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**Schools May Sell Naming Rights**

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Children in the Peninsula town of Belmont soon may find themselves attending Ralston Middle School Sponsored by Purina, eating lunch in Safeway Cafeteria and running laps around Nike Field.

That's because the financial picture is so bleak in the Belmont-Redwood Shores School District that school trustees are giving serious thought to letting corporations slather their names on just about everything in sight -- for a price.

It's a radical -- and unprecedented -- idea that school officials said could bring as much as \$1 million to a district that would lose one-fifth of its \$20 million annual budget under Gov. Gray Davis' proposed spending plan.

"In times of economic difficulty, the community, the district and the parents are looking for creative ways to increase funding," said school board President Colleen You. "The school district needs to think outside the box." Or at least look to Jack in the Box.

No other school district in the nation has gone to such lengths to fill its coffers. But some have considered less drastic measures.

The Berkeley Unified School district considered and rejected a \$100,000 deal with Pepsi Co. in 1998 to allow the company exclusive rights to campus vending machines. The proposal also would have allowed Pepsi to erect a high-tech scoreboard bearing its logo at the high school football field.

**OLD NAVY ON BUSES**

And it wasn't that long ago that buses bearing the Old Navy logo ferried kids to school in San Francisco and San Mateo County.

The possibility that media mogul Rupert Murdoch could slap his name on Benjamin Fox Middle School remains at least a few months away, but the debate has already started.

Advocates said selling naming rights can be a terrific way to bring money to strapped districts. Critics argue it teaches kids that everything is for sale if the wad of cash is thick enough.

School trustees launched a subcommittee Thursday that will outline potential guidelines for corporate sponsorships of schools, classrooms, libraries and gyms.

The plan could be voted on by late February or early March.

District administrators argue they need the cash to make up for a shrinking budget, which could lose \$4 million under Davis' proposed budget.

"We should certainly share in filling in the state's budget deficit, and we understand that," said Superintendent Anne E. Campbell. "But to take 20 percent of our budget away absolutely guts our school district."

#### NO FULL RIGHTS

School trustees rejected the idea of granting a corporation full naming rights to a school, so there won't be an Oracle Elementary.

Instead, they favor incorporating a corporation's name into existing names, much like the college football Fiesta Bowl became the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl.

"Because the community already identifies with the school names, the board is more interested in partnership or sponsorship ideas," said You.

Although Professor Alex Molnar, director of the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University, can understand why a district might consider such a move, he thinks it's a bad idea.

"I don't question the desperation, I question the value of the response," he said. "This is not the way to address the district's fiscal crisis. The long-term effect is it undermines quality of the education by making their schools beholden to special interests."

Proponents of the idea said they can live with any ill effects if it means keeping the district afloat.

"The students will be exposed to corporate advertising all their life, so why not do it a little now to help fund their education," said Jeff Adams of School Force, the district's fund-raising foundation.

Adams, who conceived of the idea, said the district would strike deals only with companies possessing images that would not undermine its educational mission.

In other words, Budweiser and Marlboro need not apply.

Belmont-Redwood Shores School District

-- Benjamin Fox School

-- Central School

-- Cipriani School

-- Mae Nesbit School

-- Sandpiper School

-- Ralston Middle School