

West Contra Costa Unified School District
Office of the Superintendent

Friday Memo
January 24, 2020

Upcoming Events – Matthew Duffy

- January 25: West Contra Costa Education Fair, RHS, 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
- January 28: AASAT Meeting, DeJean, 6:00 PM
- January 29: Board of Education, DeJean, 6:30 PM
- January 30: 100th Day
- February 4: Agenda Setting, Superintendent’s Office, 4:30 PM
- February 4: Early Learning TK-2 STEM Night, Olinda ES
- February 6: Early Learning TK-2 STEM Night, Wilson ES
- February 6: Governance Committee, Alvarado, 6:00 PM
- February 6: MDAC, Helms, 6:30 PM
- February 7: MDAC, Kennedy, 9:00 AM
- February 11: Agenda Setting, Superintendent’s Office, 4:30 PM
- February 12: Board of Education DeJean, 6:30 PM
- February 17-21: Presidents’ Week Recess, Schools and Offices Closed

Next Week’s Meeting - Matthew Duffy / Tony Wold

Next week’s Closed Session will begin at 5:00 PM.

We will be discussing an update regarding negotiations with all bargaining units and the roadmap to completing all necessary reductions to mitigate the budget deficit. This will be an important meeting as key dates are quickly upcoming regarding potential Reduction in Force notifications (February 26th and March 11th).

Harbour Way CDE Waiver - Gracie Guerrero

WCCUSD will apply for a waiver from CDE to request that Harbour Way Academy, a community day school, be approved for colocation on the campus of Coronado Elementary and serve grades K-8. Harbour Way is a specialized program for students with significant behavioral and social/emotional needs. More information on the waiver language can be found [here](#).

Budget Update - Tony Wold

The District has begun meeting with all associations toward identifying reductions. At the last board meeting the District outlined the plan to mitigate the \$47.8 million in reductions which is outlined below:

Item	Amount	Timeline
Non-salary Reductions	\$6 million	The total recommended list will be released for stakeholders to view on Thursday, January 30th and will be presented to the Board at the February 12th meeting.

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Management Reductions	\$4 million	This included non-represented (Management) and represented (WCCAA) reductions in positions. This will be discussed in Closed Session on January 29th with actions likely taken by the Board at the February 26th meeting for Certificated and March 11th meeting for Classified.
Site Allocation Reductions	\$2 million	The budget development for next year will include a reduction of \$2 million from site budgets. These budgets will be provided to sites along with staffing allocations in March once other reductions have been identified.
One-time utilization of Trust to Directly Pay OPEB Liability	\$15.8 million	The District will pass a resolution to utilize the trust for a second year to shift the cuts from the 2020 - 2021 school year to the 2021 - 2022 school year to allow for possible budget solutions that may be adopted at the June State budget, or through the November 2020 election to potentially materialize. Should those solutions not occur, the District will begin negotiations with all bargaining units in November 2020 to identify reductions to be in place for the 2021 - 2022 school year.
Consultation / Negotiations with Associations	\$20 million	The District is required to make \$20 million in ongoing reductions. The District has begun the process of working with each of the associations regarding these reductions that will impact staff. The timelines for action regarding Reduction in Force are February 26th for Certificated employees and March 11th for Classified employees.

There will not be a presentation at the next board meeting. The Board will be asked to approve two resolutions to finalize budget mitigations for the current year so that these solutions can be presented as part of the Second Interim report. Those resolutions include making a transfer of \$19.8 million from Fund 17 - Special Reserve to the General Fund and to utilize the Fund 71 Trust to directly pay the OPEB liability of \$15.8 million for the current year rather than the pay as you go method that is currently budgeted. Both of these are one-time solutions that effectively push the current year problem into next year which is what the solutions listed in the chart above are moving toward addressing prior to budget adoption for 2020 - 2021.

Outreach to community groups is still ongoing even with the tight timelines. To ensure that there is some opportunity for feedback regarding the non-salary reductions the District will be releasing a summary of the contracts and budgets that would be reduced to meet the \$6 million target. That summary will be released on Thursday, January 30th. This will allow for public review of the recommendations along with review of what remains in central budgets so that they could provide

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public comment and feedback at the February 12th Board meeting where the material will be presented. The full information will also be published with that Board packet for review.

While the negotiations process is confidential, there are very few options to reduce \$20 million in expenses that do not impact employees. Each association or union utilizes different communication methods to gain input from their members. The District respects those processes and is working diligently not to negotiate in public. Each association will determine the level of detail that they share with members. That sharing may bring forward questions that end up being directed to Board members. We encourage you to not respond to items that may be negotiated and allow the process to continue to move forward. With that said, some of the areas that may be considered to make these reductions include the possibility of laying off positions, increasing class size, potentially suspending stipends and other extra duty pay or compensation, altering work hours, along with consolidating responsibilities. As solutions are identified through the appropriate process they will be presented by the District to the Board. With the potential management reductions we will be bringing forward a series of job description changes later in the Spring to accommodate the work responsibilities that will be shifted due to a loss of positions.

