

District Union/Organization Statements
December 14, 2020 Board Meeting

12/14/2020

This is Theodora Pappas, President of the Diablo Managers' Association and Principal of Valhalla Elementary School in Pleasant Hill. DMA is a Charter of ACSA, the Association of California Administrators with over 17,000 members in the state. I am here on behalf of the 180 DMA members who are classified managers, certificated administrators, and confidential employees in the district. We want to welcome and congratulate our two new board members Erin McFerrin and Keisha Nzewi. We look forward to your leadership and building relationships with you both! We are working hard supporting our sites and colleagues! We continue to work with Dr. Clark and the executive cabinet. We wish all of the MDUSD community a healthy, safe and happy holidays!

Good evening Board Members, Superintendent Clark, and members of the audience.

Welcome and congratulations to Trustee McFerrin and Trustee Nzewi.

I am Anita Johnson, President of Mt. Diablo Education Association. We are dedicated to the health and safety of everyone in our district. Every child. Every school. Every Community.

I commend and agree with Dr. Clark on his recommendation to postpone the reopening of our schools. His recommendation has reduced the anxiety and confusion among parents, teachers, staff, and students.

As you continue to discuss how to establish a date for beginning the hybrid phase, I encourage you to keep health and safety as your priority. While I have great concern and compassion for the students who are struggling with distance learning, there can be no justification for reopening when transmission rates are dangerously high in any of the communities we serve.

Please direct your bargaining team to agree to reopening criteria based on low transmission and death rates for each of the eight towns in our district: Bay Point, Clayton, Concord, Martinez, Pacheco, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill, and Walnut Creek. Only when it is safe in each of these towns should we begin a district-wide Hybrid Phase. Research has shown that transmission and death rates are higher in communities of color. It is a matter of equity. Equity is about opportunity. We must provide everyone the opportunity to survive this pandemic. We can do our part by planning on reopening only when there are low transmission and death rates in each of the eight towns.

The other thing we need before establishing a reopening date is a finalized MOU which clearly lays out the Hybrid Model that will be implemented and establishes clear expectations of responsibilities. This agreement will make it possible to clearly communicate to parents regarding the Hybrid Model and allow each of them to make an informed choice.

Please begin work this evening on establishing an orderly process for reopening. This process should include a timeline that starts with a finalized MOU. When the MOU is finalized and all eight towns have low transmission and death rates, the next step in the process would be for you as a Board to select a target reopening date. Based on this date and clear information about the nature of the Hybrid Model, parents could then be asked to decide if their students will participate. Based on that information, detailed, site-based plans can be clearly communicated and implemented, and the Hybrid Phase would begin with the least amount of confusion.

Speaking of limiting confusion, I would now like to turn my comments to the first interim report.

Each year I dread the First Interim Report. This report, with its overprojections and dooms-day scenarios each year seems to generate the wrong kinds of conversations. I urge you to keep in mind and repeat out loud several times this evening that the reason we are all here is to serve and educate students. This noble enterprise we are engaged in costs money. This is the best use of the resources of our state that I know of. We are not here to find ways to shortchange students and reduce services. We are not here to deny educational opportunities for the purposes of building up a higher ending balance to make bankers happy. The child's time is now. He cannot wait. Please do not spend time bemoaning the fact that the work we do is expensive. Yes, we are underfunded and difficult choices must be made. But please don't use these overprojections and dooms day scenarios to undermine a commitment to invest in our children.

The prefatory notes of this First Interim contain a statement which I believe is inaccurate. The notes state: "Board Approved Operating Budget was amended during the presentation of the unaudited actuals in September 2020 and overwrites the June budget." I have reviewed the presentation of the unaudited actuals in September of 2020 and do not see any reference to overwriting the June budget. I can find no presentation of this new budget in any previous presentation. Yet this new budget is presented here as "Board Approved." When did the Board approve \$48 M in increased expenses? I think I would remember such a vote. If I am mistaken, I apologize, and would very much like to know the date of the vote.

In fact, this is an ongoing practice of management to overwrite the Board's approved June budget with their own estimates and preferences. I recall discussing this last December and believe the Finance Officer made a commitment to refrain from this in the future.

If I had called each of you on Friday and asked why you approved an additional \$48 M in expenses, would you have been able to explain? How can you be held accountable for controlling expenses if the district' budget is changed without your approval?

We have other questions about this new budget:

The good news is the report shows a projected increase in revenue of \$43.5 M. I understand that \$19.7 M of this is due to COVID-related funding. What is the explanation for the rest of the increase?

The \$48 M increase in projected expenditures is concerns. I have questions about several specific categories, beginning with Administrator Salaries, which are projected to increase by 6.1% in the new budget. Did you approve this increase? If so, why?

The District is projecting that Health and Welfare costs will increase by 10% annually. This is not in line with annual increases over the last several years, which have all been lower. What is the basis for expecting such a large increase in Health and Welfare costs?

Services and Other Operating Expenses have increased by \$4.4 M. What new subagreements are costing us \$4.4 M more?

Professional/Consulting Services and Operating Expenditures went from \$9 M to \$28 M. While I understand that most of the COVID-related funding was quote unquote parked in this category, this represents a serious lack of transparency. Please demand a more clear accounting of these funds and this category.

The category “Rentals, Leases, Repairs, and Noncapitalized Improvements” has almost doubled. What new rentals, leases, repairs and improvements are costing us \$2.6 M more?

I ask these questions with the hope that the Chief Financial Officer will provide clarification during her report. Either way, I encourage you to make sure you fully understand each of these important issues before approving the First Interim.

The work we do is the absolute best use of resources in our state. Unfortunately, we are seriously underfunded. It is imperative that each of you fully understand how the funding is being spent and ensure that the spending is done in such a way as to maximize benefits to students.

In the next weeks and months, you will make life-altering decisions for our communities. I know that each of you are committed to making the choices that are in the best interests of the students. I encourage you to prioritize everyone’s health and safety. Every child. Every school. Every community.

I appreciate your dedication and commitment to this important work.

Thank you.
