

Board of Education
Berkeley Unified School District
2020 Bonar Street
Berkeley, CA 94702

June 15, 2022

Dear Board of Education:

We, the undersigned individuals, request that the Board of Education convene a task force to explore providing true reparations to current African-American students in Berkeley Unified School District.

For too long, the impact of slavery and anti-Black federal, state, local, and district policies have led to worse educational outcomes for African-American students, including here in Berkeley. For instance, African-American students are:

- More likely to be disciplined
- More likely to be identified as needing special education services
- More likely to drop out of school
- Less likely to attend gifted and talented programs
- Less likely to be at grade level in math or reading
- Less likely to graduate ready for college or a career

These opportunity gaps are systemic and have persisted for decades. While there have been numerous attempts to improve African-American student academic and life outcomes in BUSD (e.g., The Diversity Project, Vision 2020), none have directly responded to the root cause - the historical sin of slavery and its legacy that is still felt today. Reparations for African-American students begins the important work of healing from slavery and discriminatory policies.

Many “true” reparations programs - unrestricted cash payments to recipients - already exist. Two of the most well-known are the cash payments by the U.S. Government to Japanese-Americans, who were forcibly removed to concentration camps during World War II, and the cash payments by the German Government to Holocaust survivors (both directly to survivors and via the Israeli Government).

The need for true reparations in response to the institution of U.S. slavery has existed for over 150 years but it has recently taken on increased public attention. A number of local jurisdictions are exploring reparations or have already instituted other types of reparations. The City of Berkeley recently launched an effort to explore reparations and Evanston, IL recently launched a reparations program aimed at providing financial assistance to African-American residents in response to historic discriminatory housing practices. However, no “true” reparations program for

descendants of enslaved people currently exists at the federal, state, or local level. It is time for that to change; BUSD can and should lead such a change.

We recommend that the purpose of the task force be to make recommendations in response to the following prompts:

- How to structure and implement a true reparations program for BUSD students with ancestors who were enslaved in the U.S.
- How to fund or finance such a program.
- What policies need to be developed to implement such a program.

To help make such recommendations, the task force should also be charged with engaging key stakeholders (i.e., students, families, teachers, and staff) and, if possible, aligning its activities with those of the City of Berkeley.

We look forward to hearing more about the Board's leadership on this issue. We know that the work done by this committee will have a lasting impact on the lives of African-American students in BUSD and begin the healing work needed to address our nation's history of slavery, human bondage, and anti-Black policies.

Sincerely,

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