

School Districts Throughout The Country Are Experiencing Financial Difficulty... *Even In Beverly Hills, California.*

Here's how students, parents, teachers and an entire community rallied to raise money and save their teachers' jobs.

The One Campaign

By Dion Rabouin

On May 1st, the Beverly Hills Board of Education had a pink slip list with the names of 24 teachers, counselors, and other staff of the Beverly Hills Unified School District (BHUSD). By June 9th, only four got the notice. What happened between May and June is a story of budget cuts, early retirement, diminished property values, and a motley crew of educators, administrators, board members and volunteers who refused to accept the inevitable. Their problem was not that different from one faced in other school districts across the country with too many students and not enough money. In the past three years, schools from elementary to post-secondary have laid off teachers and other staff hoping to forestall the guillotine of declining tax revenue, housing prices and community earnings that hit the U.S. almost overnight.

Despite being known as a beacon of wealth, privilege and unfettered prosperity, Beverly Hills is no different. BHUSD has managed to allay many problems in the past because it is a basic aid school district—meaning it relies mostly on local property taxes rather than money from the state. The district receives no general purpose funding from California, but receives money for categorical programs, meaning cash comes with strings attached. According to BHUSD board of education directors, California requires all basic aid districts have a budget showing a minimum of a three percent reserve. If the district can't produce one, the state can seize control of the budget and the district. To meet conditions, in 2011 the board cut \$2.2 million from a \$50 million budget and \$500,000 from non-teaching positions.

"We'd been talking about doing [something] and people said, 'Wait, let's see,' and as the news kept getting worse and worse about the financial landscape of the school community, we decided to jump on it," said Dev Hankin, CEO of the Beverly Hills Education Foundation (BHEF), which spearheaded the charge hailed as a "joint emergency fundraising effort." It was coordinated and executed by BHUSD, the Beverly Hills Education Association teachers union (BHEA), BHEF, PTA Council, and the PTSA with the intention to raise one million dollars in one week. It was called the ONE

campaign. The goal: save 10 positions within the district selected by BHUSD's five principals and the superintendent. Deemed "the most critical to the educational experience of students," they included K-8 Counselors, a special ed teacher, BHHS counselor, BHHS journalism, BHHS performing arts, special ed program specialist, BHHS custodians, middle school instrumental teachers, and K-5 technology.

"We said one week, one million, that's obviously an ambitious goal," said Hankin. "In our minds, failure is doing nothing, success is hiring every teacher. Not getting the full amount is not failure, doing nothing is failure." The effort kicked off April 27th at the Beverly Hills Apple Ball. Normally a VIP reception where the BHEF honors and recognizes Founding Families and sponsors, this year the honorees were asked for money. It worked. The BHEF brought in \$60,000 within half an hour. The rest wouldn't come easily. An email appeal was followed by robocalls to each resident in the city and 4,700 students were required to take home and return envelopes requesting donations from parents. If parents declined to donate, envelopes were required to be returned anyway.

"The beauty of this campaign is that not one person in this community can say 'I didn't know this was happening,'" said BHEF chairman Jonathan Prince. "Don't tell me you didn't know, just tell me you didn't care." The campaign garnered media attention on all the major news channels, and the Associated Press news wire published the story in more than 100 newspapers across the country. The focus wasn't just on the lofty goal; it was also a sign that the country's economic woes were hitting everyone.

continued page 25

