



BEVERLY HILLS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Educational Employees Working Together

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CONSENSUS

A Newsletter for BHEA Members
March 5, 2008



Board Approves Over \$3.6 Million in Cuts

- **33 certificated positions lost; 4 OTBS workers, 1 groundskeeper also lose jobs. Cuts to administrative jobs light by comparison.**
- **Cuts to middle school French to be revisited. Lurie implies that teachers pressured students in effort to save program.**
- **52 speakers and comment cards go on record at standing-room-only meeting.**
- **Divisions among Board members, superintendent laid bare.**
- **Bushée tells Board that cuts fall too heavily on classroom, presents data on administrative top-heaviness.**

The Salter Family Theater at BHHS was not big enough to hold the overflow crowd that showed up to listen to and participate in the debate on budget cuts at the Feb. 26 Board of Education meeting. In the end, the Board voted to cut \$3,648,000 out of the 08-09 budget, leaving in limbo the middle school French program and restoring \$25,000 of Maple Center funding that had been previously marked for elimination.

A total of 42 speakers addressed our Board at the microphone on the topic of budget cuts and Board Pres. Myra Demeter read 10 comment cards into the record. Although the time limit chime sounded at the 2-minute mark for each speaker, Demeter allowed all speakers to finish their comments. (Side note: At one point during the meeting, Demeter read a card from a community member that asked our Board members to limit *their* comments to 2 minutes!)

Most of the comments fell into three broad categories: 1) program-specific, 2) general impact, and 3) inequity. The number of speakers/cards for each category is shown in parentheses directly after the title.

Program-Specific:

French (12): Speakers urged our Board to save

the middle school French program. Asked to consolidate to 1 or 2 schools if necessary. Argued that HS French program would be adversely affected by cuts at the middle school level. HS Foreign Language Dept. Chair Corinne Carlson spoke in defense of middle school French, as did several of our district's students. The widespread use of French worldwide was offered as a reason to keep the current program.

English Learner (4): Speakers urged our Board to save the EL program at both the adult school and K-12 levels. BHEA At-Large Director Caitlin Carter argued that EL students need individual attention.

Special Reading/Librarians (3): Speakers urged our Board to save the special reading and librarian programs at the K-8 sites. Questioned why priority was being given to artificial turf maintenance. HS Librarian Karen Boyarsky said our district administration's rationale for cutting K-8 librarians makes 'no mention' of many of their benefits and accused our administration of being 'clueless' about the value of librarians. A former BHUSD reading specialist talked about the long history of this program in our district and said that the Board would 'take away hope' if it followed through with the cut.

Art (3): Speakers urged our Board to spare cuts to the HS Art program. Speakers, all of whom are students, talked about the inspiration they received from their 'amazing teachers.' One student asked our Board to 'make smart moves.'

Maple Center Counseling (3): Speakers urged our Board to spare cuts to the MCC program. They talked about the vital services MCC provides. The MCC director gave an example of how the MCC has helped our students respond to tragedies in the past. He said the MCC often services students who are 'most in need.' HS counselor Ali Norman also spoke in defense of the MCC.

General Impact (9): HS teacher Joel Pressman asked that the minimum amount of cuts be made and to pursue a parcel tax to get more revenue

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BHEA President, El Rodeo Teacher Give Rousing Speeches

BHEA and community members rose to their feet to support the words delivered by BHEA Pres. Chris Bushée and ER Rep. Amy Arebalo at the Feb. 26 Board of Education meeting. Both addressed the Board on somewhat different themes, with Bushée accusing our district of protecting administrators' jobs at the expense of classrooms and Arebalo lamenting the fickleness and lack of direction of our district administration's curricular judgments.

Both speeches struck a chord with the standing-room-only audience, who gave lengthy applause at the end of each delivery. Both speeches may be viewed in their entirety at <http://bhea.org/News.htm>.

More News Coming...

There is not enough space in this *Consensus* to report everything that's going on right now in our district. Please stay tuned for more information in future BHEA communications.

IMPORTANT DATES

- Mar. 6: Rep. Council mtg., BHHS, Room 118
- Mar. 11: Cert. bargaining
- Mar. 11: Board Ed. mtg.
- Mar. 14: First day of Spring Break.
- Mar. 24: First day of work after Spring Break.

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for the future. Other speakers asked our Board to minimize cuts by instigating a community-wide fundraising effort. Another speaker asked concerned citizens to contact their state legislators. Former Board member AJ Wilmer urged our Board to make enough cuts to prevent L.A. County from taking over the finances of BHUSD, warned against jeopardizing the JPA with the City of BH, and asked to pursue more shared services with the City. HS teacher Preston Joseph talked about the impact that cuts would have on probationary teachers and reminded our Board that 'these are lives' that are being impacted. An AYSO representative said that AYSO will continue to support BHUSD.

