



To: All decision-makers within and outside of the Oakland Unified School District

From: Members of the legally mandated, representative, parent-majority advisory committees of OUSD

November 13, 2024

As representatives of all families, we, the members of the three legally-mandated parent-majority advisory committees—the Parent and Student Advisory Committee, the District English Language Learners Subcommittee, and the Community Advisory Committee for Special Education—have come together to combine our perspectives as leaders from schools across OUSD.

We understand that the process of crafting and implementing fiscal and institutional changes can lead to reimagining a district better positioned to improve outcomes for all children. Or, it can diminish credibility and the capacity to educate within OUSD.

We believe that the Board of Education, administrators, teachers, staff, advisory committees, families, students, and other members of the OUSD community must work together to emerge positively from the current challenges. We must rely on the wisdom of those who will most be affected by decisions.

We stand before you today even though we were clearly told that “there is no expectation of feedback from district committees” and that, as it relates to the proposals for school mergers under AB 1912, the sole avenue for engagement would be the town halls that are being organized by individual School Board members.

With little time and few resources, we met anyway.

After rushed and intense preparation, 31 district committee members met last night to craft this joint statement. We created our own unified space to learn from each other and to respond collectively to the challenges of this moment.

At our meeting, we gathered a remarkable diversity of voices across race, ethnicity, language, nationality, disability, class, gender, and other lived experiences. As a cross-section of our city and our district, we crafted the recommendations and considerations included in this letter.

Because OUSD leaders have concluded that they must present a proposal for school mergers or closures at this time, which was made public only a few days ago, we must respond to that proposal in this letter. We do so even as we try to make sense of the October 23rd recommendations (Attachment C) to reduce or adjust the OUSD budget.

ABOUT THE RECOMMENDATION FOR SCHOOL MERGERS AND THE RELATED EQUITY IMPACT ANALYSIS

The equity impact analysis in the proposal to merge 10 schools is incomplete and insufficient. The goal of that analysis was to prevent disproportionate harm. With the analysis as it is, OUSD is not in the position to prevent such harm.

As a start, the data in the analysis did not include all the modifications listed in *Resolution No. 2324-0020 Equity Impact Analysis Metrics for the Initiation of School Changes Per Education Code 41329*, nor did it include all the metrics identified by the *AB 1912 Ad Hoc Committee*.

We are especially concerned about the absence of “qualitative evaluations of how schools serve specific populations of students” and “determinations of how the planned actions will maintain or exacerbate the segregation or isolation of particular demographic groups.” As a clear example, we know that many Special Day Classrooms exist in almost complete isolation from the rest of the school. We must understand the extent to which students in these classrooms are supported by all elements of the wider school program. We must also identify historical efforts by each school to offer integrated learning and social experiences to all their students.

Additional data points must be included in the analysis to better reflect the demographic make-up of each school, analyze how that demographic make-up arose, and understand the impact of actions on particular groups of students. This will yield important findings requiring our attention.

The list of additional data points includes:

- number and percentage of students from all ethnic groups at each school (only 2 were included)*
 - the home languages of the students*
 - number and percentage of newcomer students*
 - the types of disabilities at each school generally and in Special Day Classrooms specifically (for example: Deaf students at one school; larger numbers of Autistic students at certain schools, etc.)*
 - teacher and staff retention rates*
 - the type of Special Education programs or Special Day Classrooms (for example: programs for Low Incidence Disabilities, whether they serve students with mild, moderate, or extensive needs)*
 - whether the demographics of students in Special Day Classrooms or other programs differ substantially from the rest of the school (for example: different racial/ethnic background)*
 - school stability indicators already available to OUSD and that connect to a request made by the Ad Hoc Committee (for example: the nonstability rate used to designate schools for Equity Multiplier funding.)*
- [A more detailed list of data points with related commentary can be provided upon request.]

We believe that school continuity and stability is one of our most important outcomes for students. It is a pre-condition for achieving other outcomes. **OUSD must define school stability and belonging for all students in collaboration with families.** This includes identifying related metrics and committing to using them. It also includes disaggregated data to show how often students move (and are moved) from schools.

Any proposals must begin with the assumption that each and all students can remain with their peers unless they are going to a new grade span, **including students who attend Special Day Classrooms and other Special Education programs.**

Most importantly, we believe that OUSD schools must be designed to serve all OUSD students. Schools must demonstrate in their design and practices that they serve and protect all students as it relates to race/ethnicity, home language, the full range of disability experiences, national origin, income, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.

This includes, in part, identifying which schools are models of stability and belonging for disabled students. We must support and cultivate focal schools with stable programs that can showcase program continuity,

disability access, universal design, and inclusivity, especially for students with moderate and extensive support needs.

