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Adult School surviving despite funding cuts



Fairfield-Suisun Adult School students, from left to right, Michael Miller, Crystal Britt and Evelyn Saludo study together during a class on sterilizing medical instruments Thursday. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)

By Heather Ah San

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FAIRFIELD — Last week it was National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week, and at the Fairfield-Suisun Adult School that celebration has a lot of meaning.

Principal Kay Hartley certainly thinks so.

The Adult School faced some devastating cuts last year including several staff layoffs and the near dissolution of the English as a Second Language program. The Fairfield-Suisun School Board cut \$862,607, nearly all of the Adult School's budget.

The board did, however, change some language in its motion so that the Adult School could bring back programs if it found outside funding from grants or other sources.

Not all is dismal for the Adult School, Hartley said. With help from other district schools and grants the Adult School is moving forward, still striving to offer the best education it can now and in the future.

“(The school) is alive and flourishing,” she said.

While the focus is on high school diplomas and the GED test, Hartley said the school is working on ways to retain other programs such as ESL.

Last year, the Adult School offered five ESL classes in the morning and five in the evening. Now, only two classes are available in mornings and evenings.

To continue to support the demand for ESL, the Adult School has partnered with four elementary schools in the district that are offering funds to support three ESL classes and one GED class.

These classes are offered to parents of students at the elementary schools.

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Another option available to parents is the Solano Parent and Child Education program. It was sponsored by First 5 Solano this year.

The program offers numerous classes to help develop parenting skills such as communication, discipline and skills such as CPR.

Technical and trade classes could also grow in the Adult School. Hartley said the aim is to add four new specialized classes within the year.

Last year, the Adult School added a sterilization process training class for medical tools.

The class has been a hit, with potential students lining up overnight to ensure a spot.

Mother and daughter Donna McFarland and Shmecca Johnson, respectively, were two of those students who waited to register.

Johnson said they slept in pop-up chairs outside all night just to earn a coveted spot in the class taught by Sharon Barum.

Barum, the leader in sterile processing at NorthBay Medical Center, teaches twice a week at the adult school but often takes time out of her busy schedule for an extra study session with her students.

"She's really good," Johnson said. "She teaches us to be professional."

Johnson said she quit her job in San Francisco to make time for this class. With children and a full-time job, Johnson couldn't juggle school, too. Instead of giving up school to keep her job, she gave up her job in hopes in favor advancing her career.

"I want to focus on a career, not just a job," she said.

For more information on classes, call the Adult School's main office at 421-4155.

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Heather Ah San

Heather Ah San covers Rio Vista, features and general news for the Daily Republic. She received her bachelors of art degree from the University of Oregon.

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