

Welcome to a special Friday edition of the Sunday letter.

At the Governing Board meeting last night, our community learned who “gets it” and who needs remediation. Let’s start with the final vote and then learn how we got there. The board voted 5-3 to return to in-person instruction in a phased-in hybrid model after Solano County is in Red Tier for five consecutive days.

The story begins with Helen Tilley making a motion to immediately reopen schools in Purple Tier with Bethany Smith seconding. David Isom then made a substitute motion to stay in distance learning for the rest of the year, with Ana Petero seconding. At this point, consulting the Robert’s Rules of Order was required.

Skipping over the procedural steps, the substitute motion was rejected and Tilley’s motion to immediately reopen went to a vote. It was defeated with Judi Honeychurch, Isom, Petero, Craig Wilson and student member Chantel Martino voting against it. Tilley, Smith and Richardson voted in favor.

It was encouraging that Honeychurch and Wilson commented on a willingness to consider delaying reopening to Orange Tier. But when the motion to reopen in Red Tier was made by Smith with Tilley seconding, the majority of the board (Honeychurch, Richardson, Smith, Tilley and Wilson) voted in favor of it. Isom, Petero and Martino voted against it.

What was especially telling is what happened prior to this vote. Isom asked Smith if she would accept a friendly amendment to her motion to reopen in Red Tier with the added wording that vaccinations would be available to staff before reopening. Smith did not accept the friendly amendment to employee wording for vaccinations.

Hope was alive for a minute that Honeychurch and Wilson would vote against this motion so a new motion of opening in Red Tier with vaccinations could be introduced. That was not to be.

So, where do we go from here? The county will reach Red Tier when the adjusted case rate is 7 per 100,000. We are currently around 26 per 100,000. So for now, we continue in distance learning with the option to work at home or school sites.

Negotiations will continue Wednesday to discuss

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the effects and impacts on our working conditions based on the Governing Board’ decision.

We work with our partners to urge Dr. Matyaz, the county Public Health Officer, to authorize vaccinations for school employees immediately. Tilley and Smith made numerous incorrect statements about vaccination availability last night in dismissing their importance as a condition to reopen schools safely. Hopefully they will not impede our efforts to expedite the start of vaccinations.

Finally, we survey the most important decision makers – our members. Your Organizing Team is working over the weekend to have a survey out to you on Monday. We need to know how you want to proceed, and high participation in a survey is paramount. Look for a survey in your non-work email on Monday and complete it immediately.

The most important takeaway from last night is that our members’ voices and efforts kept us from reopening in Purple Tier. Time and again, Governing Board members referenced your survey results and more importantly your comments and emails before the meeting.

Your participation made this happen. With the help of our knowledgeable Governing Board members, we are part of the way to a safe reopening plan for our schools. Together we can take it over the finish line.

- Nancy Dunn, FSUTA President

President's Feb. 11 address to FSUSD Board

It is no surprise I'm going to speak on when is the best time to reopen schools. It is very important you hear that this message is framed emphasizing a timeline for reopening because that is what we have emphasized all along regardless of how others have tried to mischaracterize our position. Over fifty members have emailed you their "public comments" in the last two days because they could not attend the meeting this evening.

Your certificated staff, your employees who are the educational experts, gave their informed opinion that the earliest time to return to in-person instruction is when Solano County is solidly in the red tier and employees who want to receive the vaccination have completed the process. We provided you with the survey data from 80% of our members stating an overwhelming 93% united in this position.

We are very close to reaching this milestone. In speaking with Dr. Matyas yesterday, he stated vaccinations for school employees may begin as soon as 10 days from now. It would take a little over a month from the first vaccination of an employee to completion of the process. During the vaccination window, it is projected our county's adjusted case rate will continue to decline making it realistic to expect Solano County to be firmly in the Red Tier around the same time the second dose of the vaccine is administered sometime in early April.

Currently other districts in our county have agreements with their bargaining units, or are very close to signing agreements, choosing the Red Tier as the soonest time to return to in-person instruction. Any tentative dates they have published will be delayed if Solano County is not in the Red Tier for two or three weeks. None are pushing to reopen while in purple.

Conversely, we do not have an agreement on working conditions despite both sides bargaining in good faith. I believe we all can agree it is to everyone's benefit that this situation does not escalate to the point your certificated staff has to decide to comply with your decision on reopening or not.

Clearly you have a lot of groups advocating for one position or another. An important point of view to consider is to look at a reopening decision through an equity lens. As a Board, you have committed yourself to making decisions to overturn systemic inequities. We are a very diverse district and know COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted our Black and Latino communities.

Families of color are not urging for a quick reopening of schools. A recent national poll found 70% of black households with school age children said they support or strongly support keeping all instruction online while 32% of white parents indicated the same. The New York Times reported earlier this month "School closures have hit the mental health and academic achievement of nonwhite children the hardest, but many of the families that education leaders have said need in-person education the most are most wary of returning."

It is more important to reopen schools correctly than to do it quickly. Distance Learning has not been a failure and returning to in-person instruction is not a magic wand. There will be a huge amount of learning time lost with a return to in-person instruction. Schools will not be returning to a "school as normal" schedule, instruction, or social interactions.

