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LA MESA-SPRING VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

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Brian Marshall is starting his seventh year as superintendent of the **La Mesa-Spring Valley School District**. The K-8 district is the second largest in East County, with about 12,250 students attending 21 schools in both La Mesa and the unincorporated community of Spring Valley. Marshall, 45, who lives in San Diego's Del Cerro neighborhood, sat down with us recently to talk about the district.

QUESTION: Tell us first about declining enrollment in the district. I know this has been an issue for a number of years. Are you still seeing the trend?

ANSWER: We've been in decline for the seven years that I've been superintendent. When I became superintendent, we had 14,500 children, and over the years we've lost those kids for a variety of reasons. Certainly our community is aging, and as a community ages, they produce less school-age children. The housing market certainly had an impact on that -- it was very expensive to buy houses for new families in La Mesa or Spring Valley. There was a little bit of a movement out of the San Diego community up through the I-15 corridor into Temecula ... And you know the birth rate is down. So all of those kind of things go together to have fewer school-age kids.

We did do an analysis early in my superintendency maybe now five years ago, and the projection was that we should bottom out here in the next year or so right at about 12,000 students and then start to grow back a little bit. ... We've lost in the average about 250 kids a year, give or take.

So what has that meant for the district -- less funding, right?

Well, you're funded based on the number of students you have and so yes, fewer funds, but since you have fewer students, you have fewer costs, and so you can actually recuperate some of those costs. You know if you have less kids you're going to have less classrooms, less teachers. But the district and all school districts have a variety of fixed costs that don't change.

How has the state budget crisis affected the school district?

It's had a dramatic impact on the services that we can provide throughout the system, whether it's to our students or whether it's maintenance for our facilities. We've had to cut back in numerous ways probably over the course of the budget crisis, which really isn't just right now; it's been going on for the last year or so.

And what's the total budget?

We used to be \$100 million, I think we're \$88 (million) right now. So it's a cut of about \$12 million total. We probably have some more cutting to do, actually. We'll work this year to do some more cutting. We have increased class size from 20 to 22 at our K through 3 grades. We have increased our 4th, 5th and 6th, 7th, 8th grades to an average in the neighborhood of 33. Certainly some classes are smaller, but some are bigger. ... It's very fluid, but our average is going up in both the primary grades K-3 and in our upper grades 4-8. Very, very fortunate that we were able to negotiate a salary reduction for all of our employees.

How many positions are you down?

I would estimate in the neighborhood of 70 from last year -- that's just teaching staff.

The beginning of a new school year is always an exciting time for students, going back and seeing if there were any changes at your school. Are there any big changes that kids or families are going to see? What can they expect?

I wouldn't say you're going to see, "Oh my gosh, the school's been remodeled" or any of that kind of stuff. Certainly we painted a couple schools, a new roof here or there. Some of that deferred-maintenance kind of stuff.

(For students and parents), you can expect your best year ever. Regardless of what the state is doing with the budget, we know that children have one year in whatever grade they're in. ... We pledge to educate your child to high levels. Your child will learn everything he or she needs to learn this year, and they'll have a great time doing it.

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