

# **Palo Alto** **Weekly**

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## **Simitian bill to benefit Ravenswood City School District**

The Ravenswood City School District's long financial struggle with the state over the reimbursement of special education costs is finally over, according to state Assemblyman Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto.

Simitian's AB 1350, which sought to reimburse the East Palo Alto district \$1.33 million for special education costs incurred in complying with a court order, has been signed into law.

"It took some time -- more than two years -- but we finally got the school district its due," Simitian said.

"It was a simple reimbursement claim that got caught up in a bureaucratic nightmare. Thankfully, the result is a good one."

The Ravenswood City School District filed two separate claims with the state controller's office, totaling \$1.33 million, for special education costs it incurred in complying with a federal court order.

Under the Ravenswood Corrective Action Plan, the district was ordered to make certain improvements to its special education programs -- the cost of which would be reimbursed by the state.

The district complied and submitted a claim for reimbursement of funds it had spent, but between filing and payment of the claim, the relevant section of the Education Code authorizing such payments was repealed, meaning the controller's office had no authority to reimburse the district, Simitian explained.

District Superintendent Floyd Gonella turned to the assemblyman for help.

"We needed someone who could make sense of these arcane statutes and push past the bureaucracy," Gonella said.

"Joe sat down with legislator after legislator to explain why we were entitled to this money. He lobbied the governor's office. He really went to bat for us."

For his part, Simitian said the district simply submitted a valid claim in a timely fashion.

"Unfortunately, the district's somewhat tumultuous history made the matter that much more confusing. It just took some extra effort to sort out the issues."

AB 1350 allocates special education funds, rather than state funds to pay the Ravenswood claims and specifically requires that the funds be used for special education purposes.

— *Bay City News Service*

# San Jose Mercury News

October 14, 2003

## State to pay back district

### RAVENSWOOD OWED FOR SPECIAL-ED COSTS

Gov. Gray Davis has signed a bill to reimburse the Ravenswood City School District for \$1.3 million in special-education costs.

Sponsored by Assemblyman Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, AB 1350 calls for using federal dollars left over from this past fiscal year to reimburse Ravenswood for money spent on special education that the state has owed the district since 1999.

The payment was mandated by a court order, but a loophole prevented the district from recouping the costs.

"Ravenswood was really caught in a bureaucratic Catch-22," Simitian said Monday. Simitian outlined the three obstacles facing the district: The state law allowing the repayment had been repealed; the law had allowed for repayment but did not actually require it; and the state budget deficit made the governor and the Legislature queasy about approving any kind of spending bill.

In the end, AB 1350 was "a lot more palatable for people to support" because the bill specified Ravenswood would receive money from remaining federal special education funds rather than the state's general fund, Simitian said.

"This is a big win for Ravenswood in terms of the district's financial solvency and ability to move forward," Simitian said. "And it's a big win for special education parents."