Inequity (14): Paul DeVargas, president of our sister union CSEA, said that all employees of our district are 'educators.' He defended BHEA members by saying, 'Teachers teach because they care.' A group of HS students presented Demeter with baskets of turkey sandwiches to accentuate their view that Demeter misplaced priorities at the Feb. 20 Board study session when she argued in favor of maintaining the Board's catering budget in the midst of deciding on multi-million dollar program cuts. After presenting the baskets, they said, 'Invest in students.' Another speaker asked, 'When did teachers become expendable?' Several other speakers pleaded to our Board to not cut teachers. Another speaker asked, 'Which is harder: running our schools without administrators or without teachers?' Former Board member John Millan urged our Board to 'keep cuts away from the classroom.' He also urged our Board to allocate \$600,000 toward athletic fields. Another speaker said that some classrooms are too small to accommodate the larger class sizes that would result from teacher cuts. Another speaker said the teacher is the 'role model' for our children. She said, 'We lose the future if we lose the teacher.' A student speaker urged our Board to cut administration before cutting teachers. Carter said, 'Classroom teachers are vital to our community.' BHEA Pres. Chris Bushée addressed our Board on the inequity of the proposed cuts, pointing out that 10% of the teaching staff (33 members) would be cut while laying off only one half-time administrator. He presented statistics from a Las Virgenes Unified School District study that ranks BHUSD #1 in administrative costs per student but #17 in dollars spent on instruction in a comparative sample of 21 similar districts. He said that BHEA members have re-

sponded to two internal polls that call into question Supt. Kari McVeigh's credibility among the staff as our district faces a financial crisis. His speech was received with a standing ovation.

After moving through a few other business items, our Board began their discussion of the proposed cuts. Board Vice-Pres. Nooshin Meshkaty asked to remove the \$600,000 for athletic field maintenance.

Board member Brian Goldberg asked to remove the \$410,000 hiring reserve along with the athletic field money and take a couple of months to have a community-wide discussion on how to use this money to 'minimize the impact on students.' Goldberg also asked to redesignate a separate \$780,000 reserve account to add flexibility. He argued that there is time to work through priorities methodically because layoffs do not have to be acted upon until May 15, even though notices must go out by Mar. 15.

Board member Myra Lurie talked about 'misinformation' regarding budget cuts, but did not provide specifics. She said that administrative budgets would be reduced. She said cuts to teachers must be made because of declining student enrollment. She took issue with BHEA remaining neutral on BHUSD's permit policy, making reference to last fall's school board election. Bushée requested the opportunity to respond, but was dismissed by Lurie who said, 'You've had your turn.' (Demeter refused later requests from Goldberg and Board member Steve Fenton to allow Bushée to address Lurie's accusations against BHEA and its members.) Lurie said it would be 'fiscally ridiculous' to not fund the artificial turf maintenance because of the potentially negative impact on current JPA negotiations. Lurie said that others put words in the students' mouths who spoke up in defense of the French program earlier in the evening. Bushée asked twice during the meeting to have Lurie specify exactly *who* she was accusing of having used students as pawns. Demeter denied Bushée's requests. Lurie refused to specify but left the audience wondering if she was accusing teachers of putting undue pressure on students.

Fenton told the community, 'I'm with you.' He asked, 'Are we doing what's best for kids?' He directed some critical comments at McVeigh, telling her that she has not supported reducing her own administrative staff, nor has she agreed to return her increase in compensation. Referencing the 'turkey sandwich' demonstration

presented earlier in the evening, Fenton asked Demeter, 'Have you sacrificed?' He declared, 'I'm not in support of these cuts!'

Demeter said, 'There is no good budget cut.' She said, 'We're obligated to present a budget.' She said, 'We're looking to increase the rigor of the middle school foreign language program.' She said the BH community needs to have a discussion about what a 'smaller' district would look like. She said that the City 'reminded' BHUSD of the district's obligation to maintain our athletic fields.

McVeigh said that BHUSD would need more time to explore what a '1-year' French option at the middle schools would look like. Lurie suggested looking at shuttling students using vans between the K-8 sites to keep the French program alive.

Goldberg said that with over 130 resignations among certificated staff in the last 4 years, our district lost 4 years of opportunities to use voluntary attrition to downsize our district. He said that it is irresponsible to use teachers' jobs to pay for fields due to our district failing to allocate the appropriate amount of money in years past. Meshkaty said that 'we should have thought about' putting more money into a reserve for the fields. Lurie said that she's 'asked repeatedly over the years' for shoring up the field maintenance budget. Fenton said that the organization he helped found, the BH Athletic Alumni Assn., cannot help financially right now with the fields and that even if it could, he said he doubted the association's leaders would agree to a bailout because he views Demeter and McVeigh as 'obstructionists' to the BHAAA.

Meshkaty pleaded with her Board colleagues. 'We're not running for office anymore. Let's get along together. Let's focus on students.' She asked to find the 'least possible burden on staff.'

Demeter said the set-aside of \$410,000 for hiring additional teachers was not realistic in the face of declining enrollment.

The Board voted 4-1 in favor of the package of cuts presented, making only two changes: adding back \$25,000 to the MCC funding and agreeing to look at reviving a limited form of middle school French. Goldberg voted against the majority. After the meeting, Fenton told BHEA that since he knew the majority had the votes, he decided to vote with them only to show his support for the restored MCC funding and for the possibility of keeping middle school French.