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Board Cover Memorandum

To Facilities Committee

From Patrice Berry, Director

Meeting Date April 16, 2026

Subject Resolution No. 2526-0216 - Protecting Student Health and Educational Equity Through Urgent Districtwide Heat Mitigation

Action Requested Discussion and Possible Adoption by the Board of Education, upon recommendation by the Facilities Committee, of Resolution No. 2526-0216 - Protecting Student Health and Educational Equity Through Urgent Districtwide Heat Mitigation

Discussion Educational equity requires that every student in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has access to a safe and healthy learning environment. Ensuring that school facilities can safely support students during extreme heat is therefore an essential component of student climate resilience. In 2020, the Board declared a climate emergency and recognized the direct and immediate threat of climate change to our students, families, and schools.

Over the past several years, the Facilities Planning and Management Department has led significant and commendable work to understand and address the district’s complex infrastructure needs. Together, the 2022 Thermal Comfort Study and the 2026 Facilities Master Plan (FMP), the first comprehensive facilities assessment in six years, established passive cooling strategies and HVAC modernization as critical priorities for the district, and provides the analytical foundation and strategic direction needed to act. The FMP explicitly identified HVAC modernization and cooling as top concerns, finding that excessive heat “contributes to student fatigue and health risks, reduces instructional effectiveness, and may lead to schedule changes or lost learning time,” and that “relying solely on full modernizations to resolve cooling gaps will leave many students in vulnerable conditions for years to come.” The district has also begun installing temperature and ventilation sensors in classrooms across the district to build the data foundation for an equitable, data-driven investment plan.

This resolution directs that complementary actions to mitigate extreme heat in our classrooms begin now, ensuring students return to safer, cooler learning environments in August 2026.

The urgency is clear and well-documented. Extreme-heat days in Oakland are now two to three times more likely than they were before the 2000s, and the warmest period of the year, August through October, overlaps directly with the school calendar. School buildings retain heat, resulting in temperatures significantly higher than outdoor conditions. During the March 2026 heat wave, temperatures across the district climbed above 90 degrees in classrooms, often 5 to 15 degrees hotter than the outside air. Students and teachers described this as unsafe and too hot for effective learning. In contrast, at Sequoia Elementary where parent-funded cooling efforts were implemented, parent-collected data showed significantly cooler classrooms, averaging 76°F with peaks of 84°F. Teachers described this as “an oasis of cool.”

These impacts are not experienced equally. The geography of heat exposure in Oakland reflects deeper patterns of environmental injustice. Oakland’s most affluent neighborhoods (located in the hills) have tree canopy coverage of approximately 50 percent. In contrast, the flatlands of East and West Oakland, where most OUSD schools are located, have canopy coverage as low as 4 percent. CalEnviroScreen also identifies flatland neighborhoods in Oakland as being in the top 20th percentile of cumulative pollution burden statewide. Students in these communities arrive at schools across the district already heat-burdened.

The district’s aging infrastructure compounds these inequities. Eighty-one percent of OUSD campuses were built before the 1970s, and approximately 2,100 classrooms currently lack forced air cooling. Only 24 percent of campuses are rated good or excellent. At least one student has already been hospitalized due to classroom heat, and the district has received reports of medically fragile and neurodivergent students being unable to attend school safely.

School communities have also begun fundraising independently to purchase cooling solutions, creating inequitable access based on fundraising capacity rather than need.

The district has the data, the research, the community mandate, and \$8 million in Measure Y bond funds already designated for heat abatement. The Measure Y Expenditure Plan, approved pursuant to the bond measure passed by Oakland voters in November 2020, allocates funds to broad categories, allowing the Board to direct specific investments. Consistent with the intent of Measure Y, the Facilities Master Plan includes recommendations to deploy Measure Y funds toward heat mitigation and cooling. The Board is committed to exercising its authority under that expenditure plan to deploy these funds in service of students.

This resolution directs the Superintendent to develop and present to the Board a comprehensive Districtwide Heat Mitigation Strategy and Spending Plan that outlines immediate, short-, and long-term heat mitigation strategies grounded in the strategic direction established by the Facilities Master Plan and the

Thermal Comfort Study, as well as a plan for leveraging the designated \$8 million in Measure Y bond funds alongside other public resources and philanthropic opportunities, with implementation to begin no later than July 1, 2026, so that meaningful heat relief is in place before students return to school in August 2026.

Fiscal Impact

Implementation will utilize \$8 million in Measure Y bond funds already designated for heat abatement. The Superintendent's Districtwide Heat Mitigation Spending Plan will provide the Board with a detailed allocation of these funds, prioritizing strategies that deliver the greatest benefit to the greatest number of students while improving building efficiency and long-term climate resilience.

