

**Palo Alto Council**  
**PTA**<sup>®</sup>  
*everychild.onevoice.*<sup>®</sup>

May 3, 2017

Dear Members of the Board and Superintendent McGee,

We thank you for your hard work and thoughtfulness as you address the difficult challenges with the PAUSD budget this year. We write to advise you of the considered position of the Palo Alto Council of Parent Teachers Associations, which represents over 7100 community members. First, we strongly support re-allocating the \$6 million new school reserves to reduce the impact of the forecasted deficit, and secondly, we request that the Board of Education develop and communicate a policy regarding class size at the middle and high school levels. Finally, there are a number of items currently being considered by the Board for cuts that we are interested in learning more about the impact, and encourage you to involve PTAC and the community at large in understanding the tradeoffs of the difficult choices you are making.

Regarding the use of some or all of the new school reserve to address the current budget shortfall, particularly in the context of the population bubble moving through the schools, we would like the district to prioritize the needs of current and expected (forecasted) students as it plans and allocates its financial resources (as opposed to maintaining high reserves for unforecasted future students). The reserve was originally created in the anticipation of addressing a population bubble by creating a new school; but now that proposal has been rejected. The \$6 million reserve is our collective tax and bond revenues, raised with the expectation that it will be spent to address a population bubble. We also feel 'locking in' operational cuts for the next 3-5 years based on this year's budget snapshot is a needlessly rigid approach. We could use the "new school" reserve as a near-term contingency fund - adjusting the levels of supplemental revenue based on each year's actuals (and adjusting the operational cuts needed as well). There will be a new budget proposed next year, and by then we'll know whether the forecasts were too generous or too lean, and by how much. Accordingly, there is no need to make deep and permanent cuts to important programs right now. Additionally, staffing new sections need not become a permanent and recurring cost, because through attrition, staffing levels will drop naturally as the population bubble graduates. Thus, while generally reserves ought not be spent for repeating operational costs because the funds will be depleted and

unavailable down the road, the nature of the population bubble is temporary and thus these reserve funds are appropriately spent to ensure that all students receive the best educational opportunities we can responsibly provide.

A class size policy in the upper grades is needed. As we researched information we could not find a clear position, despite some discussion and documents shared at a prior Board meeting. We understand the enormous difficulty of the effort to balance class size, and we strongly believe (as shared in our letter Oct. 18, 2017) that our students and teachers deserve class sizes that give students the opportunity to thrive. We ask the Board to develop a policy that relies on the most thorough research available to ensure that Board decisions are made with a clear understanding of the educational trade-offs with respect to class size.

Finally, we want to share with you our particular interest in the items below, and ask that you listen to the community members that have spoken about them. From the Possible Budget Balance Ideas For 2017-2018, Proposed Prioritized Spending Reductions, Spreadsheet Attachment D (April 17, 2018):

- **Line 3: Art.** In the category of District Office, recommended budget cut that would *consolidate the Art Coordinator with Music Coordinator into a Fine Arts Coordinator.*
- **Line 12: TOSA/High School.** In the category of certificated/classified personnel, recommended budget cut that would *reassign the equivalent of 3 FTEs Teachers on Special Assignment.*
- **Line 16: Clerical Position.** In the category of Certificated/Classified personnel, recommended budget cut that would *review and consolidate clerical positions at the high schools.*
- **Line 22: Teachers/High School.** In the category of previously approved program adds, potential cuts for consideration that would *reevaluate the 3 teachers previously approved to further reduce class sizes at the high schools.*
- **Line 23: Equity Administrator.** In the category of District Office, potential cut for consideration that would *consolidate the Equity Administrator with Director of Equity and Academic Support.*

From the Potential Program Additions for 2017-2018, Attachment D (April 18, 2017):

- **Line 1: Parent Liaisons.** In the category of on-going additions, potential addition of *parent liaisons/academic supports for HUR.*
- **Line 12: Special Education.** In the category of one-time expenses, potential addition of *District Management Group Special Education Extended Study and Review.*

We would like a better understanding of the consequences of making these changes, and encourage you to include PTAC and the community in your decision-making process. Additionally, we applaud guidelines suggested at recent board meetings to refrain from cutting programs that directly benefit students or support teachers.

Thank you for your work on this challenging issue. We look forward to working with you to resolve the budget issue, and hope you will include PTAC concerns in your deliberations. Again, we strongly urge you to use the reserve to alleviate the need for permanent deep cuts to important programs, and to develop a coherent policy on class size in the middle and upper grades.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Audrey Gold".

Audrey Gold  
PTA Council President, 2016-18  
<http://ptac.paloaloto.org>