It also includes working together to clarify what size of school population is most protective to high need students, even as we seek to increase the sustainable use of resources across schools. We must understand how to best achieve the highly personalized and relational school experiences that are lifesaving to the most vulnerable students.

In contrast, heavy emphasis was placed on distance from a school within a presentation related to school closures, especially for students with disabilities and other vulnerable students. **No matter their location, a few schools function as places of refuge and of last resort for these students.**

Finally, the lack of historical referencing in this resolution diminishes our faith in OUSD's capacity to implement mergers in a way that protects all students. Relevant parts of that history and their impact were actively discussed within our meeting, as they are in other community spaces. **OUSD must draw lessons from its history of school design, re-design, mergers, and closures in developing this analysis.**

The Equity Impact Analysis is incomplete as we have described thus far and in other ways. Because of this, OUSD is not in the position to prevent great harm for specific groups of students.

Any attempt to complete the analysis must be made in consultation and collective dialogue with the families at the impacted schools and in partnership with the advisory committees that represent them.

ABOUT THE PROPOSED BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS AND RELATED CONTEXT

Our advisory committees, along with the families and communities that we represent, must have supported time and space to understand the budget reductions and adjustments that were only recently presented.

We need full dialogue with the staff and other leaders who developed the proposals and who will oversee their implementation. We must all clarify how the named reductions and adjustments will impact schools and students. That requires a stated commitment from Board directors and administrators to engage in public two-way dialogue with us as collectives.

We aim to protect the students who have been most neglected and who will be most harmed by the loss of programs and resources. In doing so, we ask that you focus on disabled students with Moderate and Extensive Support Needs, especially those who are members of other focal student groups. We should prioritize filling vacancies for Special Education teachers, Instructional Support Specialists, and Paraeducators. Vacancies for these urgently needed roles were already eliminated last year. We must not continue to decrease the baseline number for these positions.

Our experience this Fall of 2024 was not a dialogue: we did not get information early enough to process it with communities, even with our schedule of frequent meetings. We experienced last-minute overload of information that did not cohere and was out of sequence. We attended confusing public meetings where Board members and staff did not have clear goals for the agenda. It appeared as if they had not spoken to each other. Further, documents misrepresented comments from individuals as feedback from committees. That misrepresentation must be corrected.

We can do so much better. Timelines for decision-making must be explained well in advance, must make sense to everyone, and must include clear information and time to weigh in. As committee leaders, it has

been almost impossible to explain what has happened. It is almost impossible to support the families whose voices need to be heard.

With that, **our dialogue last night yielded some clear lessons about the budget adjustments, about how our financial situation is being explained, and about the use of OUSD assets:**

We have heard the consistent message from administrators that charters are not the problem when historically, they are a large part of how we got here and why it is difficult to chart a path forward. Their creation and proliferation fragmented our city, our communities, and our resources. Charter schools were allowed to open and operate with different expectations than district schools. OUSD added to the problem through choices made for our district schools, through choices that mirrored the practices of charter schools. **OUSD must face and express the historical implications of decisions about charters, open enrollment, the design and marketing of particular district schools, and of the practices that have diminished our capacity to act as a unified school district for all students. . . even now.**

Our dialogue last night demonstrated that many of us are favorable to more centralized budgeting. This could help to use our resources more effectively. It could also promote transparency and equity across our district. And it could free up time for principals, especially those that do not have the experience to piece together budgets and implement them. And it would free up school site committees that feel forced to approve expenses.

Yet, **more centralized budgeting must come hand in hand with centralized, transparent, and democratic decision-making with all district stakeholders.** It must not be implemented without strong centralized structures for shared decision-making with all schools and families.

We do not approve the lease of properties to charter schools. OUSD must immediately begin the process to lease properties to other institutions that serve our most vulnerable families.

We do support using vacant properties to develop low income and below market rate housing for teachers and families This creates opportunities for revenue. Housing for teachers could help attract and retain teachers in OUSD and make their work in Oakland more sustainable. Housing for unhoused and other low-income families could stabilize their living conditions within our district, with impacts on enrollment and attendance. **We also support housing for transitional age youth and a hub for services geared to them.**

We understand the enormity of what you are facing in your role as administrators and decision-makers. We also know that the challenges of this moment began and grew through multiple administrations and through the choices of many individuals across decades.

And we remain here after all of it.

These challenges matter to all of us. They impact our children, our families, our communities, and the city that we call home.

As parents, caregivers, and committee leaders we believe in the promise and vision of a UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT. That promise can be fulfilled only when you embrace and unleash the power of a unified community.

WE ARE OUSD.