



Berkeley Federation of Teachers

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The Key Investment: Our Human Talent

The following speech was given at the January 23, 2013 Board of Education Meeting by BFT President Cathy Campbell. Over 85 BFT and Berkeley Council of Classified Employees attended this meeting in a joint mobilization designed demonstrate unity and urgency.

Good Evening Board Members and Co-Superintendents,

My name is Cathy Campbell and I am the President of the Berkeley Federation of Teachers.

I want to thank the BFT and BCCE members who have spoken before me tonight about the significant deferred needs in the area of employee financial security. I hope the Board realizes how nerve wracking it can be to speak at a public meeting like this one, and I hope that you will give careful thought to what you have heard.

BFT and BCCE are here together tonight to urge the Board to make the most strategic investment you can make with the funds you have available in your Ending Fund Balance: investing in the incredible human talent of this district.

Through Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Response to Intervention, Academic Language Development and English Language Development, curriculum cohesion, Transitional Kindergarten, formative assessments and Professional Learning Communities, to name just a few initiatives, we are showing that we can move the needle on student achievement and begin to close our equity gaps. These gains come largely from the concerted efforts of teachers, instructional assistants and other site-based staff.

To go to the next level as a district we are asking teachers to learn and implement the new Common Core standards, to use Illuminate to create formative assessments, to use data to drive instruction, to respond to the significant parent communication generated by PowerSchool, to regroup students according to language needs, and to implement Tier 1 classroom interventions, just to name a few of many things. Teachers, and all employees, are raising expectations for themselves, and their dedication and energy are driving our improvements in student performance.

Teachers in Berkeley do more today than they ever have, working longer hours and tirelessly growing as educators. We fight with courage, creativity, and honor to improve the lives of our children and the health of our society.

At the same time, employees are facing very serious financial hardships as a result of the economic realities of recent times. Teachers have not received a raise in four years, AND during this time the District's contribution to the cost of benefits has stayed flat, leaving teachers to bear the entire weight of the skyrocketing health care costs. During this same time period the cost of living in the Bay Area has increased by at least 7.8%.

At the end of this month health care costs for BFT members will go up again. Teachers will see their contribution to the cost of benefits rise by anywhere from 24% to 31%. A BFT employee on Kaiser Low Family coverage paid \$406/month in 2012; starting this month they will pay \$513 per month for the same coverage. In 2008-2009 the average out of pocket cost for benefits was \$1,171; in 2011-2012 that number was \$3,338. In 2012 BFT members contributed \$675,000 toward the district's increased expenses through their employee contributions to the costs of healthcare.

The unmet, deferred needs of employees for adequate compensation and affordable health care have passed the point of affecting morale, and are now beginning to impact productivity and retention of human talent.

Fortunately, due to the passage of Proposition 30, the Board is now in a position to be choosing strategic investments, as shown in your agenda item later tonight, rather than facing a sixth year in a row of cuts. District resources need to be used in the best possible way to increase the achievement of our students. Because every program, every initiative, every advance is carried out by the dedicated employees of this district, targeted investments must start there.

A reasonable person could read your agenda item 4.2-P and believe that the staff sees no role for employee compensation in the use of the significant Ending Fund Balance. We sincerely hope that is not true. In addition, we urge the Board to consider waiting to decide on a specific plan for the use of Hillside proceeds until the negotiations that are currently ongoing are further along.

We urge the Board to address first the engine of change, the professionals of this district, before it becomes completely disabled. Like a car, we cannot move forward as a district if our core is neglected and its maintenance deferred. While there are many worthy and competing needs, none is as critical as retaining and supporting the excellent people who do the work of our district day in and day out.

Please Note: BFT will be mobilizing at the February 13th and 27th School Board meetings. If you can help our contract campaign by attending ONE of these meetings (it is not required that you speak, just attending is fabulous), please email BFT Political Organizer Britt Alamo at brittalamo@berkeley.net. We will send you a confirmation and a reminder. If you wish to speak at one of these Board meetings please let us know and we will send you detailed information.