Attachment

Resolution No. 2526-0216 - Protecting Student Health and Educational Equity Through Urgent Districtwide Heat Mitigation.

**BOARD OF EDUCATION
OF THE
OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Resolution No. 2526-0216**

Protecting Student Health and Educational Equity Through Urgent Districtwide Heat Mitigation

WHEREAS, the Board of Education of the Oakland Unified School District has already declared a climate emergency and recognized its direct and immediate threat to our students, families, and schools, including the threat of extreme heat events and warming average temperatures; and

WHEREAS, the Board recognizes that preparing students and school facilities to withstand the impacts of climate change safely is essential to student climate resilience and educational equity; and

WHEREAS, OUSD's Facilities Planning and Management Department has undertaken significant and commendable work to understand and address the district's infrastructure needs, including the 2022 Thermal Comfort Study and the 2026 Facilities Master Plan — the first comprehensive facilities assessment in six years — which together provide the strategic direction and analytical foundation necessary to inform an equitable heat mitigation investment strategy; and

WHEREAS, the district is actively installing temperature and ventilation sensors in classrooms across the district as part of an effort to build an equitable, data-driven investment plan, and this resolution is intended to complement and accelerate that work; and

WHEREAS, the 2026 Facilities Master Plan explicitly identified HVAC modernization and expanded cooling capacity as critical to education adequacy, operational continuity, and long-term climate resilience, and further cautioned that “relying solely on full modernizations to resolve cooling gaps will leave many students in vulnerable conditions for years to come”; and

WHEREAS, approximately 80 percent of students in OUSD are unduplicated pupils, meaning they are low-income, English learners, or foster youth, and environmental conditions such as excessive classroom heat disproportionately impact vulnerable students; and

WHEREAS, seventy-three percent of OUSD students receive free or reduced-price meals, 46 percent identify as Latino, and 23 percent identify as African American — communities that research shows are disproportionately harmed by excessive classroom heat, including research suggesting that hotter school days may account for approximately 5 percent of the racial achievement gap nationally; and

WHEREAS, the hottest period of the year in Oakland, August through October, overlaps directly with the school calendar, meaning students are increasingly exposed to high temperatures during instructional time; and

WHEREAS, many school buildings retain heat from previous hot days, causing classrooms to reach temperatures of 82 to 84°F, often 5 to 15 degrees hotter than outdoor temperatures, even when weather is not considered extreme; and

WHEREAS, Oakland’s environmental geography compounds classroom heat inequities: the city’s affluent hill neighborhoods have tree canopy coverage of approximately 50 percent, while the flatlands of East and West Oakland (where most OUSD schools are located) have canopy coverage as low as 4 percent, and flatland neighborhoods are identified by CalEnviroScreen as being in the top 20th percentile of cumulative pollution burden statewide, meaning many students arrive at school already experiencing disproportionate environmental heat stress; and

WHEREAS, 81 percent of OUSD campuses were built before the 1970s, when school facilities were designed for a cooler climate and often lack modern heat mitigation strategies; and

WHEREAS, approximately 2,100 classrooms across the district currently lack forced air cooling, exposing students and staff to uncomfortable and potentially unsafe learning conditions; and

WHEREAS, the district’s 2026 Facilities Master Plan facility condition assessment found that only 24 percent of campuses are rated good or excellent, while the majority are rated fair, poor, or deficient; and

WHEREAS, excessive classroom heat contributes to dehydration, fatigue, increased irritability, stress, impulsivity, aggression, and reduced student well-being, further impacting students’ ability to engage in learning; and

WHEREAS, students have already experienced severe health issues due to excessive classroom heat, resulting in student hospitalization; and

WHEREAS, excessive heat also compromises the health, well-being, and professional effectiveness of educators and school staff, who are required to work in the same conditions as students and who bear the burden of managing unsafe classroom environments without adequate institutional support; and

WHEREAS, the district has received reports of medically fragile students and neurodivergent students being unable to safely attend school due to overheating classrooms, resulting in a loss of equitable access to education; and

WHEREAS, research shows that student cognitive performance can increase by approximately 20 percent when classroom temperatures are reduced from 86°F to 68°F, and that each 1°F increase in average school-year temperature reduces that year’s learning by approximately 1 percent; and

WHEREAS, school communities across the district have demonstrated urgent and broad-based demand for action, with representatives from 25 schools attending the most recent OUSD Facilities Committee meeting to urge the district to address heat before the start of the 2026-27 school year; and