Districts that reopened report a sizable dropout of families from in-person instruction when they realize how different the school experience is from what they anticipated. This is why FSUSD is so wise to offer families the option to remain in distance learning for the remainder of the year. The GenUp survey indicated many students agree this year should conclude in distance learning.

If offering the option for in-person instruction is the decision of this Board, please remember this is only possible with a teacher in the classroom. We are not only teachers we are parents, spouses, and care givers too. We want to be with our students and we want to be able to do that without jeopardizing our health or the health of our families.

Do not make us choose between our families or our jobs when you can make a decision that makes this a win-win outcome. - **Nancy Dunn, FSUTA President**

Many a test to be the best

Being selected as Teacher of the Year for 2020-21 at Armijo High School came as a surprise to Joseph Arbizu because he had nothing to do with the award other than making mathematics make sense to his students.

By the way, Joseph prefers saying mathematics to math for no other reason than he believes what he teaches is worth the seven extra letters at the least.

The 42-year-old is also the district's Teacher of the Year after being one of the eligible site winners to apply for the award. He has also applied to be Solano County Teacher of the Year.

That Joseph is willing to be judged is a testament to how comfortable he has become in his own skin. He has faced his fair share of challenges as the son of immigrants from El Salvador.

Neither of his parents could speak English, so the only job his father Jose could get was as a groundskeeper. Then his parents divorced and Joseph lived with his mother Esther. Times were lean, but Esther's six siblings wanted the best for their nephew and paid his tuition to St. Patrick's High School in Vallejo.

Among Joseph's lessons at the private school was to learn several of the students



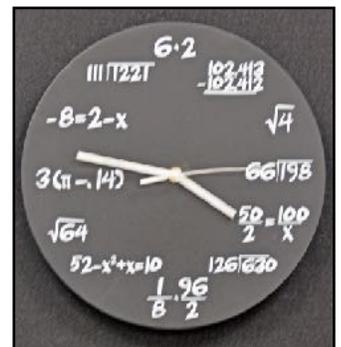
Joseph Arbizu

appeared to enjoy the finer things in life. A few even took it upon themselves to point out to Joseph that he was not as fortunate. One even went as far as to come right out and ask if Joseph was wearing the same pair of pants for the second day in a row.

Little did any of his classmates know that Joseph often had to wear the same pants for an entire week.

Joseph also recalled students in a data analytics class openly questioning whether he had what it would take to pass. Those questions were answered when Joseph proved to be more than capable with "sheer will." He also pushed himself to take three years of French because Spanish would have been a cakewalk with his parents being natives of a Central American country.

His former classmates might be shocked to learn whenever there is a class reunion that Joseph went from St. Patrick's to Napa Valley College and UC Davis. He is now the chair of the mathematics department at Armijo. "With the passion I have for it, I hope (his students) get some of that spark. I want them to be bit by the bug," said Joseph, who has a 10-year-old daughter with his wife Cheri. "When you think you understand (mathematics), you find out you really don't know anything. When you think you have reached your limit, you can reach a little bit more."



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Caring worth sharing

Push the panic button? Daniel and Kayla Mikkola are well beyond having to do that when one of their two sons falls out of bed or twists an ankle. They load 8-year-old Jeremiah 6-year-old Elias into the car for a trip to the hospital.

Jeremiah and Elias have hemophilia, so their blood does not clot. Even a scratch is cause for concern because of the risk of internal bleeding.



Kayla and Daniel Mikkola have their hands full with 8-year-old Jeremiah and 6-year-old Elias.

“It’s frightening,” said Kayla, who is an English teacher at Crystal Middle School. Daniel teaches math at Fairfield High. “We have to be on our toes all the time.”

On top of that, Jeremiah is autistic and spends 2.5 hours a day Monday to Thursday in applied behavior analysis. His schedule will soon change, Daniel said, when one of those days is replaced by a social group on Friday. Kayla has been looking forward to this as a gauge of Jeremiah’s progress.

“(Jeremiah) is really bright. He’s quick, he’s clever,” Kayla explained. “He plays his dad in chess.” Kayla added Jeremiah has come close to defeating Daniel, and Jeremiah claims he has once.

Jeremiah and Elias can be a handful at times, but the lessons Kayla and Daniel learn in raising their sons reinforce why they teach. “I want to be the teacher, that I would want for my son,” Kayla said. “Every person has special needs. Some just have to be diagnosed.”

Kayla met Daniel when her father played guitar in a band and Daniel was the drummer. Daniel has a drum set in his living room along with three guitars, a violin, banjo and mandolin hanging on the walls. Daniel also has a collection of ties that is at 200 and growing.

They were married June 7, 2008 because Kayla said she needed a date that would easy to remember. That would be 6/7/08.

Ready to lead? Election is your opportunity

A change in our bylaws will allow Nancy Dunn to seek a third term as president if she desires. President will be one of six openings on the Executive Board to be decided in our May election. The others are vice president and four Members at Large. Nominations will open March 1 at the Site Representative Council meeting on Zoom.