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Student protests cost districts

By Marianne Love Staff Writer
San Gabriel Valley Tribune

When thousands of students walked out of class on Monday to protest a bill that would criminalize illegal immigration, it hit school districts squarely in the pocketbook.

For each child who doesn't show up for school, a district loses between \$60 and \$80 under the state's average daily attendance formula.

So the walkouts throughout the San Gabriel Valley have school officials scrambling to make up the lost state funds in other ways, including holding class on Saturdays or after school.

Tony Ortega, assistant superintendent of business at El Monte Union High School District, which has 10,000 students, said he was afraid to calculate the financial loss.

Students from South El Monte, Mountain View and El Monte High schools walked out after the first bell rang, he said. The district locked down Arroyo and Rosemead high schools when demonstrating students moved from El Monte City Hall to Rosemead Park.

Ortega said the undetermined number of students who walked out are considered truant and could have instead benefitted from classroom discussions.

"There were some students \ only because it was an opportunity to miss class," Ortega said.

Ralph Rossum, executive director of the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College, said the demonstrations were a poor way of promoting equal economic opportunity.

"You undermine your cause if you avoid school to engage in protests. Do it on weekends," Rossum said. "It plays badly politically for those students to think they are advancing their cause by protesting at the expense of their own education."

Students walking out of Hacienda-La Puente district schools, which has an enrollment of 24,000, will face truancy charges and must make up class time; all district schools were locked down at 10:30 a.m., officials said.

District spokeswoman LaDonna Jackson said district students marched on La Puente City Hall where they were met by Councilman Lou Perez and city and school officials and eventually put on a bus and taken back to school. About 20 were issued truancy citations.

"\ told the students they understood what the kids were feeling ... and passed out information about contacting legislators to have their voices heard," Jackson said.

About 300 Bassett High School students who walked out were considered truant, making them subject to detention; they must also make up the lost time.

Robert Watanabe, superintendent of the 6,000-student Bassett district, said parents will be notified.

West Covina school board trustee Steve Cox said of the 10,200 students attending the district about two dozen walked out. Cox said no schools were locked down.

Staff writer Nisha Gutierrez contributed to this story.

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