

Baldwin Park Unified facing senior program cuts



By [Melissa Masatani](#), San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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Aqua aerobics changed Mary Palminteri's life.

The 81-year-old Covina resident, diagnosed with fibromyalgia and diabetes, was in constant pain 15 years ago when she was told she had to change her lifestyle.

"My doctor asked me, 'do you have access to a pool?'" said Palminteri, who immediately signed up for the water aerobics class at Baldwin Park Adult and Community Education. "Now my fibromyalgia is under control, my sugar is under control and I keep getting better all the time."

Seniors soon may have to look elsewhere for their low-impact yoga and aerobics classes as Baldwin Park Unified's adult school braces for changes in adult education funding for the 2015-2016 school year.

The seniors' program could get the ax in favor of workforce development courses like English as a second language, GED/high school diploma or vocational programs.

"We value these programs and these are really hard decisions for us to make," BPUSD Superintendent Paul Sevillano said. "Our entire (school) board and community is very supportive of this program."

Baldwin Park Unified is one of the few school districts in the San Gabriel Valley still offering a seniors' program since the state changed the way adult education would be funded several years ago. Dozens of senior programs across the state have been eliminated in the past decade as funding shifted from K-12 control to community college oversight as part of Assembly Bill 86.

Baldwin Park is part of the Mt. San Antonio College consortium with a handful of other adult education programs in the area, but state funds are only allowed to fund basic education, ESL, career/technical classes, adults with disabilities and apprenticeship programs.

In Baldwin Park, layoff notices were delivered to 13 part-time instructors in the senior program as a "precautionary" measure, Sevillano said. District officials are waiting for the governor's May budget revision. Approximately 500 students take advantage of

about a dozen different classes, senior director John Kerr said, with the superintendent adding that raising fees for the classes is not feasible.

“It’s really hard to make promises or commitments when there’s really so many unknowns out there,” Kerr said. “It’s up to each district to decide if they want to fund their older adult programs,” said Bruce Krall, director of career/technical education at Hacienda La Puente Adult Education.

Hacienda-La Puente Unified offers several fee-based senior classes at local senior centers, while Azusa Unified transferred all of the district’s older adult classes to the city’s Parks and Recreation Department. Tri-Community Adult Education, part of Covina-Valley Unified, meanwhile, offers classes that are open to seniors but not strictly for seniors.

“I think there’s a mechanism by which we can serve older adults, we just need to be creative in how we do it,” said Mary Ketza, Azusa Adult School director. “The need doesn’t go away, but how we serve them can change.”