

**BSEP PLANNING & OVERSIGHT SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES  
COMMUNICATION, TRANSLATION, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

**April 16, 2019**

BUSD Offices –Technology Room 126  
2020 Bonar Street, Berkeley, CA 94702

**P&O Committee Members Present:**

Weldon Bradstreet, *Rosa Parks*  
Heather Flett, *Washington (Co)*

Terry Pastika, *King*  
Shauna Rabinowitz, *Berkeley High*

**Visitors, School Board Directors, Union Reps, and Guests:**

Jay Nitschke, *Director of Technology*  
Lea Baechler-Brabo, *Communications Consultant*

**BSEP Staff:**

Natasha Beery, *Director of BSEP and Community Relations*  
Danielle Perez, *BSEP Program Specialist*

**1. Call to Order/Introductions**

At 7:15 pm, Chair Bradstreet called the meeting to order by welcoming and thanking attendees, the group gave introductions around the table.

**2. BSEP Director's Comments**

*Natasha Beery, Director of BSEP & Community Relations*  
Director Beery thanked attendees for coming to help discuss this specific budget and plan.

**3. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**4. Purposes**

*Natasha Beery, Director of BSEP and Community Relations*

Director Beery distributed the following documents:

- Preliminary Recommendation for BSEP Funds in FY 2019-20 for Communication, Translation, and Community Engagement

Broadly, purposes of the budget, sometimes called “the 2% budget” for short are: 2% of revenues go to support the P&O and SSC oversight committees, communication, translation, and community engagement. Mostly budget is for staffing, as described in the draft plan text. This group will start with talking broadly about the broad purposes, then have Lea present on projects, then discuss budget.

The BSEP Oversight goal is to review plans for all BSEP budgets, help budget managers to think through their plans for the coming year and bring that information to the P&O for discussion, and in some cases recommendations of minor or even large changes to the plans. BSEP Director Beery also sits on the Superintendent’s Cabinet, advising the Superintendent

and cabinet members on the use of BSEP funds (and on communications and community relations issues), and also does this for the Superintendent's Budget Advisory Committee (SBAC), which has delegates from the P&O. The goal is to see that funds are appropriately used and cover needed purposes within the district.

BSEP Program Specialist Perez supports SSCs and P&O committees, answers questions and sits on meetings with Principals (along with Budget Analyst Elizabeth Karam who is funded out of GF, and works to support BSEP budgets). Director Beery also works with oversight and community engagement in other areas, such as assisting with LCAP or acting as the Superintendent's delegate for the Sylvia Mendez renaming; she also helps to manage responses and communications for our community, including for emergencies such as wildfires.

Director Beery also supervises the PIO, whose job has changed much in the past several years as technologies and public demands/expectations have changed. The current PIO is deals with ever-increasing PRA requests, and is consequently much less out in the community taking photos and sending out stories as the previous PIO was. Berkeley tends to be out in the news around the country, with high focus and expectations, which can be time-consuming and weighty. These positions deal with the consequences of being perceived nationally as the bastion of all things "Left" politically, and thus a focal point for those who are in opposition. For example, the recent story of elections rigging at BHS got picked up by NY Times, and any member of the public can request all communications around that issue. This is along with all other normal requests that any school district might receive.

The communications team want to be able to tell BUSD's story to parents and our community about what's going on in classroom, help parents understand curriculum, share wonderful things going on in schools that we don't get to tell about because of other pressures on the PIO job. Fortunately we have also been able to fund a contract for a communications consultant to assist with some of this.

The current PIO will be retiring in early August, so the job will be posted soon. There is a need to review the goals of the position. and any substantial changes would have to go through the Merit Commission, as well as Board approval; it can take a long time. The general hiring process includes publicly posting the position for a set period of time, followed by written testing of qualified candidates, then an oral panel, then a hiring panel that is blind to results of the previous two processes. It will take a long time, and perhaps we can have a assistance working hourly on an interim basis or via contract until the hiring process for a new PIO is complete.

