



BEVERLY HILLS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Educational Employees Working Together

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CONSENSUS

A Newsletter for BHEA Members

April 28, 2008



ORGANIZING ACTIVITY #1

BHEA is asking its members to sign a letter addressed to our school board members asking them for their help in 1) rescinding layoff notices and 2) moving talks on salary and benefits forward at the bargaining table. BHEA will present the signed letters to school board members in early May. Please seek out your site representative to sign a letter. There is strength in unity!

Board Extends Straus' Contract Through 2011

- Extension approved on 3-2 vote. Bushée, Goldberg criticize action.

On Apr. 22, our Board of Education approved a contract extension for Asst. Supt. of Educational Services Ilene Straus. According to the Apr. 25 BH *Courier*, her new contract expires on June 30, 2011 and no other terms of the contract, such as duties and compensation, were changed...only the length. Board Pres. Myra Demeter, Board Vice-Pres. Nooshin Meshkaty, and Board member Myra Lurie voted in favor of extending Straus' contract. Board members Steve Fenton and Brian Goldberg voted against it.

Demeter said that Straus is "the best Asst. Supt. with whom I have worked with in my professional life as an educator" and rated her performance as "superior."

BHEA spoke out against the extension, with BHEA Pres. Chris Bushée telling the Board hours before their vote that he disagreed with the "timing" of the decision. "Your action today would directly benefit only one, single employee in the face of massive layoffs, position closures, and a break-down at the bargaining table," he said.

The *Courier* quoted Goldberg as follows: "While the district is about to lay off a number of teachers and staff, I think it sends the wrong message to extend the contract of any administrator. I believe the timing of this vote will only contribute to further demoralizing our staff at a time we need to find ways to increase the morale."

With SERP Green-Lighted, Pressure To Lay Off Reduced But Not Eliminated

- BHEA continues to monitor events and presses for withdrawal of layoff notices.

BHUSD officially announced on Apr. 23 that the early retirement program, dubbed SERP, has enough takers to be financially viable. This means that the program will move forward. According to district officials, 18 certificated BHEA members will take advantage of this program, which pays eligible employees tens of thousands of dollars to resign from BHUSD at the end of this school year. Because this program is not tied to CalSTRS, any member who takes advantage of this program is not forced to initiate retirement with CalSTRS and remains eligible to work in any other school district in California except for BHUSD.

At the Apr. 15 layoff hearing, our district said that it seeks to lay off 27 employees (23.5 full-time equivalents). Two retirements were known at the time the layoff list was compiled, so 16 new retirements will now be factored into the mix. If all 16 retirements take place in program areas that match up with program areas targeted for reduction or elimination, then 16 layoff notices can be rescinded by the district. This would still leave 7.5 FTEs vulnerable.

While declining student enrollment may be a factor for BHUSD to deal with two or three years from now, our own district budget projections predict a decline of only *four* students district-wide going into the 2008-2009 school year. Therefore, a decline in enrollment is not a factor that is predicted to adversely affect our district financially next year. Also, the worst-case scenario for the budget deficit in Sacramento would reduce our district's state revenues by \$2.4 million next year. CTA is actively pressuring politicians in Sacramento to soften Gov. Schwarzenegger's proposed education cuts and mitigate this \$2.4 million cut. Our Board of Education voted on Feb. 26 to cut \$3.6 million out of the budget, most of it in the form of unit member jobs. This represents a \$1.2 million of additional cuts above and beyond even the worst-case scenario mentioned above.

Special Board Meeting Likely to Act on Layoffs

- Session to be scheduled between May 7 and 15.

The judge who presided over the Apr. 15 layoff hearing has not yet issued her recommendations pursuant to the legality of the nearly three dozen layoff notices issued to BHEA members by our district. As such, it has become increasingly unlikely that our Board of Education will be able to act on layoff notices at their regularly scheduled May 6 meeting. Once the judge issues her recommendations, our district will need sufficient time to analyze her report and decide on a course of action. At this point, it does not appear that our district can accomplish this by May 6. Because the Board does not have any more meetings scheduled before the statutory May 15 deadline for acting on layoff notices, the Board will have to hold a special meeting sometime between May 7 and 15. As soon as BHEA becomes aware of the date, time, and location of this meeting, we will inform our members.

So Far in 2007-2008...

- Unallocated reserve available for salaries and benefits: \$1.8 million
- Number of months BHEA and BHUSD have been bargaining salaries and benefits: 8
- Amount cut out of next year's budget: \$3.6 million
- Number of layoff notices issued to certificated employees: 35
- Average price of a gallon of gas: \$3.90

March 11 Board of Education Meeting

Highlights from the Mar. 11 Board of Education meeting:

- Eight community members, including current and former students of the Adult School's ESL program, spoke in defense of the program and its coordinator Esther Caporale, whose position has been targeted for elimination in this season of budget cuts. Speakers said that Caporale gave them "confidence" and said she has "passion" for her work. One speaker said that Caporale's work will now fall to Adult School Dir. Twila Cook and create further "dilution of oversight" for the Adult School. Cook has served two years in the dual role of Adult School Dir. and Alternative Education Director. Caporale, an employee since 1999, said that she learned of her layoff from a secretary rather than from the Human Resources Dept. She criticized the current Adult School administration, saying that Cook told her that Alternative Education is more important than Adult School. She also claimed that Supt. Kari McVeigh does not support the Adult School. She said that the Alternative Education program is being built on the "bones" of the Adult School program. Several cards were also read into the record supporting the Adult School ESL program.
- BHEA Pres. Chris Bushée spoke extemporaneously to the inequities of the layoffs between BHEA members and administrators. He urged the Board to rethink their budget priorities.
- A speaker addressed the Board saying that he was a contractor for asbestos abatement for BHUSD in 2006 and has still not been paid after making repeated attempts to contact the district.
- BHHS History teacher Dan Moroaica spoke about the need for developmental classes, particularly their role in being able to give students more individualized attention.
- Board member Nooshin Meshkaty thanked ASB advisor Loren Newman and ASB student leaders for their concern about community happenings. Meshkaty also remarked kindly on the NowRuz holiday.
- Facilities contractor Karen Christiansen said that the auditorium upgrades are continuing at three K-8 sites, that the old Science and Business Education buildings at BHHS have been demolished with plans to build a new interim practice field on the now-vacant land over the summer, and that the south playground at BV is now complete.
- Supt. Kari McVeigh said student artwork is great, recognized state DECA winners, and said that she saw at her recent HAW visit that veteran teachers complement younger teachers. She thanked teachers for their hard work.
- Board members talked about the importance of "buy-in" from all stakeholders, saying that it appeared to have occurred with the K-8 science textbook adoption process, presented by HM teacher Allison Leggett and Dir. of Curriculum Brian Tash.
- Student Board member Zach Kahn said that the HS Robotics Team is great.
- More news from this Board meeting in next *Consensus*...

Independent Study Program Revisited; Variety of Opinions Expressed

- **IS students and their parents give testimonials. Lurie, Meshkaty defend program while Demeter and Fenton raise questions.**

At the Mar. 11 Board of Education meeting, Dir. of Alternative Education Twila Cook presented a status update on the BHUSD Independent Study program. She said that IS represents a voluntary, optional, alternative, and individualized learning strategy whose quality is equivalent to that of regular classroom instruction. She said that every student's eligibility for IS is reevaluated each semester. She said enrollment in IS must have the consent of both the student and his or her parent. She said that too many missed "appointments" with the IS instructor jeopardizes continued enrollment in the program. She said that students must meet with the IS instructor at least once a week and that BHUSD currently exceeds the state minimum teacher-student contact time for IS. She said that the curriculum is tied to California standards and is presented as modules. She said that the IS instructor is responsible for teaching over 20 different courses. She said that the number of students enrolled in IS has been growing.

Parents and IS students gave testimonials extolling the benefits that they believe exist in the IS program. Parent Robbie Curtis said his son was "sinking" in the traditional classroom. He said that HS Prin. J. Guidetti "saved" his son by supporting his movement into IS. He said his son now earns "straight As" in IS. Students said that the amount of work in IS is comparable to that of the regular classroom. They said that testing occurs in a "different way" by "drawing" answers out of students. Both parents and students spoke very highly of the IS instructor, Sergio Mandiola, commenting on his motivation and calling him one of the "finest" teachers. Mandiola is a certificated BHEA member.

Board member Myra Lurie said that she takes "gratification" in hearing student testimonies about IS and said she believes that there has been "misinformation" disseminated about IS in the past. She dismissed the notion that IS is a way for students to bypass "rigor" and instead said that IS is "personalized" learning. Board Vice-Pres. Nooshin Meshkaty spoke in favor of IS as an alternative to private school.

Board member Brian Goldberg thanked students and parents for sharing their stories. He cautioned that not every student would benefit from IS.

Board Pres. Myra Demeter put forth some questions. "How do we measure the quality and quantity of learning in IS? How do we compare IS to classroom instruction?" Cook said that IS follows the same state curriculum standards as the regular classroom but IS has more "unusual finals (final exams)." She said that she is open to instituting more "common finals" with the regular classroom. Demeter said she wants to see more verification that IS is adhering to the state standards. Demeter asked if the regular classroom teacher is consulted before students are put into IS. Cook said that this is "something we should investigate." Cook also said that she has no say in the decision to place any student into IS. Next, Demeter asked about the "validity of the credentialing process." She asked how one teaches pre-calculus (one of the courses taught in BHUSD's IS program) without a credential? Cook replied that BHUSD is in full compliance with state law which requires that an IS instructor hold only one single-subject credential. She added that Mandiola currently hold credentials in Spanish, social studies, English, and EL. She said that he plans to attain credentials in math and science this summer. In response to another question, Cook said that students in IS can also be enrolled in regular classes as long as at least four of their classes are in the IS program. Board member Steve Fenton thanked the families for addressing the Board. He said he agreed with Demeter and remains concerned over the credential status of the IS instructor given the number and variety of courses offered through IS.