WHEREAS, school communities have begun independently fundraising to purchase cooling solutions such as window films and portable cooling units, creating an inequitable dynamic in which access to cooler classrooms is determined by the fundraising capacity of individual school communities rather than equitable district investment, a dynamic that underscores the urgency of coordinated district investment; and

WHEREAS, the Measure Y Bond Expenditure Plan, adopted pursuant to the \$735 million bond approved by Oakland voters in November 2020, allocates funds to broad categories that permit the

Board to direct specific investments, and the Board has ultimate authority over how bond project funding is spent; and

WHEREAS, \$8 million in Measure Y bond funds has already been designated for heat abatement, and the district now has the data, research, and community engagement needed to develop a comprehensive, equitable spending plan for those funds; and

WHEREAS, the Board hereby finds that ongoing and worsening classroom heat conditions constitute an urgent and ongoing threat to student health, safety, and equitable access to education; that delay in addressing these conditions causes continued and irreparable harm to students; and that the time-sensitive nature of the school calendar, with the 2026-27 school year beginning in August 2026, requires urgent action by the district to ensure meaningful heat relief is in place before students return; and

WHEREAS, providing safe and healthy learning environments is fundamental to the district's mission of ensuring that every student thrives.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Oakland Unified School District Board of Education, finding that student health and safety conditions require urgent action, hereby directs the Superintendent to develop, in coordination with the Facilities Planning and Management Department and the Measure Y Bond Program, a Districtwide Heat Mitigation Spending Plan (the "Plan") for the \$8 million in Measure Y bond funds already designated for heat abatement, and to present that Plan to the Board for approval no later than the April 2026 regular Board meeting; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Plan shall:

- Be grounded in the strategic direction and analytical frameworks established by the 2026 Facilities Master Plan and the 2022 Thermal Comfort Study, and shall leverage temperature and ventilation sensor data being collected across district classrooms to ensure investments are targeted equitably;
- Identify and prioritize the highest-need campuses based on classroom heat exposure data, student vulnerability (including the proportion of unduplicated pupils, medically fragile students, and neurodivergent students), educator working conditions, and facility conditions;
- Include a phased strategy of passive and active cooling interventions, which may vary school-by-school based on facilities realities and amount of intervention needed to reach a safe temperature; and a districtwide Thermal Comfort and HVAC plan;
- Identify the target classroom temperature ranges informed by facility conditions and feasible intervention and the projected number of classrooms expected to reach or approach that standard through Plan implementation;
- Include a clear implementation timeline with milestones, beginning no later than June 1, 2026, so that meaningful improvements are in place before the start of the 2026-27 school year in August 2026;
- Identify any constraints (i.e., electrical capacity, structural conditions, procurement timelines) that may affect implementation at specific sites, and propose solutions or alternatives where constraints exist; and
- Be consistent with all Measure Y bond program requirements, bond counsel guidance, and applicable facilities standards;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Superintendent shall ensure that implementation of the Plan begins no later than June 1, 2026, and that the Board’s adopted goal is that students return to meaningfully cooler classrooms in August 2026; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Superintendent shall publicly release the assessment of electrical capacity at each OUSD campus conducted during the Facilities Master Plan process, to enable each school community to identify opportunities and constraints for installing current and future cooling systems; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, in recognition of the urgency of the need for near-term heat relief, the Superintendent is directed to identify any actions within existing staff authority, including any procurement activities that can be initiated prior to Board approval of the full Plan, deployment of portable cooling equipment, distribution allocation of staff time, technical resources and/or technology necessary to develop and implement a districtwide passive cooling policy, including training and guidance for teachers and site staff on safe ventilation strategies such as night flushing and effective use of windows and blinds; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that district staff shall provide quarterly reports to the Facilities Committee and an annual report to the Board, with an initial report due to the Board by October 2026, following the opening of the 2026-27 school year; these reports should outline implementation progress, including classrooms served, temperature outcomes where sensor data is available, educator and staff experience of classroom conditions, and recommendations for sustaining and expanding cooling investments in future bond cycles; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution shall take effect immediately upon adoption.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of Education of the Oakland Unified School District this ___ day of _____, by the following vote:

PREFERENTIAL AYE:

PREFERENTIAL NOE:

PREFERENTIAL ABSTENTION:

PREFERENTIAL RECUSE:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSTAINED:

RECUSED:

ABSENT:

CERTIFICATION

We hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of a Resolution passed at the Regular Meeting of the Board of Education of the Oakland Unified School District held on

_____.

OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Jennifer Brouhard
President, Board of Education

Denise G. Saddler, Ph.D.
Interim Superintendent and Interim Secretary,
Board of Education