Meanwhile, despite demographic shifts, consistent need for Spanish interpretation/translation means need for funding for than half of the salary for district translator position. The diversity of languages spoken in the district also necessitates contracts for over-the-phone interpretation in many varied languages.

## **5. Projects**

### ***Lea Baechler-Brabo, Communications Contractor with BUSD***

Ms. Baechler-Brabo began by explaining that storytelling is what she does, passing along the voices of staff, students and community. Her current project has 3 media interns at BHS creating videos to tell the story of the African American Student Success Project. She tries to

take advantage of field trips, activities, performances and all the rich learning happening in classrooms, which help everyone realize the power of BSEP dollars and informs the community about what's going on in BUSD schools. She works in multiple channels, with the challenge of meeting everyone where they are, and using those channels strategically to get info out simultaneously. She also has a role, along with OFEE, in making sure parents can support students at home and engage with schools/district. She helps cast a wide net for messaging while OFEE and other groups run the individual events/workshops etc. An example is the Superintendent's Speaker Series, which aimed to create opportunity for community conversations about education, and to motivate and inform teaching in classrooms.

Examples of communication channels are: The A-plus newsletter is emailed every 2 weeks; the staff weekly bulletin w/ key information and news is sent weekly; Illuminate accounts for students and parents to track attendance and work; the Community Report which is created and mailed out to all residents annually. The Community Report can also be used at community events as a handout; it's a way to reach broader community about some efforts and initiatives of of district. It is very expensive to produce and mail, even just once a year, and so is being reconsidered. She is also working on texting communication, specifically a pilot to get students at BHS on emergency texting which has been mildly successful but challenging because of rules about how to invite participation. Parents may be an easier test group than students. The team hasn't had a successful strategy due to lack of resources and time and in part because of lack of resources to have someone managing content. There is room for discussion of whether social media is the way to go for the district as she is stepping out of her contracting role in the coming year.

The group shifted to specific discussion of the Annual Community Report. Rep Flett felt it good to continue to reach the broader Berkeley community, that we need to inform Berkeley voters about the schools. Director Nitschke added that as the use of paper waned culturally, the format of the Report changed from newspaper style to this current one-page (folded) version. He has an objection to eliminating the report because Berkeley has so many older residents without kids in school, it is important to have some way of letting them know what's happening. Rep Pastika felt it was better to have the smaller version than not send anything. Mr. Nitschke also explained that it looks professional, is a well-run piece; and conveys that the tax dollars are being put to good use, and that we are providing access to resources for the community to locate even more information.

Director Beery shared that the twice a year mailings used to cost about \$30,000 for printing and mailing, not counting production time and cost, so the reduction to once a year was a necessary savings. She agrees that our city is still at a point where older voters are most likely to take a look at this physical mailing and least likely to find any information from other sources, and so potentially these voters could be relying on out-of-date information if this were eliminated. Rep Flett praised the mailing, stating that even parents who are already paying attention can appreciate that it's well done, competent, and gives info on how to stay connected. If a parent wasn't connected to the district any other way, at least this gives a good feeling that we're doing right by the kids and that's what's important. If someone is craving more information they will seek more out, but this provides at least a once-a-year

reminder of where to get that.

Ms. Baechler-Brabo explained that it takes a lot of time to educate educators on how to effectively message about what's going on in the classroom and she helps frame the stories for the audience. Rep Pastika asked if anyone who has kids in district can opt-out of mailing as they will be getting information more directly throughout the year. Mr. Nitschke responded that it is delivered by mass mailing, because it is cheaper by a lot to bulk-mail; the cost difference between black and white and color is quite small, but the impact of color and print quality is much higher than that cost. Ms. Baechler-Brabo shared that the Report ends up taking about \$5-7,000 of work. Rep Flett asked if there was a way to create a template for some of the items, to help when we transition to a new contractor. Director Beery explained that the graphic design is about \$1,500, and the rest of the cost is for printing and mailing.

