



May 11, 2021

Office of the City Mayor and City Council
250 Hamilton Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94301

Dear Honorable City Council Members,

On behalf of the Palo Alto Council of PTAs Executive Board, we are writing to you to ask you to reverse budget cut considerations to safeguard students, teachers, and parents in the Palo Alto Unified School District. Our children's safety is a top priority. Budget cuts would also have a serious impact on key goals, policies, and programs as outlined in Palo Alto's current Comprehensive Plan (See Comp Plan Goal T6). The pandemic may have paused normal school commutes, but returning to school full time will introduce unique safety requirements requiring maximum staffing.

Please consider how the Crossing Guard staff reduction and PAPD patrol staff reductions will impact our community as you deliberate on budget cuts:

- 1. Crossing Guard Cuts Affect Accident Rates.** The current 2022 budget proposal as outlined in the [proposal](#), page 325, includes cuts to both the School Crossing Guard contract and the PAPD Traffic Safety team. Both of these will directly affect the safety of students biking and walking to school. Concerning Crossing Guards, the statement in the budget "*As PAUSD works to establish revised schedules and accommodate safety protocols as schools re-open, it is likely that the current contractual service levels would not maintain the previous level of service of 30 designated area crosswalks.*" warns about this reduction and makes it clear the future coverage level would be reduced when more kids will be crossing streets to get to schools. This is bad timing. As school campuses were closed for over a year during the pandemic, it resulted in the one year gap where students did not practice biking or walking to school. When schools reopen fully in the fall of 2021-2022 school year, we will have new Kinders and 1st graders going to new schools, new 6th and 7th graders going to new middle schools, and new 9th and 10th graders going to new high schools. Reduced Crossing Guard presence will mean that we can expect to see increased bike and pedestrian accidents reported in the local papers.
- 2. Maintaining Crossing Guards Benefits the Entire Commuting Public.** The current Crossing Guard contract provides 30 Crossing Guards at critical school intersections citywide. See a list of Crossing Guard intersections and schools they serve [here](#).

Proposed cuts will reduce the total number of intersections covered from 30 to 15 with a savings of \$304,310. The multi-lane intersections that carry traffic volumes exceeding 20,000-40,000 autos per day on roads such as Alma, El Camino and Embarcadero, need full crossing guard coverage. Crossing Guards provide essential visibility and safer crossings for the students - a key factor for parents' decision on whether to allow their students to walk and bike to school. If parents choose not to allow their children to bike, they will get in a car and drive them to/from school, thereby increasing vehicular traffic throughout the city. Through the joint efforts of the City, PAUSD, PAPD and PTA Council, students walking and biking to school has increased over the years thereby reducing car traffic during peak commute times. This benefits the entire commuting public.

- 3. PAPD Staff Cuts Will Negatively Impact School/Work Commute.** The current 2022 budget proposal will remove 5 PAPD Patrol positions. The PAPD Traffic Team has provided regular enforcement and a visible presence on miles of school routes between guarded intersections, particularly on identified trouble traffic spots during school commute times. The PAPD Traffic Team provides preventive enforcement on all city streets throughout the day, as well as provides in real time a reminder for PAUSD students to practice bike safety. Budget cuts have already reduced the traffic team, and more cuts will essentially eliminate this essential function. PAPD officers are needed to provide preventive enforcement during daily school commute times, especially in the morning when foot-powered students converge with rush hour work traffic. This fall when schools fully re-open for in person learning, students will be heading to school for the first time. any parents who are also residents will be driving their children to school for the first time.

We ask you to give the most heightened review to a budget priority. **Traffic Safety.** Your decision will have an important effect on the daily safety of thousands of school-bound children. The PTA Council requests that you fully fund the Crossing Guards and PAPD officer staffing. An alternate plan, if adopted, will only be acceptable if it meets these two requirements. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Christina Schmidt, President, Palo Alto Council of PTA's

Jim Pflasterer, PTA Council, Chairperson, Safe Routes to School Committee

Cc:

Board of Education Liaisons to City Council, Jennifer DiBrienza and Shounak Dharap
PAUSD Superintendent, Dr. Don Austin

