

**To:** The OUUSD Board

**CC:** Emilie Knisley, Marla Ianello

Thank you Emilie and the board for allowing us to read a statement.

This has been a challenging school year for everyone. Students, teachers, parents, support staff, custodians, principals — none of us envisioned that a school year would ever look like this one.

The response of even our youngest students to the challenges has been truly inspiring. When I'm asked by a student if they can use a larger paint brush, or get out the blocks, or what kind of clay project we will be doing, it breaks my heart to tell them that those aren't options this year so that we can keep everyone safe and healthy. Upon hearing my answer, every single student who has asked me such a question has quietly accepted it, never arguing, just grateful that they still have an art class to come to this year.

To imagine that these same students who have been diligently wearing their masks all day, washing hands and sanitizing every time they enter a new room, students who know that many of our traditional activities have been canceled due to covid now also risk losing the few fun activities that we are able to provide them with seems unfair. They are the ones who will suffer from further budget cuts.

We have been seeking out ways to creatively build community, create new traditions, and inspire our students to be engaged and thrive through these challenging times. A socially-distanced winter activity program tailored to covid health protocols would be enormously beneficial to our students. We need a budget to make that a reality.

Transportation to and from school provides students with reliable and consistent access to the school building. Busing also allows for meal drop off. Parents and caregivers rely on transportation for their daily schedules. Without school-provided transportation, equal access to education becomes compromised, with the burden falling on the students and their families.

When schools closed in March, students lost three months of in-person instruction. Students who were already below grade level fell further behind. Inequities in access to adult help with school work at home and reliable internet compounded the challenge. Reductions in staffing would disproportionately affect those students, who work with our deeply committed special educators and paraeducators. What does a reduction in staffing look like? It's explaining to a child that an adult they have been working with every day to help them to process and understand the material they're learning about is suddenly not there anymore. And if we are forced to go remote again due to budgetary concerns, the learning gap will widen once again.

We are all committed to in-person learning. We all know that learning in the school environment is best for kids academically, socially, and emotionally. In-person teaching is strained when you want your students to be able to access books on subjects you don't have, or when you can't print out activities for students when your copy machine is broken and you can't purchase a new one because you don't have a budget. Every year, teachers at every grade level and in every discipline spend their own personal money to supplement classroom materials. Right now is an especially difficult time, when teachers are forced to either watch their students go without, or

spend their own money on supplies, with the reality looming that they may be out of a job shortly due to budget cuts.

We want to help our students to succeed and thrive. It is heart-wrenching to watch my students and colleagues do everything that has been asked of them -- canceling birthday parties, isolating from friends and family, distancing themselves, cleaning, sanitizing, washing everything, teaching both in-person and remotely, doing as much as they can with little or no resources -- so that we can all continue to operate our schools as normally as possible, while the community has failed to pass a budget for the third time. Please know that teachers and staff have been doing everything in their power to create the best possible environment for students during this difficult year, but we can't do it without the support of our community. Now is the time to set aside our differences and give our children what they need.

Thank you.

Al Morrow & hopeful BES staff