Rep Pastika asked what might not be happening in the district's communication because these resources that currently go to the Community Report. Ms. Baechler-Brabo responded perhaps more storylines in the A-Plus news, more speaker events, or a tradeoff with social media and being able to develop more effective use of other channels like texting. Rep Pastika expressed that content should be coming from other sources, it's the planning and implementing of the processes. Ms. Baechler-Brabo responded that changes between channels take a lot of manipulation to make messages appropriate to the delivery method, there is usually not room for 4th channel. Rep Rabinowitz shared that she prefers to use Twitter for news/updates. Ms. Baechler-Brabo pointed out that we would need to pick topics to focus on with that medium: what topical areas would appeal via Twitter? Health? Mental Health? Classroom strategies? Tobacco and vaping? Rep Rabinowitz pointed out the generational gaps between users of Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat, etc.

Rep. Flett shared that her school tries to use Livingtree but that it isn't widely embraced. You must think about your target audience; with Twitter it's like a firehose, and you can't tell who's getting your information. She wouldn't recommend using time that way. Berkeleyside is tweeting their headlines, she doesn't need that from her child's school district. Further, information from within confines of an individual school is too private to be out in the broader public, that is better for personal channels. She suggested evaluating the strengths of different channels in relation to messages you'd like to get across and to whom. For example using YouTube for the Board meetings is successful because of the ability to refer back over time, fastforward and rewind, etc. to find relevant discussion points. She feels there is an opportunity to use students and their classroom skill-building, while identifying what you are trying to communicate and with whom.

Ms. Baechler-Brabo noted that you need to sit with interns, to advise them on the fine tuning aspects of their work, and so that can be time-consuming. Maybe with practice it might get a little less intensive for the supervisor. Rep Flett added that a lot of parents will have privacy concerns and won't want school events, images, or video of their children shared publicly on social media.

Rep Pastika supported continuing to produce the Community Report. Regarding social media: she remembers BUSD trying to develop a policy on social media use, and that she

didn't feel that the district has a vision on how to use it. Is it for engaging the public as a forum, to push out information, to create a dialogue? Once some of the baseline questions are answered by the district, then it will be appropriate to try. Thinking about two-way communications, how do parents engage? Director Beery responded that electronic forum is not pretty; comments aren't dialogue, rather just more venues for people to yell one-way. She agrees that the Twitter firehose problem loses messages, and we do have the website as a resource for information. We are also waiting to see where the new Superintendent will fall in terms of media use. Rep Flett expressed that being cautious feels appropriate, especially because of Berkeley's position locally, nationally and politically. She asked if we would have a staff member monitoring the comments and input that would be inherently invited by BUSD participating in social media. Director Nitschke agreed, but also felt that Twitter (and facebook to a lesser degree), can be very useful in emergency situations. Ms. Baechler-Brabo added that lots of other districts have young persons working in this field and are very bought-in to using it, but it doesn't work that way currently in Berkeley necessarily.

Ms. Baechler-Brabo asked the group about video and visuals, if the district is doing enough in that category and whether they desire more. Perhaps something like recorded math lessons for parents. Rep Pastika thought that would be very helpful. Director Nitschke shared that teachers are doing that already and their students know where to find them. Rep Pastika agreed that at King she knows that if she looks around their website, any King teachers will have things posted there. Ms. Perez added that when researching SSC meeting information as a part of the BSEP Office work, it can be very difficult to navigate between the district-provided pages for each school and privately run pages for schools that may be created and run by PTAs or other parent groups. If for example a Willard parent wanted district resources on math lessons, they wouldn't necessarily be able to or know how to access something posted by a King teacher on their PTA website. Also the question of publicly posting things like meeting notices comes up when schools may use private websites to post public committee notices. Rep Pastika suggested using the district as a portal to each school in a unified way.

## **6. Budget**

Director Beery distributed the budget summary document, which contains a combination of actual expenditure amounts and proposed spending to be used as a "think piece" only; the numbers are not comprehensive and were meant to aid a general budget discussion. She explained that these numbers are projected AND actual, to give an overview and idea of how the budgets have evolved from Measure A in 2015-16 through the current year of Measure E1, and to help thinking about the coming year.

