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Union targets Rialto district with flier

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RIALTO - In a flier mailed to city residents about three weeks ago, the Rialto Education Association said the school board has given the district the image of a dropout factory. "Federal and state governments enacted laws that took American children out of factories," the flier says. "Under the current board's leadership, Rialto's public education institutions have been labeled factories themselves."

The flier depicts students in the district as grizzled child laborers from the early 1900s. Some parents are outraged at the latest salvo fired in what many see as an ongoing war between the union and the district over student performance, teacher layoffs and money. "This is just going to add fuel to the fire, and it's just not right," said Karen Bryan. "I did take it personally."

Bryan, who has one child in the district, spent 10 years as a substitute teacher there before joining the accounts payable department. The flier calls for residents to vote out board president Dan Mays, and school board member Walter Hawkins. It also says they along with Superintendent Edna Davis-Herring and board member Joanne Gilbert are hoarding money as they watch students fail and teachers pack for another district.

Bill Hedrick, head of the Rialto Education Association union, authorized the mailing of the fliers to about 17,000 homes in the city. "We wanted to get the attention of the voters of Rialto," Hedrick said. "We have a highly centralized district, an appalling dropout rate, incredibly shabby treatment of employees and an instructional program that is starting to look like the Titanic."

The flier points to the dropout rates of three high schools and charges the district with sitting on top of \$36 million, even as it let go of more than 200 qualified teachers earlier this year.

Deputy Superintendent Joe Davis said the district is saving money to pay bills for the next three years. According to Davis, the district has \$15.8 million allocated to specific categories, \$7.2 million in reserves and \$12.6 million in unallocated money.

Davis said the unallocated money will be used to pay for increases in teacher benefits, keep class sizes reduced in first and second grades and help cover the loss of millions of dollars from the state as 600 students a year are expected to leave the district. There's also the rising cost of food, gas and electricity, he said. It's a matter of the district fighting for its budgetary life, Davis said. "If you knew that you were going to be cut back, and that your gas, food and electric (bills) were going to go up, you'd be hoarding too, if that's what you want to call it," Davis said.

Hedrick wouldn't state how much the fliers cost but said it's the type of fight the teachers expect their union representatives to wage.

One parent supported the flier. Lynn Gonzales transferred one son out of the district before he reached high school. She transferred her daughter out before she reached middle school and plans to transfer her youngest son out of elementary school. "I was like, yes, they finally put something out there the parents will read," Gonzales said.

The board members could not be reached for comment.

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