

School Board Speech October 21, 2020

Good evening Board members and Superintendent 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.

Tonight I'd like to talk about our view of the path ahead. Our goal is to find a way forward that is safe for everyone involved **and** meets the needs of our students and families, especially those who are most impacted by the lack of in person instruction.

As we talked about at the last Board meeting, BFT members work in a wide variety of settings, with very different students. Understandably, their questions and concerns about in person instruction are informed by the details of their situations.

Preschool teachers are worried about young children who can't wear masks and bathrooms with no doors or partitions. Intervention teachers picture the tiny spaces they work in and wonder if there is enough air circulation. Special ed case managers know that the very nature of their job involves going from class to class to support numerous students and they worry whether the concept of a bubble can even apply to them. First grade teachers wonder how on earth they will keep all the books and materials clean, if they are allowed to use them at all.

These details matter. They determine whether our schools are safe, and whether our teaching is effective. It's an incredibly complicated task to figure these things out across the wide range of students and classes. There's a reason that none of the larger districts in our area have opened yet. The logistics are orders of magnitude more challenging than for private schools or small wealthy districts like Tiburon.

Our theory of action is first to carefully and specifically address all the concerns that are raised, and then to allow willing teachers and students to engage in limited pilot programs which will allow us to get procedures and protocols right before expanding. The agreement BFT and BUSD reached today on Health and Safety Policies and Procedures provides a detailed and extensive baseline set of measures to protect the health and safety of all members in all job categories who may eventually work with students in person. We believe that these measures will also protect the students and their families.

The agreement ensures that every person will get Essential Protective Equipment (including masks, gloves, gowns and face shields). The plan will also include protocols for testing, screening, contact tracing and reporting, including universal testing before

employees return to sites plus ongoing surveillance testing. Other elements include: physical distancing based on actual room size; mask requirements for students and staff; standards for ventilation and air filters; sanitizing and disinfecting; plans to isolate sick students; limits on visitors and congregating; leave for employees who test positive or are required to quarantine; and adherence to public health guidance.

If the Phase 1 pilots are successful, and our plans and protections prove to be sufficient, AND our community transmission of Covid 19 continues to decline, we can move forward another increment. If not, we can pull back before causing either a surge in Covid cases and/or a disruption of Distance Learning. (We believe that going in and out of Distance Learning is a very undesirable outcome, so it is essential that we implement carefully.

Our entire community will be watching closely to see how these pilots go. Teachers and families will make their decisions about whether they are ready to return based on BUSD's credibility--and their own observations that things are working as planned and agreed. Clear communication--with well-explained context--is crucial. Confusion creates anxiety and anxiety erodes trust. As we have seen on the national level, rushed decisions with the appearance of political pressure will cause resistance. There is no room for mistakes due to haste.

We understand that there is pressure from some to return quickly. We respect their advocacy for their children's needs. But it's an incredibly complicated task to figure these things out across the wide range of students and classes. We think the best practice is to continue to be transparent about the challenges, to explain the details to BUSD employees and the community, to learn from our own pilots as well as the attempts of other districts--and to **take the time to get this right.**