

Hello Board Members,

I am addressing you tonight on behalf of the BSEP Planning and Oversight Committee to express the committee's general approval of the plan for for Class Size Reduction budget. As we approach the end of this 10 year measure, we are pleased to have been able to meet the class size goals established in the 2006 Measure, and have sufficient funds to also provide support to the district by funding expanded course offerings, middle school counseling, and program support, as specified in the measure. In the early years of the measure, the BSEP budget has been able to support the district's general fund, and increase support to important district support programs during a period of BSEP revenue growth based on higher COLAs of over 4%, and flatter costs when enrollment and salary increases were less than they are today. Recently, the BSEP budget has had much smaller COLAs, hovering around 1% for the last few years, and the all of the various program budgets have been strained by enrollment growth and cost increases.

There are many potential ways to balance the needs of our schools with the budget issues we face. In the past, the district administration has prudently cut budgets early, when funding from the state looked uncertain and likely to decline. Those cuts, while difficult, served both the district and the people of Berkeley well, and they protected our schools from dramatic changes. Given this historical precedent, cutting program now may look like the correct action . . . it worked before to minimize the possibility of major traumatic cuts, reducing through several smaller painful events, so why not repeat this "cut early" tactic?

However, the general consensus of the P&O at this point is that we now face a different budget climate, both as a district and as a state. The current situation is one where investing some short-term money to buffer the BSEP priorities of expanded course offerings, middle school counselors, and program support, has a very real chance of preventing cuts to these vital programs in the future. Tax receipts that are higher than projected and additional funding for Common Core are but two examples of additional funding that make the state's budget outlook look particularly positive, the possibility of additional funding for schools is high. By shifting funds in the way proposed, we can buy enough time to get these budgets on solid footings and maintain critical school programs. We encourage you to adopt the budgets proposed by staff and strongly endorsed by the planning and oversight committee. Thank you!