

April 20, 2021

Good evening Board President Gilles, members of the School Board, and Superintendent Perez,

It has certainly been an eventful month in our district! I am happy to report that our membership voted in favor of the Hybrid In-Person Memorandum of Understanding and it was ratified on March 22nd. Right after a much needed Spring Break, everyone jumped right into preparing to bring students back to campus. Our members are so happy to have had the opportunity to be fully vaccinated prior to bringing students back, and we want to acknowledge the board and the district administration for prioritizing the safety of our community and upholding that agreement.

The end of March brought a pay raise for our association members. In April members also received retroactive pay for the past two school years. In addition, members of our other district labor unions, SEIU and CSEA are working to ratify similar agreements. We are so pleased that the board is choosing to prioritize our hard-working employees and take a step in the right direction to start to address the significant increase in the cost of living in our area over the past few years. These wage increases will ensure that CRPUSD can attract and retain highly qualified and effective individuals to serve our students. As we look forward to the future, we hope to continue to collaborate and develop an ongoing plan to address the rising cost of living and further close the gap between the California average educator salary and the salaries of CRPUSD educators. The good news is that funding for our schools is looking good! The Governor's plan is projecting an increase in funding, and in addition, on April 9th, President Biden released his fiscal year 2022 discretionary budget request, which includes federal education programs. The proposal includes significant funding increases for education, continuing some of the additional one-time funding in the American Rescue Plan. The request includes \$102.8 billion for the Department of Education, a \$29.8 billion (or 41%) increase over 2021. Considering this update, our RPCEA bargaining recently sent the board and Superintendent Perez a sunshine letter to open negotiations on our collective bargaining agreement for this school year. We are currently working off a contract that needs to be renegotiated and renewed for the next three years. We would like to get started on this as soon as possible so that we can use what little time is left in this year to plan for the 2021-22 school year and make sure we are addressing the various needs of our students and our staff as we look towards applying the lessons of this school year, in particular we are interested in assessing class size along with wages and hours.

A little over a week ago our elementary schools once again welcomed students to in-person instruction when our fearless TK-2nd grade students and staff kicked off the party. This week our 3rd-5th grade returned, and next week our secondary students will join the fun. Our members are very happy to see some of their student's again in person. Schools have been bubbling with excitement, with balloons and encouraging messages greeting our returning families. Teachers are again learning a new way to teach, as they are not only teaching students in person, but also using new technology and managing a group of online students as well! It isn't easy, and it requires additional planning and concentration, but our members are bringing their expertise and creativity to this challenge and developing ways to connect with all their students as we all ease back into being together again. As we look to the final five weeks of

the school year, it is important to remember that we have all been through so much over the past twelve months. As I said in my report last month, our focus should be to provide social and emotional support and guidance to our students and finish this year on a strong note. While academics are undoubtedly important, we believe the primary focus at this time must be on reintroducing our students to campus, easing into the expectations and rigor of school, and ensuring the wellness of our community.

There has been a lot of discussion at recent board meetings and on social media about the updated CDC guidelines for in-person school. As with many of the changes this year, these guidelines may seem like a simple shift, but they in-fact require quite a bit of planning. Some members of our community are pushing for our schools to fully reopen or for agreements between the district and the labor associations to be changed. Our In-person Hybrid MOU does say that the District will adhere to the most recent guidelines of the CDC, State, and County in section 3.01, however it also includes the 6 foot requirement in multiple places, such as 2.05, 3.06, and 3.23. Also, the MOU specifies 14 students per stable cohort in 3.17. The newest CDC guidelines recommend a 3 foot distancing between students in classrooms, yet still require 6 foot distancing elsewhere. In addition, the recommendation is to still maintain stable cohorts, even if the cohorts are larger in size. The CDC guidelines were adopted in California over a month ago on March 19th, but RPCEA was given no indication that the district wanted to consider changes to the existing plan or ask to re-negotiate until the afternoon of April 16th, which was this past Friday when we were notified that the District would like to meet to propose new schedules and language. Yesterday at an elementary hybrid debrief meeting, we saw two examples of elementary schedules, but there remains plans that need to be determined. We have asked for a proposal with schedules for all sites, but we have not received one yet. On principle, there are a lot of positives about having more students in classrooms or being able to extend the time that students are in classrooms with teachers; however, this request feels like it is coming at a very precarious time not only for our teachers, but for students and families. We will, of course, return to the table and continue to negotiate in good faith if the school board and the district decide they would like to reopen negotiations. However, we are concerned that planning seems to be reactive rather than proactive in our District. In December the RPCEA bargaining team developed a tiered re-entry plan that we wanted to include as an appendix to MOU to allow for a smoother pivot should the county change tiers. Towards the end of negotiations, the District team asked to remove it and only include the language from the purple and red tier, since that is what had been negotiated up to that point. In addition, one of the challenges to shifting course now is the model of instruction that was decided upon. Right now our members are teaching two groups of students at once: one in person and another group online. If we switch and have more students in the classroom, there will still be students who will not be able to return and will continue to tune into class from home. Our members will then have to manage more students while trying to engage and assess those at home too. From the start RPCEA expressed concerns about this model and felt that it would not provide our students the best learning environment, yet the District said they could not consider other models once the surveys had been sent out to parents before negotiations with the labor associations were complete. Surrounding districts that are moving to a longer instructional day are not asking their teachers to do so while teaching students online and in-person simultaneously. In addition, some districts that are asking teachers to take on both jobs are paying them a significant stipend. Finally, many of our neighboring districts, especially those who serve both elementary and secondary, are not planning to

rework schedules or change at this point and are getting started on Summer School MOUs and plans for the fall. Realistically, the bargaining process for this could take anywhere from three to four weeks. Our bargaining team is a small group of teachers who are in the midst of pivoting to a new way of teaching and the additional pressures that the current situation brings. Bargaining has been occurring in the afternoons, meaning that our team has not received the release time or substitutes that are normally provided so this work can take place. To bargain this issue will take these teachers away from their students, which is frustrating when the guidance has been in place for the past month and we could have been in negotiations much sooner. We ask the board to please implement a proactive plan moving forward to avoid the pattern of changing course at the final hour.

We have also tried to connect with you, the school board, over the past few months. We had hoped to open the lines of communication so you could share your vision for our District and ways that we could all collaborate to best serve our students. We did receive responses from three members who said they could not talk with us, even informally, while we were in negotiations with the District. While this may be the recommendation of the California School Boards Association (CSBA), it is not a violation of the Brown Act nor improper for board members to meet individually with union representatives, as long as no direct bargaining takes place. According to the Institute for Local Government: “As negotiations continue, the union may seek meetings with individual elected official(s) to discuss the agency’s bargaining position. As with any group of constituents, an elected official can choose to meet with them or not. If an elected official does meet with union officials, the official should be clear that the official is not speaking on behalf of the governing body.” While we understand the precautions you may be taking, we believe communicating regularly would allow for more collaboration in planning for the future of this district. Our focus will continue to be on creating the best possible learning environment by supporting teachers and therefore supporting students. We welcome dialogue and collaboration with you.

Thank you.