Over the next month or two it will be important for the Board to understand the impact of identifying reductions will have on the broader West Costa Contra Unified School District community and stakeholders. Back in September, we began the process of telling the “budget story” with a review of the Kubler Ross Stages of Grief as it pertains to the budget situation. Through this process we have outlined the timelines and actions that created the current structural deficit. While many of our internal and external stakeholders have moved through the full cycle to acceptance and are focused on solutions, there are still many who feel betrayed, do not understand how this occurred and remain angry and disappointed regarding our situation. This is very natural as every reduction now being considered will have an impact on District operations and ultimately impact students in the classroom. We however are at a point in our timeline where all efforts must now be focused on identifying solutions for implementation.

Board members will have multiple groups and individuals providing input, criticism, and suggestions for reductions. We ask Board members to remember that our responsibility is ultimately to maintain a balanced budget and this will require very hard decisions regarding reductions. The District is strongly working on advocating to the State level to address the lack of educational funding and believes that now is the time to engage in direct lobbying efforts as more and more districts are facing financial hardship. Just this past week, our neighbor San Francisco Unified identified a current year structural deficit of over \$30 million with needed cuts next year of over \$80 million. They join Sacramento, San Diego, Los Angeles, Sweetwater, and Oakland, to name a few, that are urban school districts that collectively need to make more than half a billion in reductions for next school year.

Staff will be bringing recommendations forward beginning with the February 12th board meeting and we will begin the process of making hard decisions starting at that meeting and again February 26th and March 11th to move forward. As feedback is received, we ask that you continue to be focused on the goal of identifying reductions and understand that this process will be painful for all of us and that we must ensure that we remain open to hear the ideas and comments of those that are impacted by the

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reductions, but ultimately stay committed to adopting the measures necessary to meet our budget responsibilities.

Wilson Elementary School Renaming - Marcus Walton

The ad hoc committee voted on Thursday evening to recommend renaming Wilson Elementary School after Michelle Obama. We anticipate bringing the full recommendation to the full board at the February 12 meeting.

Media Stories of Interest - Marcus Walton

The following news articles may be of interest. Copies are attached.

<https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/55195/california-considers-permitting-students-excused-mental-health-days> - California Considers Permitting Students Excused Mental Health Days

<https://richmondstandard.com/richmond/2020/01/21/de-anza-high-teacher-wins-eukel-award/> - De Anza High teacher wins Eukel Award

<https://patch.com/california/pinole-hercules/discussion-set-over-naming-richmond-school-after-michelle-obama> - Discussion Set Over Naming Richmond School After Michelle Obama

MINDSHIFT

California Considers Permitting Students Excused Mental Health Days

By [Katrina Schwartz](#) Jan 23



(Ponomariova_Maria/iStock)

Parents, educators and clinicians are seeing an alarming increase in mental health problems among young people. Various national surveys show the rates of **depression**, **anxiety**, and **suicide** on the rise, but what to do about it is less clear.

In July of 2019, Oregon passed a bill that allows students to take excused absences for mental health related issues. **Students advocated for the bill**, saying it would reduce stigma about mental health issues, and encourage young people to seek the treatment they need.

Now, the California legislature is considering something similar. State Senator **Anthony Portantino** has introduced a bill that would change the education code to allow for mental health related excused absences. For him, mental health is a personal issue.

"I had a brother who took his own life," Portantino said. "And one of the reasons I talk about it is so people understand that mental health issues affect all of us."

He says anything that reduces stigma could go a long way to prevent tragedies like the one his family suffered.

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"It's not the time to be shy. It's the time to bring these conversations out of the shadows so we can help those who need it."

Portantino isn't concerned that students will abuse the excused absences. If anything, he thinks it will take a lot of convincing to help families drop the barriers they hold around mental health.

But what would this really mean to schools?

"Young people are already missing school because of mental health challenges," said Jenn Rader, director of the **James Morehouse Project** at El Cerrito High School just outside of San Francisco. "So if this would make that reality more visible for all of us, and bring into sharper focus for all of us what it is we're all up against, that would be a positive step."

Rader hadn't heard of the legislation, but was intrigued. She'd like to see what results Oregon sees a year into implementation, but agrees with Portantino that reducing stigma around mental health would be valuable.

El Cerrito High operates on a block schedule, which means each student only has four classes a semester with a year's worth of material condensed into each class. That makes it extra difficult to catch up when students miss a lot of instructional time. Rader says there's a clear correlation between students with mental health challenges and absences, especially for those with anxiety.

Dr. Mark Reinecke of the Child Mind Institute says the state needs to tread carefully with legislation like this. He understands the need for parity between mental health and physical health, but says it all depends on the specific situation.

