

Berkeley Unified School District

School Board President

2134 Martin Luther King, Jr. Way, Berkeley, CA 94704

March 7, 2005

Dear Berkeley Community,

The school district and Berkeley Federation of Teachers have been working to negotiate a new contract. I know that many of you are concerned about the current bargaining progress and also the teachers' recent "work to rule" job action. We are currently in a step of the bargaining process called mediation. Mediation is a confidential process where an impartial professional mediator works with the District and the teachers union to try to reach an agreement.

Three years ago the District was perilously close to a state takeover. In response, the Board painfully but responsibly reduced expenses by over \$12 million to avoid financial collapse and to maintain local control of our schools.

We had hoped to end the 2004-2005 school year with our revenues and expenditures balanced, and with progress made toward rebuilding state-mandated reserves. Unfortunately, current projections indicate that we will not make that goal. The Governor is taking away promised revenue and also forcing the district to pay costs the state previously paid. Further, double digit increases in areas such as health benefits and lower revenues from student attendance make things worse.

To give our employees a raise, the School Board must have the funds available to do so. For example, a 2% increase for our unionized employees for two years would lead to an increased cost of over \$2.7 million in the second year. Since the small amount of increased money from the state is eaten up by increased expenses, that money would have to come from cuts. After several years of teacher, staff and administration personnel cutbacks, options like laying-off counselors, reducing student support and security positions, forgoing athletics or closing schools are some of the undesirable choices remaining.

While teacher compensation is never sufficient for the work they do, I want you to know that our teachers, compared to other districts in Alameda County and to 31 comparable California districts, are compensated with a salary and benefits package at above average rates. We continue to give teachers step and column raises as they gain experience or education credits. Over the last two years, teachers who have been with the district since 2002-03 have seen average increases in their take home pay of 2.5% annually due to step and column raises, and have been covered by the district's attractive benefits package.

Last fall, I was among the many parents, teachers, staff, students and community members who worked to pass Measure B. The district is now in the process of planning to implement the Measure. You can be completely confident that the average class size will meet the goals set in the Measure: 20 students to 1 teacher in grades K-3, 26:1 in grades 4-5; and 28:1 in grades 6-12 for both the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years.

As the budgeting process continues this spring, we will be determining the specifics of other Measure B programs that will all be consistent with what you approved in the measure. All Measure B money is designated for specific purposes (class size reduction, music and library programs, professional development for our teachers, parent outreach and data-driven program evaluation), not for across-the-board salary increases.

The district is taking a positive step toward planning for its long-term educational and financial future with the Designing and Funding Quality Schools planning process to determine our most effective educational practices and making sure the district has the means to fund them. This work is described on

the accompanying flyer, including information about the public forum series that you are invited to attend.

There are some areas where you can assist:

- Put pressure on the Governor to increase revenues to balance the state budget since the State provides the largest share of our school district budget. In May, he will submit his revised budget—pressure from public school advocates like you could make a difference on issues such as his proposed STRS shift (which shifts \$700,000 of teacher retirement plan costs to our district each year).
- Send your children to school every day they are able. If a child misses a day of school, the school district loses state revenue for that child—about \$28 per day. That may not sound like much, but for BUSD it totals about \$3 million per year. And every day a student is in school is a day of learning.
- Continue to appreciate the teachers and staff in this district who are devoted to public education and to all our children.

As Board President, my first duty to you is to provide the highest quality education for our students while maintaining a balanced budget. I hope that you will take the time to read other information about our district budget and the state budget, some of which can be found on the district website at www.berkeley.k12.ca.us. As you read about the situation in our public schools, I welcome your constructive suggestions and comments.

Thank you for your continued support of public education,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy Riddle".

Nancy Riddle
President, Berkeley Unified School District Board of Directors
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