At the end of Measure A, the cost of staffing was eating up 95.6% of available revenue, which was only sustainable because of increased revenue with the move to Measure E1. Salary costs, mainly benefits and retirement contributions, continue to rise for both the district and for employees. Now, in 2018-19 staffing costs are down to around 78-79% of revenues, a more sustainable ratio. The need for hourly staffing is variable based on the number of public meetings for all district-wide topics like tax measure renewals and facilities bonds, etc. Other costs include translation outside of Spanish, which is mostly Arabic for the past several years. Contracted services happen when we don't have enough work in a field to

warrant a full-time position, or to allow for one-time projects. The cost of communications consultant contract was split with the Superintendent's budget this year, but next year due to budget cuts would need to be totally borne by this BSEP budget. Looking at how a contractor could best support the work of the team (alongside the PIO and Director Beery) is still TBD. For example, some districts have an electronic communications position.

Carryover funds have been used for translation equipment the past two years, and that will probably include more next year. The balance might cover expanded contracts if that is feasible. The website redesign pulled a large chunk of carryover funds in '18-19, along with supporting the Superintendent's Speaker Series.

Rep Pastika asked if the contract position is mainly to support PIO and Director Beery, or other projects. Director Beery responded that the contract supports the Community Report and the A-Plus News, which are a lot of time, plus projects like the Speaker Series. Rep. Pastika asked if there are opportunities or thought about how to open up time in the PIO responding to PRA requests by having an online "reading room" that contains oft-requested documents. She is aware of other public bodies that do that, it could reduce amount of work from PRAs. Director Beery shared that she does wish that the majority of the requests fell into that category of general and high-interest topics, but instead they tend to be highly specific to a program or incident and also require specific redactions to respect student confidentiality.

Rep Rabinowitz asked if there was a way to turn the PRA work into the consultancy piece, and then have the more important PR and marketing public relations tasks covered by a dedicated district employee? Director Beery considered that PRA requests involve a lot of confidentiality, but more of those could perhaps sit with the Superintendent's office, with the weight of the Superintendent behind the internal inquiries, because they involve getting Director-level responses within deadlines. Responses must be made within 10 days, and a change in laws requires info from privately held devices to be gathered as well.

Rep Rabinowitz noted that BHS has writers and resources in the Jacket school newspaper, students who write well and could be helpful to public relations on the side. Ms. Baechler-Brabo shared that one district she knows has 20 student interns running media communication and have a full-time staff person teaching/developing their skills and leveraging their work with mentoring, to have leadership students using media. Director Beery added that with all the emphasis on the CTE pathways in the district, this could be an avenue to explore further. Rep Pastika asked if the description of the Program Specialist's responsibilities include developing language for both principals and with school committees around site funding and district decisions that impact availability of school funds. She would like the district to draft a statement that there is a policy to spend a certain amount of site fund dollars explicitly, because that information sharing should happen in venues other than just the Principal meetings. It could perhaps be included in budget documents or in training materials.

Director Nitschke recognized how crucial Ms. Baechler-Brabo has been to BUSD communications, noting that she has always been present and requesting forward movement

and improvement. He praised her writing and credited her as being the voice behind important communications several Superintendents and the A-Plus news. In his opinion, the small amount the District is compensating her is not indicative of the amount or quality of what she produces. He expressed worry about finding a replacement for her and her broad knowledge from 20 years' experience, and her skill in advocating for BSEP in all the necessary and appropriate ways. Ms. Baechler-Brabo responded by sharing that in addition to her having social capital, in knowing people and who to ask because of long personal relationships with so many in BUSD, as a contractor she also benefits from being on the outside of the organization; she is able to focus on a single project at hand, and not be pulled into other work from around district as a regular staff person would be. Though it's not always appropriate to have some kinds of work done on contract, in these respects it's highly valuable and appropriate to have a contractor doing this work.

Meeting adjourned by Bradstreet 8:42pm.