

Frequently Asked Questions

Tam Union High School District

How are Tam District high schools performing?

Our schools in the Tam District are among the top in the nation. Students at Drake, Redwood, Tam, San Andreas and Tamiscal High Schools receive an education that prepares them to succeed in college and future careers. Last year, Tam District had 7 National Merit Finalists or Semi-Finalists and 30 commended students.

What challenges are facing our schools?

Revenue supporting our schools has not kept pace with the cost of educating our students. Our district faces rising student enrollment and unfunded mandates from the State. In recent years, student enrollment has grown and is expected to continue to increase. In fact, in the past 10 years, student enrollment has increased by more than 30%, which equates to over 1,200 students or roughly the size of Drake High School. We are a community-funded district which means that we do not receive more funding when student enrollment increases.

How has the District dealt with these challenges?

The District addressed these challenges through fiscal management and partnering with our community. We made cuts (\$5.8 million annually), while still protecting the education provided to local high school students. For several years, the District sought input from the community through community meetings, surveys, community task forces and most recently the citizen Fiscal Advisory committee. The community passed the Measure J parcel tax last November and this helped to minimize the most drastic cuts and protected essential programs.

Has the District made cuts?

Yes. With input from the community and the citizen Fiscal Advisory committee, the District made \$5.8 million in cuts. The following steps were taken:

- Reduced the number of teachers, librarians and staff
- Reduced the administrative technology budget
- Reduced administration positions and hours
- Principals and teachers have reduced costs, materials and supplies at all schools
- Reduced administration of educational services, maintenance and nutrition
- Reduced number of new teachers, counselors and assistant principals
- Reduced professional development and consultant services
- Reduced custodian, grounds and maintenance staffing
- Eliminated community education evening classes
- Reduced administrative costs
- Reduced counseling services (specifically, non-mandated therapeutic counseling)
- Reduced kitchen staffing
- Reduced athletic budgets

Does Tam High School District currently receive local parcel tax funding?

Yes. Tam High School District has two local parcel tax measures that account for 17% of the District's annual budget. Our local funding measure was first passed in 1989 and has been periodically renewed over the years. In addition, in 2018 local voters approved Measure J, a supplemental parcel tax measure, to provide additional funding to accommodate rising student enrollment and rising costs. Today, these measures have a combined total cost of \$443 annually per parcel, with a 3% annual cost of living adjustment, and provide approximately \$16.1 million in annual funding for our schools. Both of these measures are set to expire in 2022.

Was Measure J intended to prevent all cuts to Tam District high schools?

No. Even with the passage of Measure J, the District knew it would need to make additional cuts.

What happens if the local funding measures expire?

Both of Tam District's local parcel tax measures are set to expire in 2022. This funding accounts for 17% of the District's annual budget. If this funding expires, our schools will need to make cuts equivalent to laying off almost half of our teaching staff (114 teachers), increasing class sizes and cutting academic programs. Although no final decisions have been made, the District is considering placing a local parcel tax measure on the ballot in 2020.

Has the District relied on reserve funds?

Yes. The District has been able to make up for insufficient funding by relying on reserve funds. Although the District has relied on reserve funding in previous years, this year our budget is balanced and we won't rely on reserve funds. However, due to rising costs and the expiration of the parcel taxes, our forecast shows that we will need to use reserve funding in a couple of years.

Does parcel tax revenue support teacher salaries?

Yes. Despite the high cost of living in our area, we are able to attract and retain teachers, in large part because of our competitive salaries and benefits. We want our students to have highly qualified teachers who are invested in our community and in our schools. Our existing parcel tax measures provide funding equivalent to 114 teachers and helps to attract qualified teachers.

Why don't we receive more funding when we have more students?

We do not receive additional funding from the State when more students attend our schools. This is in contrast to most other California schools that receive state funding based on their enrollment. We do not receive state funding based on our enrollment. That this because we are a community funded district so most of our revenue is from local property taxes and our local parcel taxes. In fact, out of our total budget we only receive about 6% from the state and about 1% from the Federal government. The number of students we serve is far outpacing the dollars we receive to serve those students.

What about the rising costs of special education?

We educate to all of our students—including those in special education. It's true that more students are requiring special education and the District's cost of providing special education is increasing, and we are happy to provide these services to ensure that every Tam District student receives the outstanding education they deserve. However, our costs have been increasing (\$5.2 M in 2013-2014; \$19.6 M in 2021-2022), a result of Federal and State mandates. Because of these unfunded or underfunded mandates, the cost of special education is comprising a larger percentage of our budget each year.

What about pensions?

The District is legally required to pay retirement benefits and cannot adjust these costs. Retirement benefits are set at the state level and not at the local level. The passage of Assembly Bill 1469 required our District to increase our pension contribution rates and resulting pension costs. Our pension costs will double over the next six years.

Pensions, however, are only one piece of the challenges facing the district as state funding for our schools is insufficient, the cost of providing an education continues to increase and our schools are facing rising student enrollment that is expected to remain or drop only slightly after five years. Even when enrollment is projected to decline, it will still remain higher than historical levels and require staffing that exceeds existing revenue.

Is student enrollment projected to continue to increase?

Student enrollment has been on the rise and increased by over 30% in the past 10 years, requiring the District to hire over 70 additional teachers and counselors to serve the additional 1,200 students. After five years, enrollment is projected to decline slightly. Even when enrollment declines, however, it will still remain higher than historic levels and require staffing that exceeds existing revenue.

What is the citizen Fiscal Advisory Committee?

The citizen Fiscal Advisory Committee is a committee made up of representatives from our community and provides input on budget decisions. The committee represents a cross-section of the community and includes representatives from Tamalpais Federation of Teachers (TFT), California School Employees Association (CSEA), teachers, classified staff, parents from each of our schools, community partners, management and a trustee observer. The citizen Fiscal Advisory Committee has provided perspectives on the budget process and cuts that have been required.

Has the District engaged the community throughout this process?

Yes. Over the past several years, the District has engaged with the community multiple task forces, one-on-one community interviews, community meetings and surveys. We appreciate feedback from our parents and the greater community about what they value about our schools. This information has helped to inform our decisions about areas to reduce or cut all together. Most recently, the District sought applicants from the community for the citizen Fiscal Advisory Committee and the LCAP committee (LCAP stands for Local Control Accountability

Plan). The District met with each committee multiple times and worked together to identify the most recent budget cuts. Our Superintendent and Chief Financial Officer, Tara Taupier and Corbett Elsen respectively, visited each high school site to update staff and seek their feedback. The District also held six community budget update meetings and administered a survey to parents, staff and students to solicit more feedback about our plans for reducing the budget.

Why can't we just rely on the reserve?

The District is required to maintain a reserve, or savings account, for emergencies so that it can continue to operate in the event of unexpected or dramatic changes in funding. It has been necessary to rely on the reserve in order to insulate our students from devastating cuts but relying on reserves is a short-term solution as the reserves will eventually run out.

What's the difference between parcel taxes and bond measures?

Bond measures and parcel tax measures are used for different purposes — bond measures can *only* fund facility upgrades and improvements and cannot be used for operating costs or programs. Parcel taxes may be used for teachers and academic programs.

How can I learn more?

If you have questions about the District's budget or planning process, you can go to the District website at www.TamDistrict.org and click on "Budget Information" on the left side. You can learn more about the existing parcel tax, our budget and the District's planning process. Please share your comments or questions with us.