statute of limitations, according to the prosecutor.

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# Former Lincoln teacher to spend 14 years in prison

FROM BELTRAN PAGE 1

"We think this was a disposition that was in the best interest of everyone," Sax Katzenstein said.

The mother of one of the victims read a prepared statement before the sentencing, often turning to look at Beltran who sat to the right as she spoke about a daughter whose eyes fill up with tears when she hears the word, "abuse."

"Why? Why her?" the mother, whose identity was kept confidential by the court to protect her child, said. "What had she done?"

The parent said she noticed changes in her then 11-year-old daughter around the winter of 2006, acting lethargically, snapping at her siblings, putting on more weight and avoiding skirts.

She had thought it was the beginning of puberty until her daughter came forward one night crying to tell the truth.

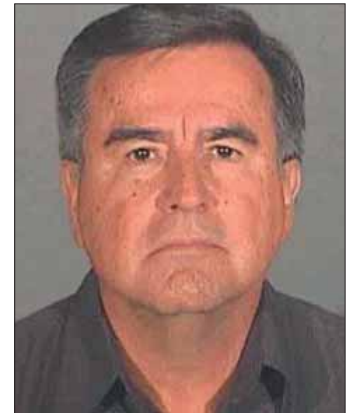
"The rest of her confession is still fresh and hurtful in our memory," the mother said.

The arrest last spring shook the school community and led to a number of policy changes within the district to avoid a similar situation in the future, including requiring that any claims of sexual molestation be immediately reported to the superintendent.

The policy was added after it was revealed that Beltran was investigated on a similar allegation in 2006 when a student told a school administrator that she did not want to remain in his class because she was uncomfortable with the way he was touching her.

The student was removed from the class and the principal informed Beltran of the accusation.

The teacher responded that he was shocked at the accusation and upset his actions had been interpreted as inappropriate, according to a letter written at the time by former principal Kathy Scott to Detective Lloyd Gladden of the Santa Monica Police Department. The teacher was instructed not to touch any of his students to avoid further



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misinterpretation.

The district received a copy of the letter shortly after Beltran's arrest.

An administrative regulation was also recently added that requires criminal background checks for district volunteers.

"We're certainly relieved that it's over and the district is updating its policies to reduce the chances of this kind of (incident) from occurring again," Ralph Mechur, the Board of Education president, said.

Rebecca Kennerly, the president of the Santa Monica-Malibu Council of PTAs and Lincoln parent, said the focus going forward should be on the education of students and not let the sexual molestation case define the school's identity.

"Our children go to school every day and learn every day and a crisis like this is intensely sad but for children life goes on so quickly and so immediately," Kennerly said. "As educators and as parents, it's our job to help them move on and I think they've been doing probably a better job at that than many of the adults."

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*Happy Holidays*

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