

School Board speech
December 16, 2020

Good evening Board Members and Dr. Stephens,
I'm Janine Waddell, Vice President of the Berkeley Federation of Teachers. I've also been a teacher at Washington Elementary for almost 10 years.

Congratulations to Ana Vasudeo and Laura Babbit. We look forward to working with you and the rest of your Board colleagues for the benefit of Berkeley students.

Tonight I'd like to give an update on the status of our negotiations with BUSD on the topic of Phase 2 Hybrid reopening. We've met 5 times in the last two weeks with another session set for tomorrow. Both sides have been working *literally* day and night to prepare for the sessions so that we can move forward productively.

The centerpiece of the BFT proposal is that return to in person work should be voluntary. Just as families have varying concerns about how and when to return, so do educators. Just like the rest of the community, teachers have their own health issues, or they live with or care for people at high risk, or they have unmet childcare needs or other barriers to in person work. A plan that forces all to return will not solve our problems. It will only create new ones, including greatly increased staffing challenges as teachers go on leave to care for their health and their families.

Another key element to the BFT proposal is that there be a robust and easily accessible COVID testing program for staff and students alike. We appreciate recent improvements to the staff testing procedures. Tests are now available closer to work sites and the lines are shorter. Developing a testing program for students is also essential since so many children who develop COVID are asymptomatic. It will help minimize the amount of transmission in our school sites.

We support the general hybrid model that district staff has proposed. The model retains the core of Distance Learning in the mornings and adds in person options in the afternoon for those who choose them. Elementary teachers want to keep their classes together. Families appear to want the same thing, as shown in the results of the latest BUSD elementary parent survey. It's been amazing how strong relationships can develop in remote learning, between teachers and students and among the students themselves. Teachers also think that having the stability of ongoing Distance Learning sessions will maintain the momentum that classes have achieved so far and make it less disruptive if we are forced to return to fully remote learning in the event of another surge.

But of course it's not possible to keep all of the elements of Distance Learning while adding in person time. Our proposal keeps online classes together for whole class sessions every day for every student. It keeps the half class sessions for students who aren't attending in person on any given day. But since live students will be in the classroom in the afternoon, teachers will not be able to work online, so our proposal shifts the afternoon small group sessions to teachers who remain 100% remote. Our members report that students are somewhat less engaged with

the asynchronous (independent) work, so our proposal reduces responsibility for that work for those teachers who will work in person.

BFT expects that there will be many logistical challenges that cannot be foreseen or completely addressed in a written agreement before classes begin. Many will need to be solved on a site by site basis. To facilitate the type of problem solving that will be required, BFT proposes a more gradual reopening than that proposed by the district.

Week 1--TK/K and ECE classes will open.

Week 2--Grades 1-2 classes will open.

Week 3--Grades 3-5 classes will open.

Week 4--After school classes will open.

We believe this will allow us to work together at school sites to ensure that safety measures are working and to solve problems as they arise before the number of students on campus becomes so large that it is difficult to adjust.

We know that no plan will satisfy everyone. The pandemic has left us all with so many unmet needs. But we think our proposals will allow us to take a step toward returning to in person learning for those who are ready, while maintaining the best parts of Distance Learning for the majority of our students and staff who choose to wait.

Thank you.