Dear Berkeley City Council Members,

As many of you are hearing from your constituents regarding school reopenings, below is the information I believe will help you respond to their concerns and my stance on the issue.

**Distance Learning Must End- Our Kids Can’t Wait!!**

Please direct your constituents to email their concerns to the BUSD School Board and BUSD District Leadership [Boardofed@Berkeley.net](mailto:Boardofed@Berkeley.net), and to the Berkeley Federation of Teachers Union President and Vice President Matt Meyer, and Janine Waddell.

As a parent who is also a newly elected School Board Director for the Berkeley Unified School District, I am gravely concerned by the narrative that distance learning is adequately serving the needs of our students and families. While I believe teachers are doing the best they can given the circumstances, we must not fool ourselves into thinking this is somehow “working”. The data that was presented to the school board at the January 20, 2021 school board meeting in no way supports the argument that we should not be making every effort to reopen schools—especially for our earliest learners. We know we have students who are NOT engaged in this process. Parents, especially mothers, are quitting jobs as they can’t leave their child at home, and many families are experiencing trauma which I never imagined school closures would introduce. While Berkeley has always valued our educators for teaching and supporting our children, the developmental support the school provides has become even more pronounced.

So, what can we do to safely return our earliest learners to school? First, we must answer the following questions:

1. Do BUSD elementary schools meet CDC guidelines to fight the potential spread of COVID?
2. Is BUSD able to provide COVID testing to staff and students?
3. Is BUSD able to provide masks and other protective equipment as outlined by the CDC to those learning on school campuses?
4. Can BUSD provide contact tracing?
5. Is BUSD able to properly sanitize school sites?

The answer to these five questions is yes according to the BUSD Fact Based Dashboard listed on BUSD website. See link here [School Readiness Dashboard](http://www.bUSD.com).

So what else then?

6. Are families able to get tested who have students in our schools regardless of healthcare coverage or ability to pay? Yes
7. Can we arrange learning in elementary schools so that students are socially distanced? Yes
8. Does BUSD have ways to provide outdoor classrooms? Yes
9. If Berkeley reaches the threshold of 25/100,000 cases which will legally allow for BUSD elementary schools to expand its cohorts, will BUSD be able? No

No, BUSD will not be able to reopen and this is why our kids need community support.

While science says we can do this safely, the unions are asking for more. So much more, that we may never be able to reopen schools for our earliest learners.

When our unions asked Berkeley residents to increase your pay, we said yes. When we asked Berkeley residents to provide better facilities, again, with our money -we said yes. Smaller class sizes, additional classroom resources, etc., for over 20 years with our money, we have said yes. Our unions are currently asking for housing support, and we are trying to find ways to say Yes.

Now, we -parents, caregivers, community members, and our students who are struggling in ways we yet know how to repair, need our unions to support a YES to CDC guidelines.

In addition, to increase comfort levels that staff will be safe, we are working to have vaccinations reserved for all of our staff. Having our own health department in Berkeley perfectly positions us to do this quickly. Having President Biden with a goal of 100M vaccinations in 100 days, further positions us to do this. By using our school sites/city partners as dedicated avenues for health care providers to vaccinate our staff, and others in categories 1A, 1B, and so on, we can further ensure the safe return to school. However, we cannot do that without a union agreement.

Now normally, School Board Directors talk to the Supt.- Teachers and Classified staff talk to their union leaders and things just roll along slow and steady. So why am I concerned? Because our kids can’t wait. We all need to be pushing the people who work for our students for a CDC guideline-based agreement, which includes the proper exclusions for those who need accommodations.

Secondarily, an agreement opens the door to funding that can go straight to labor salaries. But what we cannot do, is sit by, week after week to hear no movement in contract negotiations. Especially once we have secured vaccinations to add to the safe return to school. By March, we have potential for our kids increasing educational and social emotional health needs to be met if we all work together.

We must act. Distance Learning, while it may not be a total disaster for some, it is not working well for most. Our kids can’t wait.

Again, Please direct your constituents to email their concerns to the BUSD School Board and District Leadership at Boardofed@Berkeley.net, and to the Berkeley Federation of Teachers Union President and Vice President Matt Meyer, and Janine Waddell.

Thank you for being our committed partners in supporting our next generation and feel free to contact me if you have additional questions or concerns at laurababitt@berkeley.net.

Best Regards,

Laura Babitt
BUSD School Board Director

WEB: [http://www.busdparents.com](http://www.busdparents.com)
TWITTER: @BerkeleyOpen
FB: [https://www.facebook.com/groups/80142944736284](https://www.facebook.com/groups/80142944736284)