

REL#11-04
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 6, 2011

CONTACT: Paul Hefner
PHONE: 916-319-0818
E-MAIL: phefner@cde.ca.gov

Schools Chief Tom Torlakson Declares Schools in State of Financial Emergency
Begins Department-Wide Review, Urges Californians to Help

SACRAMENTO—State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson declared a state of financial emergency in California's schools today, launching a department-wide review and urging Californians to come to the aid of schools across the state.

"There's simply no other way to describe it: this is an emergency," Torlakson said. "Every day, teachers, school employees, and principals are performing miracles, but the \$18 billion in cuts over the last three years are taking their toll. We have 174 districts teetering on the financial brink. If this isn't an emergency, I don't know what is."

Torlakson acknowledged that his options for addressing the problem were limited, but pledged to do what he could within his own department while calling Californians to action to address the financial crisis facing schools.

"The law won't let me call out the National Guard," Torlakson said. "So I'm saying to every Californian: 'Your schools need your help. And they need it now.'"

At a news conference held today to discuss the economic challenges facing K-12 education, Torlakson was joined by representatives of the state's Education Coalition, including Barbara Nemko, Superintendent of the Napa County Office of Education; Dana Dillon, Member of the California Teachers Association Board of Directors; Jo Loss, California State PTA President; Dave Low, Executive Director of the California School Employees Association; Gary Ravani, Vice-President of the California Federation of Teachers, and Rick Pratt, Assistant Executive Director, Governmental Relations, the California School Boards Association.

Torlakson said the California Department of Education would do its part, including conducting an independent review to set priorities and find ways to lessen the burden of state requirements on county offices of education, districts, and schools.

“Like our schools themselves, the Department has suffered severe cuts over the last several years, and multiple rounds of downsizing,” Torlakson said. “It’s time to step back and reassess what we can and cannot do and what we should do with the resources that remain.”

He noted that the Department was working to expand its free and online-resources for school districts, including its “CDE on I-Tunes U” that provides free professional development resources to districts.

Torlakson said he would also examine streamlining the school construction process, devote a part of the Department’s Web site to help districts learn from one another about ways to work together and save money, and, when appropriate, work to provide districts more financial flexibility.

“Giving schools more control over how they spend limited funds is a poor substitute for providing them the resources they need and deserve, but we shouldn’t make our schools spend time and money on unnecessary paperwork – especially now, when both are in such short supply,” Torlakson said.

Torlakson called for Californians to get directly involved in helping their local schools and to support making the investments necessary to restore California’s leadership in education, starting with an extension of current tax levels now set to expire, to prevent another round of devastating cuts to schools.

Torlakson noted that 58 percent of school districts have cut instructional materials; 35 percent have increased class size; 35 percent have reduced their teaching force; 48 percent have cut nurses, counselor, and psychologists; and almost half of local educational agencies have reduced the pay of their employees, according to a CDE survey conducted last year.

“Educators are making heart-wrenching decisions so they can meet their fiscal obligations, but these kinds of cuts endanger the quality of student learning today and our future economic competitiveness as a state tomorrow,” Torlakson said. “It’s time to treat this problem like the emergency that it is, and start working together to address it.”

The California Department of Education (CDE) is a state agency led by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson. For more information, please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov> or by mobile device at <http://m.cde.ca.gov/>. You may also follow Superintendent Torlakson on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/TorlaksonSSPI>.