



BOARD OF EDUCATION
REGULAR MEETING
2309 TULARE STREET
BOARD ROOM, 2nd FLOOR
FRESNO, CA 93721
board.fresnounified.org

MINUTES – BOARD OF EDUCATION WORKSHOP

Fresno, California
February 28, 2024

Fresno Unified School District, 2309 Tulare Street, Fresno, CA 93722.

At a Workshop of the Board of Education of Fresno Unified School District, held on February 28, 2024, there were present Board Members Islas, Levine, Student Members Lua and Pitcher, Board Clerk Davis, and Board President Wittrup. Superintendent Robert G. Nelson, Ed.D. was also present.

Board President Wittrup CONVENED the Board Workshop at 4:35 p.m.

OPPORTUNITY for Public Comment on Closed Session Items

For the record, the Board received zero (0) requests to address the Board on Closed Session items.

Board President Wittrup ADJOURNED the Board Workshop to Closed Session at 4:36 p.m.

For the record, Board President Wittrup extended Closed Session to 5:15 p.m.

Board President Wittrup RECONVENED the meeting to Open Session at 5:21 p.m.

Reporting Out of Closed Session

For the record, there were no items to report out of Closed Session.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Ambra O'Connor led the Flag Salute.

BOARD WORKSHOP AGENDA ITEM

PRESENT and DISCUSS Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism

Staff presented an overview of attendance and chronic absenteeism in the district. The board workshop delved into areas of concern, reviewed key data indicators, and shared and gathered feedback from educational partners. The workshop also provided insights into ongoing actions and future plans developed by the cross-functional team to improve student attendance.

Deputy Superintendent Misty Her thanked everyone for being present and introduced staff. Deputy Superintendent Her provided context for the evening's

presentation as an overview of the cross-departmental attendance team's work pertaining to attendance and chronic absenteeism.

After the presentation, Board members had an opportunity to provide comments or ask questions. A summary is as follows:

Student Member Pitcher commented on the number of likes received and accounts reached when student board members recorded the Friday Message. Added it is ironic they missed class to record a message pertaining to why attendance is important. Suggested staff look into how student board members can be used to connect with students.

Student Member Lua commented that students are getting smarter at an earlier age and learning how to work the system. Commented on the importance of teacher engagement.

OPPORTUNITY for Public Comment on Agenda Item

For the record, the Board received a request to address the Board on this item. The individual's name with a summary of topic are as follows:

1. Kay Bertken shared she was engaged with the district more than 15 years ago on the Attendance Task Force. Commented on being part of a group under the Department of Prevention and Intervention that developed a program for newly arrived kindergarten parents that underscored the importance of school attendance.

Member Levine asked if staff would look into the program Kay Bertken addressed. Requested clarity on information presented on slide no. 6 and asked what the percentage is in reference too. Asked if there is initial data available pertaining to the five community schools. Commented on being interested to see how the community schools compare with other schools. Requested clarity on information presented on slide no. 27 and asked what number of students are homeless. Requested staff to look into partnerships with the Fresno Housing Authority to find housing for students. National issue, early years becoming optional, asked if there is data that shows declining enrollment specifically in the early years such as kindergarten and first grade.

Clerk Davis thanked the staff for the presentation. Asked staff to confirm if birth rates in Fresno County are in decline. Requested clarity as to what is the breakdown for Average Daily Attendance (ADA). Commented on being proud of the investments Fresno Unified has made for students. Requested clarity on Saturday School. Commented if the district makes a concerted effort and families see the numbers it will help people understand the importance of education.

Member Islas complimented everyone involved in presenting the data. Member Isla commented she would like the district to find ways to help families problem-

solve, families that may not easily see a solution, likes the idea of engaging in discussions around problem solving with families. Member Islas commented that penalizing students for not coming to school does not work and often it is the most vulnerable students missing school.

Member Islas requested a board communication regarding which positions within the district are responsible for tracking attendance; and which positions are responsible for follow-up on chronic absenteeism. Would like to be sure the district has enough staff and support in place to support the work.

Member Islas would like to see dedicated efforts honing-in on what the data shows, as there are clear areas the district is not thinking about. When challenges are identified and recommended actions are communicated, it is clear there are areas the district can improve.

Member Islas commented there may not be a lot that can be done to control the weather but as an institute we can think about areas to mitigate environmental impact such as green buses.

Member Islas provided ideas on affordable housing and transportation and encouraged the district to consider new ways to advocate for students.

Member Islas commented on morning school hours and would like to see if the time change helped the district. Member Islas commented challenges are being identified and she would like to see district actions that relate to the challenges, dedicated actions that are thoughtful and strategic.

Member Islas suggested it would be good to showcase students that have overcome obstacles to get to school. A communication plan should include key messages such as, let us help, clear message about sick days, a plan using messages that are culturally competent when talking to African American families and foster youth.

Member Islas closing comment regarded the importance of childcare to students that are also parents.

President Wittrup expressed appreciation for Trustee Islas' comments. Commented on how attendance, missing school, and tardies affect academic performance and every minute a student misses' school they miss being engaged in class. Commented Saturday School will help with ADA but not academics.

President Wittrup shared a personal anecdote pertaining to a student's attendance as an example of the importance of teacher-student engagement. Commented that as a small or large school community there are so many cost-free ways staff can connect with students that could help improve attendance immediately.

President Wittrup commented that mentoring is an important piece as well. Commented that as she reviewed the spread sheet provided in the presentation it was not hard to see the more days of missed school and then other contributing factors, lead to the deterioration of academics and behavior. Getting students to school is one of the things the district can do to raise test scores as well.

President Wittrup requested to know which schools in the district do teacher-student engagement well and would like to visit the schools as well. President Wittrup commented she could not stress enough how much the relationship is key to this work and impacts the dynamics.

Student Member Lua commented on the importance of school attendance and shared from personal experience the difficulties faced from missing school and it was because of relationships built with teachers and staff that Student Member Lua is here today.

Student Member Lua thanked staff for the work done to encourage student attendance.

Superintendent Nelson, Deputy Superintendent Her, Rita Baharian and Patrick Jensen were available to provide clarity.

OPPORTUNITY FOR UNSCHEDULED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

For the record, the Board zero requests to address the Board during Unscheduled Oral Communications.

D. ADJOURNMENT

Board President Wittrup ADJOURNED the workshop at 6:54 p.m.