"There are some situations where this entirely sensible and others where it doesn't make sense," Reinecke said.

Take anxiety, for example. Allowing kids with **school avoidance problems** or social anxiety to stay home from "is absolutely the wrong thing to be offering them. For those youngsters, what we want is exposure, we want the youngster to approach the things they fear."

Reinecke says letting anxious students avoid school only reinforces the behavior. But kids aren't doomed to suffer with anxiety forever. Research has show **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy** to be an effective treatment. For a student with debilitating depression, on the other hand, an excused absence to see a therapist may be very helpful.

The problem, says Reinecke, is that parents make these decisions in different ways. Some parents take a lot of convincing to call the school if a child is sick. Others, let them stay home at the slightest sign of fever. Excused absences for mental health issues would be similarly murky, he said.

If you or someone you know may be considering suicide, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (En Español: 1-888-628-9454; Deaf and Hard of Hearing: 1-800-799-4889) or the Crisis Text Line by texting HOME to 741741.

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De Anza High teacher wins Eukel Award

January 21, 2020



De Anza High special education teacher Myrna Hadjirul (middle) was honored for earning the coveted Eukel Award at Warren W. Eukel Annual Awards Dinner at the Diablo Country Club in Diablo on Nov. 21, 2019. (Photo credit: WCCUSD)

De Anza High special education teacher Myrna Hadjirul was honored by the West Contra Costa Unified School District Board of Education last week for earning the Eukel Award.

The award by the Warren W. Eukel Teacher Trust has honored exceptional Contra Costa County K-12 classroom teachers since 1992 who exhibit extraordinary commitment to their students.

Hadjirul is a 22-year veteran teacher who, since joining De Anza High in 2011, has twice won the You Make Difference Award by the Community Advisory Committee for Special Education.

WCCUSD Special Education Director Nick Berger described Hadjirul as a “champion for inclusion” and “a pillar in our movement toward the special Olympics.”

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"If you ever were to walk into Ms. Myrna's classroom you would be amazed at what she does with her special education students," Berger said.

Hadjirul called the honor humbling. At the Board of Ed meeting, she credited De Anza High Assistant Principal Liz Sanders and Principal Summer Sigler for making her success possible. She also urged others to nominate the district's many resourceful and creative teachers.

"As a teacher I have always made it my mission to always grab teachable moments not only to teach my students the curriculum but more importantly life lessons that inevitably shape my students' decisions, behaviors, and most importantly their character," Hadjirul said in a district statement. "Our goal is always to change the mindset of our students and everyone around them about our student's capabilities and abilities."

The Eukel Award is given annually to three Contra Costa County K-12 classroom teachers and comes with a \$10,000 prize that can be used in the manner in which the recipient wishes, the district states. Hadjirul is the 19th WCCUSD teacher to win the award, followed by Pinole Valley High School's Erik Radkiewicz last year.

For a complete list of the winners visit [here](#).

Mike Aldax

Discussion Set Over Naming Richmond School After Michelle Obama

A community meeting will discuss a proposal to rename a Richmond elementary school in honor of former first lady Michelle Obama.

By [Bay City News, News Partner](#)

Jan 19, 2020 1:32 pm PT

Reply (1)

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Former first lady Michelle Obama speaks to guests at the Obama Foundation Summit at Illinois Institute of Technology on October 29, 2019 in Chicago, Illinois. The Summit is an annual event hosted by the Obama Foundation. (Scott Olson/Getty Images)

RICHMOND, CA — A community meeting to discuss a proposal to rename a Richmond elementary school in honor of former first lady Michelle Obama will be held at 6 p.m. Thursday at Grace Lutheran Church, 2369 Barrett Ave.

Wilson Elementary School, named for President Woodrow Wilson, at 629 42nd St. is currently being rebuilt and parents with the school's Parent Teacher Association believe the change will help instill additional pride for students attending at the revamped campus.

Students now attend at a temporary location at the former campus of Portola Middle School in El Cerrito.

"The newly rebuilt school will be the District's initiation in the 21st Century school facility design, featuring flexible learning spaces, which will allow for student and staff collaboration, interaction and flexibility," PTA President Maisha Cole wrote in a letter to the district.

"When the students step into the new school, they will bring a positive attitude about what the future holds for them. We also want the neighboring community to see this new facility as a community resource. We want to keep our children in our school district."

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The idea was submitted to the West Contra Costa Unified School District last September and the board formed an ad hoc committee in October to study the proposal. President Stephanie Hernandez-Jarvis and member Mister Phillips represent the board on the committee.

"We feel as though a name change would be fundamental to this fresh new start," Cole wrote.

"We are prepared to testify as to why we feel that the current name does not reflect who we are as a community, as well as why the name we are proposing is much more fitting."

Board policy 7310 outlines the process for renaming a school. This is the second of two meetings to discuss and hear public input on the proposal.

Community members can also send their comments to the committee via email at communications@wccusd.net.

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