



BEVERLY HILLS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Educational Employees Working Together

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Speech on economic uncertainty, reduction in force, non-reelection procedures, and new revenue delivered by BHEA Pres. Chris Bushée at the Feb. 5, 2008 Board of Education meeting:

“Good evening. As we navigate through uncertain economic times, I believe that it is very important to maintain clear distinctions among the various options that our Board of Education may consider.

First, let’s talk about the state budget deficit. The deficit’s impact to our district is likely to be minimal for this current school year. However, the impact for the next school year and beyond may be severe. Unfortunately, the politicians in Sacramento will probably not come to agreement any time soon on how to deal with the deficit. This means that districts throughout California, including ours, face a dilemma. On one hand, Proposition 98 guarantees a base level of funding for California’s public schools. This landmark proposition passed in 1988 has allowed our district to build budgets for the last 20 years based on a reliable funding stream that is virtually impervious to the shifting political winds in Sacramento. On the other hand, there is a provision of Prop 98 that allows, with a two-thirds vote of the legislature, a suspension of this funding stream. Sacramento lawmakers have suspended Prop 98 only once in its 20-year history. This occurred a few years ago, the last time our state ran out of money. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has proposed, and I stress the word *proposed*, another suspension of Prop 98. Will the legislature accept, reject, or modify his proposal? Will California’s public schools be spared during this budget crisis, or will we suffer...and if so, to what extent? Currently, these are unknowns. Our district may determine that this uncertainty justifies a reduction in personnel. That is a decision that lies squarely on the shoulders of our Board of Education. If this Board decides to cut personnel, I ask that you consider these three suggestions: 1) Keep the cuts as far away from students as possible. Trim administrative bloat and overhead costs first, before cutting into classrooms. 2) Thoroughly analyze all positions voluntarily vacated through resignations and retirements and see, after considering the curricular impact, whether or not cuts could be made in this fashion as opposed to involuntary layoffs. 3) Aggressively pursue early retirement incentives.

Also, let’s keep a bright line between the potential use of layoffs to address budget uncertainties and the impropriety of using layoffs to address perceived overstaffing. If our district believes that we’re overstaffed, remember that that’s not the employees’ fault. That’s the administration’s fault for hiring too many people. As such, students and teachers should not pay the price for our district’s poor decision-making in the area of staffing. If our district believes that we’re overstaffed, then develop a long-term plan to address the problem through voluntary attrition, not by using layoffs.

[Now, on to non-reelection procedures. Our district has wide latitude in firing probationary teachers. However, the law is clear on one point: It is illegal for California school districts to issue non-reelect notices as a subterfuge for layoffs. Why? Because anyone issued a layoff notice has the right to a hearing before a judge to contest the layoff, a right not afforded in the non-reelection process. So, California courts have ruled that it is illegal to deny a probationary teacher a hearing simply by issuing a non-reelect notice.]*

Finally, new revenue streams. Thank goodness for BHEF, PTA, and the City of Beverly Hills. BHEA applauds these organizations and is deeply grateful for their generous contributions and fundraising efforts that support our students and strengthen our district. We do not take this support for granted. Our district can build upon this support. We can think outside the box. Long-term...let's continue to actively explore all feasible means of bringing in as much new revenue as possible. Every little bit helps.

Thank you for your attention and have a good meeting.”

* Mr. Bushée was unable to deliver the part of his speech on non-reelection procedures due to an unanticipated, more stringent 2-minute time limit placed on speakers by Board Pres. Myra Demeter. Ms. Demeter said that she thought this 2-minute limit was necessary because of the number of speakers at the Feb. 5 Board meeting.