

President's Update 4-20 to 4-24

Hi everyone. I hope that you and your families continue to be well at a safe distance. No one is immune from the effects of this pandemic. Please let me or any of our Representatives know if there is anything that we can do for you or your families.

I wanted to use this update to field some of the questions MEA/CTA has received.

1. *What is happening with negotiations?*

We resume negotiations with MUSD on Thursday, April 30th. We cannot talk about money at this session because we have little insight into the State budget (more on this later). On the 30th, the Bargaining Squads will attempt to finish the revamp of our collective bargaining agreement (CBA) and discuss how to move forward with the counselor's working conditions. Once we finish the contract update, we will figure out how to vote on it.

2. *What's happening in Sacramento and the State Budget?*

Well, from what we're hearing, nothing good. School Services, the agency which informs local school districts on all things financial, sent out an advisory that scared the pants off all the Local Educational Agencies (LEA). School Services (SS) is always more conservative than CTA and Department of Finance numbers; however, MEA must heed the messages that SS sends because MUSD uses their calculator. SS outlined possible three scenarios, none of them are pretty, but let me clear none of them are guaranteed to happen.

A. District's will receive the 2.29% cost of living increase (COLA) that the Governor offered in late December 2019. This is SS' best case scenario. In this case, MUSD would receive from the State about \$370,000 less than they budgeted. Recall, all LEA's used a 3% COLA in their Fall budget estimates. Also, all LEAs have to budget two years into the future. With COLA at 2.29%, MUSD has to project a \$1.3 million dollar deficit for 2022-23 in its 2019-20 Second Interim Budget.

B. Districts will receive the same amount of money in 2020-21 as they did in 2019-20. This would be devastating to all LEA's. Costs for health care, salaries, STRS, SPED continue to rise with inflation. If this happens, MUSD's fiscal health may be far worse than it was during the recession of 2007-08.

C. Districts will be asked to pay back the State. We have heard that this won't happen, so let's not discuss it.

Last, on the budget. Because the IRS and the State pushed the filing date for income tax to July 15, we will not know for sure what's happening with State education funding until August. We will get some insight into the future when Governor Newsom releases his May Revision of the State Budget in the next couple of weeks.

3. *MUSD issued Reduction in Force (RIF) notices to 4.8 FTE. What's happening with this?*

As you've probably heard, MUSD continues to reduce its workforce. No segment is immune. Let's pause here and make sure to acknowledge that we aren't just talking about jobs, we're discussing human beings and his/her family. The RIFs to certificated employees were in direct reaction to the lower COLA that the State announced. MEA is absolutely opposed to these RIFs. Raising the counseling to student ratio at this time seems like a particularly bad idea. MEA continues to lobby the District and the School Board to rescind the RIFs. I spoke at length to two Board members this week. The District insists that if this was a "preemptive move," and if the enrollment and funding allows for these certificated employees to return, they will gladly have them back. MEA does not hire or fire. We cannot control the amount of money MUSD gets from the State. What we do is carefully watch the budget calculus and negotiate based on these insights. Again, the District and MEA eagerly await the Governor's May revise. The District, by law, has to let the RIFed teachers know what's happening for 2020-21 by May 15th. Again, with the State Budget so heavily influenced by income tax numbers, MUSD may not know how much money they are really going to receive from the State until August. It is a hot mess.

4. If the budget is particularly bad, will there be more RIFs and/or furlough days?

The short answer is **we don't know**. Here is the big difference between 2007-8 and today. The State was ill-prepared financially for a recession 12-13 years ago. In 2014, by way of State Proposition 2, Former Governor, Jerry Brown, established a *Rainy Day Fund (RDF)* specifically to deal with years when there are budget short falls. Some estimate that there's enough money to supplement educational funding for 2-3 years in the RDF. As of August 19th, 2019, the State had total reserves \$19.2 billion, of which \$16.5 billion is in the RDF, \$1.4 billion in the Special Fund for Economic Uncertainties, \$900 million in the Safety Net Reserve and nearly \$400 million in the Public School System Stabilization Account. The total funding for K-12 public education in 2018-19 was \$97.2 billion dollars. **The RDF exists to ensure that we do not have furloughs like we did in 2007-8.** Whether or not Governor Newsom chooses to or not to use the RDF is unclear at this point, but I can 100% guarantee he will hear CTA's voice loud and clear on the matter. Because of the influence and power of CTA, I tend to be a glass half full person when it comes to school funding, even though I firmly believe that our system is broken. I am certainly not attempting to whitewash the possibility of MUSDs economic distress, nor should it be ignored.

5. What is going to happen next year?

At this week's Roundtable, Jake, Lisa, and I discussed this matter at length with the District. I also spoke with School Board President Nathan Sweet about what comes next. The simple and most honest response is no one really knows. The Governor's "spit balling" about staggering attendance, may come to fruition, but it sent LEAs spiraling. CTA gently asked him not to brainstorm policy from the podium *ad hoc*. Here's what we know: we are socially distancing ourselves for three persuasive reasons: to curtail the spread of the virus, the grant grace to our health care institutions, and to give science more time to develop a vaccine. The last group of

people that we want to put at risk are our children, so, classroom instruction as we knew it, will most likely be one of the last measures in the gradual return to normal commercial and social interaction.

We're hearing a lot of possibilities as well as watching countries such as Norway as they attempt to bring kids back into the classroom. There are so many issues and permutations involved, such as cleaning, funding, teaching safety, class size, technology, access, and collective bargaining agreements to name a few. Families are moving; extended families are moving in together; some private schools are bankrupt. After the 1918 influenza pandemic cleared, many families kept their kids home when schools reopened. ADA is going to be difficult to measure or predict.

After discussing the matter with the District, this is what I suggest to you: let's watch where the COVID numbers are on May 15th. That is when we get some insight into how well social distancing is working in our State. Let's also keep an eye on what the Governor has to say about school funding in his May revise. We will not return to the classroom this school year. If the number of infections decline and the science and the math work demonstrate that it is safe to return in some form, the local, county, and state educational organizations in conjunction with public health agencies will forge a plan. CTA will be involved in the process at the State level. I guarantee MEA will be involved locally.

My guess is that next year will involve distance learning even if we get the Ok to return to our campuses. I suggest that all teachers prepare themselves to deliver curriculum live or taped and personally interact using a platform such as Google Meet. It is not a matter of if the District and/or the State will require it for all levels of instructions, but when it will be required. MEA believes that the well-being of all of our members and our students is our first priority. Healthy and positive personal communication is an essential part of wellness. If you feel like you need help with technology, an essential part of our amendment to our CBA during the shutdown is the District's obligation to train any teacher who needs assistance.

The District is thinking ahead. They don't have enough information, nor are they final word on what next year will look like. This disease and our economy will influence this for us first. MEA politely insists that it be consulted in the planning process. It's far easier to be out in front of something when we are informed about it prior its release.

As one of our more experienced Reps stated at MEA's first virtual council meeting, "We trust MEA leadership to keep us safe." That is exactly what we are doing, and what we will continue to do as we move forward. Keep doing the best you can under these circumstances. If you think about it, what you have accomplished is nothing short of amazing. Those with an existing online presence reformed his/her pedagogy. Most of us revolutionized our teaching in two weeks! I hope you can step back and see how awesome this is!

Have a great weekend!

Brian