



BHEA on Technology, Instructional Assistants, and Special Education

This is a transcript of a BHEA speech delivered at the Apr. 24, 2007 Board of Ed. meeting:

Speech by BHEA Certificated President Christopher Bushée

Let me start this evening by publicly thanking BHEF President Dev Hankin and Board of Directors Chair Jean Rosenblatt for having organized the Classics for Charities Car Show fundraiser earlier this month. The educators of BHEA are proud to have supported this fine community event and BHEA looks forward to supporting BHEF again next month at the May 23 Apple Ball.

First, I would like to share some good news about technology. BHEA has been actively participating in the development of our district's forthcoming 2007-2010 Technology Plan. BHEA has recently had the opportunity to offer much input on the future direction of technology. I would like to point out that such bilateral communication has been effective and has helped to develop consensus around several technology related items. I hope that administrators and teachers may experience greater collaboration on many more issues of mutual interest so that together we may best serve the educational needs of our students.

Next, I was informed recently that a district administrator paid a visit to the staff of one of our K-8 schools. During this visit, the administrator talked about instructional assistants, otherwise known as classroom aides. The administrator told teachers that classroom aides do not generate enough bang for our buck. The administrator also told teachers that research shows that classroom aides are not educationally useful. I must object to these sorts of public characterizations which only serve to demoralize our employees. I doubt very seriously that this administrator would make these same comments directly to the aides that she oversees. In fact, if I were this administrator, I would issue an apology to all classroom aides in our district, telling them that their work is valued and that they contribute positively to the education of our kids.

Finally, I would like to talk briefly about the special education program in our district. Last year at about this time, I took issue with our Board's decision to expand our middle school elective program. BHEA argued that, in an era of limited financial resources for public schools, greater need exists in other program areas, particularly special education. Well, I'm here to report that, due to understaffing this year, our district has been in violation of the law for students receiving special education services in the Resource program, which has mandatory caseload caps specified by Education Code. Also, while certain middle school electives have class sizes in the single digits, several of our special education classes that serve the neediest students, called Special Day classes, have class sizes in the high teens. I believe that our Board has misplaced its priorities in this arena. BHEA calls on our district to reevaluate this situation through inclusive dialog with teachers on how to best prioritize our students' needs. Thank you.