

Janine School Board speech
December 9, 2020

Good evening School Board Members and Dr. Stephens. I'm Janine Waddell, Vice President of the Berkeley Federation of Teachers and a long time Washington Elementary teacher.

I'd like to start by enthusiastically endorsing former BFT President Cathy Campbell's remarks in appreciation of departing Directors Beatriz Leyva-Cutler and Judy Appel. We are so grateful for the incredible service they have given to our schools and our community, and we wish them all the best as their terms come to an end. We are certain that their experience, wisdom and commitment will continue to benefit our entire community in the future.

We'd also like to thank the Board, and especially Director Alper, for bringing forth the resolution calling for teachers and classified staff who will work in person with students to be prioritized in the first tier of essential workers to receive the COVID vaccine, --after health care workers and residents of long term care facilities. This will help remove a significant hurdle to returning to in person instruction. We hope that vaccines are provided to our students and their families promptly as well.

We'd also like to report that we have been meeting extensively with BUSD leaders to negotiate the schedule and terms of a possible return to in person learning. We have held many meetings with members and we are sending a very comprehensive survey this week to gain even more detailed information. We are a democratic union and we are committed to representing the various needs and views of our nearly 900 members.

Our goal is to agree on a schedule that meets the needs of two sets of students--those who want to return to in person instruction and those who will choose to stay home--while accepting the fact that teachers can't do two jobs at once. Hard choices need to be made about how much Distance Learning to preserve and how much in person time can be offered. BUSD families do not all agree on what the priorities should be and how the balance should be struck. We are trying to figure out how to provide the best possible educational experience to as many children as we possibly can, given unimaginably complex factors.

We continue to believe, as we have stated publicly for many months, that a plan for COVID testing of students is an essential part of a safe reopening of schools. We acknowledge that a lack of resources may make this a difficult demand to meet. Our federal and state governments have failed to provide adequate resources or guidelines for many aspects of school reopenings, including widely available testing for students. Schools have simply not been a high enough priority before or during the pandemic. Teachers' unions, district leaders and school boards across the state and country are asking for more resources to support costly and complex reopening plans. We welcome community advocacy for these resources and support as well.

