

## Nov 4 School Board speech

Good evening Board Members and Superintendent Stephens. I'm Janine Waddell, Vice President of the Berkeley Federation of Teachers.

I'd like to congratulate Laura Babbit and Ana Vasudeo for their election victories. We look forward to having them join us in finding solutions to the challenges of educating through a pandemic and beyond.

We'd like to start tonight by reassuring the entire community that **BFT is trying to be an active and effective partner in figuring out the best and safest path forward.**

We *know* that kids are lonely. We *agree* that teaching young children on screens is not ideal. We *wish* that we could go back to normal and have a room full of happy, healthy, interacting students. We've devoted our entire careers to creating the positive environments where that can happen for students, and it pains us greatly that we've all been deprived of the chance to do it so far this year.

BFT leaders are currently working with our elementary teachers in an effort to help create a hybrid model that will be good for students and sustainable for teachers. We have scheduled several BFT meetings and are gathering ideas from our members about how a hybrid plan might work given the constraints and challenges.

I have been in awe of the positive and thoughtful approach our members have brought to our brainstorming sessions. Everyone is trying to think of ways to make this work. Student needs are being placed at the forefront of these conversations. Educators are asking crucial questions about what are the goals and priorities that we are trying to meet. Here are some of their thoughts...

If the highest priority is to support children's social needs, and to give them the chance to work and play with their peers, we should prioritize their part time physical presence at school, while we meet all the health and safety requirements. But then we may have to accept that their online time will be provided by someone other than their teacher and the asynchronous work will be generic and not closely tied to their work in class. This approach would favor those who choose to return over those who don't.

If our highest goal is to maintain the academic structure and progress students are making this fall, or if our priority is stability and keeping classes together with their teacher, we probably need to keep our focus on supporting the current Distance Learning model and seek other ways to meet children's needs for social contact with their peers. This approach is best for those who are doing well in the current model.

If the most important goal is to support the students who are having the most trouble with Distance Learning, we should devote our resources to Phase 1, and do our best to expand it as fast and as far as we can.

All of these are worthy goals, but they are not all possible at the same time with the same resources we have available.

We are also looking to other districts for ideas.

Some districts are solving the problems by increasing support staff, but even in wealthy Piedmont, the hybrid plan calls for students to get only 2 hours and 15 minutes per day in person with their teacher. This leaves significant state required instructional minutes to give to students after they leave for the day.

Some districts are livestreaming classes with high tech cameras and giant screens, and some suburban districts with large campuses have hired extra support staff and built multiple outdoor structures so that students can be supervised when they aren't with their teachers. We know that these scenarios require significant technology, funding, and space, which are difficult in a large public school district.

There's a reason the schools that are actually reopening in California are mostly either small rural campuses, wealthy suburban districts or private schools. No large urban districts in Alameda County are open--and it's not because their teachers don't want kids to be in school. It's because there are real challenges to overcome and details to figure out.

New York City moved heaven and earth to reopen with a hybrid model, but less than one in four children have returned, despite their currently low rate of community spread. They did a great job of getting their buildings ready, but they didn't put enough thought into how the education would actually work. We can't afford to make the same mistake. We have a great Health and Safety agreement. Now we need to put at least as much effort into the planning for what children's day will actually look like--both when they are at school and when they are remote.

Meanwhile it's important to remember that the virus is still in our community and that it spreads when people gather. It is still causing devastating loss, including in our own Berkeley Schools Community, which lost a parent to Covid- 19 this week. We can't afford to make mistakes when the cost is so high.

Thank you.