

# Fresno schools may lose \$16 million

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By Tracy Correa / The Fresno Bee

Nineteen low-performing Fresno schools will lose close to \$16 million -- money already accounted for in this year's budget -- if Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger allows nearly \$400 million in Quality Education Investment Act funds to be cut, Fresno Unified School District officials said Thursday.

Fresno Unified Superintendent Michael Hanson was joined by Greg Gadams, president of the Fresno Teachers Association, and other school officials in front of Roosevelt High School, where they urged the governor to sign Senate Bill 84 -- or find another solution -- to stop the proposed cuts. The bill would preserve the funding to 139 districts and about 2.7 million students.

"The threat is real, and we urge the governor to act very quickly," Hanson said.

The Quality Education Investment Act is part of a legal settlement between the state and the California Teachers Association. The funds have been used for more than two years to help struggling schools and were supposed to continue through fiscal year 2013-14. They were part of the public schools funds cut by lawmakers in July to help balance the budget.

When the cuts were made, state officials initially believed federal money could backfill the funding, but they later learned federal rules didn't allow it.

SB 84, written by Democrats Sen. Darrell Steinberg and Assembly Member Karen Bass, is an attempt to protect the funding to schools. The Legislature passed SB 84 on Sept. 11; it is now on the governor's desk. There is no indication of what the governor may decide, and calls to his press office weren't immediately returned Thursday.

At Roosevelt -- which had been at risk of losing its accreditation because of poor student performance and other issues -- the money has paid for intervention programs that the district believes helped boost standardized test scores.

Hanson said he didn't want to see Roosevelt's 2,465 students suffer: "Our investment at a school like this needs to be maintained and strengthened."

The eight-year, \$3 billion state program allows qualified low-performing schools to get additional funding if teacher staffing is increased and class size is reduced in grades 4 through 8.

In Fresno high schools, it has also funded freshman academies -- a mini-school that works closely with new students that have low grades and poor test scores.

Gadams said the most challenged students will be disproportionately affected by the cuts. They include English-language learners, minorities and those who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

"This is an example of something that works," he said in his plea for the governor to preserve the funding.

Gabriel McCurtis, superintendent of McFarland Unified School District in Kern County, was also in Fresno urging the governor to sign SB 84. He said his school will lose \$1.6 million if the funds for low-performing schools are stripped away.

Hanson said Fresno Unified doesn't know what it will do if the governor vetoes the bill and the district is forced to make millions of dollars of cuts to its general fund this year: "We couldn't conceive of how to do that."