



Report: Fresno Unified health board saved \$100m since 2006

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Fresno Unified has saved more than \$100 million since 2006 in health care costs and kept employee costs nearly flat as statewide costs spiked, members of the district's health management board said Wednesday.

The group that governs the district's health benefits told the school board it's on track to avoid increases again this year, despite a projected 9% jump in health care costs across the state.

The Joint Health Management Board, which manages district employee and retiree health benefits, was created as a response to rising health care costs and mounting district debt in 2005.

It's governed by both the district's employee unions and administrators and requires health care providers to bid on a chance to offer coverage for employees, retirees and their dependents. Fresno Unified currently contracts with two health networks, Kaiser Permanente and Anthem Blue Cross, and a host of others in the dental, vision and health-related fields.

Making vendors compete is what chief financial officer Ruth Quinto credits for keeping costs low. "We keep our vendors on their toes by evaluating them multiple times throughout the year and requiring them to compete if they want to maintain their contracts with the district," she said.

Care costs for the health plan's 25,000 members were \$38 million less in 2012 than they would have been without the district's competitive bidding process, Quinto said. In all, those costs totaled \$50 million that year, down from \$63 million in 2010 but a slight increase from the \$47 million paid out in 2006.

Quinto said the bidding process also safeguards against unexpected health care increases, including possible hikes under the federal Affordable Care Act health care overhaul.

Even so, the amount employees chip in out of their monthly paychecks has crept up in recent years.

For example, standard monthly premiums for a family bounced up from about \$70 to \$130 per month in 2011. Those rates rose again in 2012, to about \$230 for a family. The district pays \$1,140 per member. Quinto said she doesn't expect premiums to increase this year.

The school board took action on several other items during their meeting:

Trustees signed off on a \$7.8 million plan to buy almost 15,000 Asus tablets for students, who will use the hand-held devices to take new state computerized tests this spring. District officials say they'll be equipped with Wi-Fi and a tracking device to combat theft.

Certain Fresno schools will soon begin swapping their academic expertise with schools in other parts of California.

The trustees OK'd a plan to spend more than \$58,000 to kick-start two partnerships intended to help struggling Fresno schools improve. In exchange, local schools that perform well academically will share their expertise with other districts. One partnership is between the district and Long Beach Unified; the other is with the California Office to Reform Education.

The plan riled members of the Fresno Teachers Association, who said they're worried the board is giving up its authority to manage its schools.

Tutoring services are changing at 14 schools. Trustees voted to spend about \$1.3 million on tutoring contracts with Reading and Beyond, Sullivan Learning Systems and Cullinan Education Center. Board member Michelle Asadoorian said she'd like to see regular reports on whether students who use the services are improving academically.

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<http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/01/22/3727744/report-fresno-unified-health-board.html#storylink=cpy>