

September 4, 2018

Dear community,

The 2018-19 school year started off with something of a bang as media outlets around the world picked up the story that AUSD has updated its dress code policy. The dress code was updated for good reason — i.e., AUSD students alerted us to the fact that the former policy disproportionately targeted girls, resulted in their being removed from class, and, in some cases, caused them to feel body shamed. And in general, the media coverage has been positive. Still, some observers have questioned and criticized the new dress code, sometimes in ways that are demeaning to students and staff alike.

This topic started me thinking about the values that the Board of Education and district staff uphold and the goals we have set for how we should do work that helps us achieve our mission. AUSD believes in inclusion and teamwork, continuous improvement, and social justice. And we believe schools, like all American institutions, are their best when they serve people through democratic processes. These are values I know we all share and uphold as a team.

This goal of social justice has also guided us in other recent initiatives, including our focus on increasing salaries for AUSD employees. Our state's funding for education limits how much we can give. But both the Board and staff remain committed to finding ways to improve employee compensation. Earlier this summer chapters 27 and 860 of the California School Employees Association accepted our offer of a 4.5% raise. We remain hopeful that we'll be able to come to agreement with the Alameda Education Association soon, too.

Our focus on a possible consolidation of Alameda and Encinal High Schools is also driven by our commitment to social justice. The Board directed staff to convene the committee to see if a merger might both provide a more comprehensive and equitable secondary experience to our high schoolers and allow us to increase employee salaries. And just last week the Board approved a letter of intent to potentially build affordable employee housing as a way to

recruit and retain qualified employees who are increasingly finding it difficult to make ends meet in the Bay Area.

At that same Board of Education meeting, staff presented a new tool for tracking bias-related incidents and discussed how we report bias-related incidents in classrooms, schools, and to the public when they occur. This work is absolutely crucial to our vision of safe and inclusive learning environments, and while we know we have made progress toward enacting procedures to counter bias, we also know there will be ongoing work ahead we need to do to continuously improve.

To close, I want to express gratitude and thanks to our committed and hard working staff who have labored tirelessly in these first few weeks of school and over the summer to get us prepared for the school year ahead. Alameda is lucky to have great schools, great students and families, and great employees. We look forward to another great year of teaching and learning, and we look forward to ongoing work at continuously improving our services to the Alameda community by listening to the students and families we serve so we can realize our vision and mission. We believe in working together to explore new ways of thinking and operating as a district, and we thank all who join us in partnership toward making AUSD a better place to learn and work.

Sincerely,



Sean McPhetridge  
Superintendent of Schools