

MARIN VOICE

Don't bankrupt our children

'THERE IS always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in."

This bit of wisdom from Graham Greene reminds us that each child has only one childhood, and that every year, every day matters.

All the love, all the learning is cumulative. It adds up.

Likewise, all the moments in a child's young life lacking support, lacking education, lacking positive influences can get stacked up into a giant obstacle to success and happiness.

As members of Marin's Early Childhood Education Partnership, we wrote last year at this time to invite the residents of Marin County to volunteer their time and donate what they can afford to local children's causes.

But quite a bit has changed in the past 12 months.

This year, we are writing with a wake up call to the corporate community, elected officials, private donors, friends and neighbors across Marin County. This is it: Between the state budget deficit, cuts to education and nonprofits, investment losses and disastrous revenue projections, we are about to bankrupt an entire generation of children. And this is a disaster that will impact us all.

Marin County already suffers from an achievement gap that begins in a child's earliest years and persists. Many, many children in Marin County are struggling and have little chance of succeeding without community support.

And with the budget cuts that are coming down, dramatically less support is going to be available.

Yes, Marin County is home to

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thousands of millionaires; but it's also home to thousands of people living in poverty. The nonprofit organizations and government agencies that serve low-income children and families are facing monumental budget cuts this year, and the impact on people living in this county will be tremendous.

Because budgets are being slashed across the board, those in need will likely get hit with multiple cuts in safety net services in addition to paying increased taxes. Under the state budget, families may suffer the loss of child welfare services, health and dental care, regional center programs, mental health services and multiple educational programs at school.

When the needs of the poor go unfunded, there will be repercussions throughout our community. And when the needs of our children go unfunded, the effects will be lifelong.

Now is the time, this is the moment, when the future will be decided for our children.

Each year, April is celebrated as "The Month of the Young Child." This year, we have to wonder what we have to celebrate. While many fine organizations and dedicated people are working hard to improve the lives of Marin County kids, state budget cuts are about to devastate the programs and services we have to offer.

Now is the time for a community response and community action.

We need to save our schools and preserve the quality of education for every child in this county. We need to save health and dental care programs so children are healthy enough just to come to school. And we need to protect the high-quality early care opportunities in Marin so every child has a chance to learn and grow before kindergarten and be more prepared for success in school.

Every child needs and deserves good health, optimal development and exceptional education. Unless we act now, and come up with something big, childhood for thousands of Marin County kids will be forever changed. Every moment matters.

So wake up Marin and let's take action:

► Let your legislators know that you don't want California to bankrupt our kids.

► When you get the chance, vote to save funding and programs for children.

► Volunteer your time or make a donation to your favorite children's organization or school.

Your personal effort is needed to keep kids healthy, happy and learning in Marin.