

Sterne School

1) How has the current economy affected the need of services that you give to the community?

As California's public school system continues to cut student support services, more and more young people are failed by their schools. For a student with spatial, sequential, or attention disorders, it can be virtually impossible to learn in a room with 40 other students, yet teachers do not have the time to aid – or, in many cases, identify – students with different learning styles. Students who are failing contribute to a cycle of inadequacy in our public schools, lowering test score averages and limiting the possibility of outside funding.

For many of these students, Sterne School is a haven. At Sterne, students have access to their teachers in every class, and they are empowered to advocate for themselves and for their own success. The Sterne program assesses each student's specific challenges, and tailors a curriculum which cultivates strengths and addresses weaknesses in a constructive manner. As one high school senior put it: "Sterne actually takes the time to help students work, and we all have easy and fast access to our teachers. It helps that there aren't 40 people in one class – I'm lucky!"

2) How has the current economy affected the donations of goods and services that your organization receives?

Maintaining a student-teacher ratio of 7:1 and investing in the technology and tools to aid students with specific learning differences is a costly proposition. Sterne maintains tuition at competitive levels, but the economic downturn has definitely impacted families' ability to pay: in the 2009/2010 school year, 32% of Sterne School families receive some amount of financial aid, and at least one student has left the school for financial reasons. While Sterne is committed to making our program available to as many students as possible, the increasing cost of financial aid means limiting other programs.

We are fortunate to have the additional support of many of our families in the form of Annual Fund contributions and volunteer services; however, families already receiving tuition assistance are not generally able to contribute substantially to these fundraising efforts. Furthermore, as the economy causes attrition, the school's regular income goes down though most operational costs remain fixed.

3) How have the services that your organization provides to the community affected our local economy?

Sterne School prepares its students for their futures. At the core of our program is a constant attention to life-long coping skills. Our Passages program teaches students how to manage their time to achieve long-term goals, while exposing them to possible career paths. In the high school, the PathFinders program ensures that every student graduates from Sterne with a plan for continuing education or employment: four-year or community

college career training or a job. In this way, we ensure that students who might become a drain on the economy instead become positive contributors to society.

Additionally, many of our students go on to advocate for young people with learning differences, passing the gift of empowerment along. In the words of another high school senior: "I've learned that my learning difference is entirely different from my intelligence, which in turn has improved my self-esteem greatly and made me more confident about college – and about my future in general."