

Published October 25th, 2023

## Lafayette teachers garner community support for salary increase

By Sharon K. Sobotta



Lafayette School District teachers and allies gather outside the Stanley Middle School library prior to the Oct. 18 board meeting. Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

Lafayette School District teachers, who have asked for a 14% raise along with recognition of all of their years of service as educators (regardless which district they've accumulated those years in) crowded into the Oct. 18 school board meeting at Stanley Middle School Library with dozens of teachers and allies from Richmond, Antioch, Moraga, Orinda and Berkeley carrying signs saying, "You can't put students first, if you put teachers last."

On Oct. 13, District Superintendent Brent Stephens sent an email detailing the need for a \$1.8 million budget cut over the next three years in order to accommodate a 12% raise for teachers. Significant efforts are put into raising money for LPIE [Lafayette Parent Instruction Education] to fund state-of-the-art classroom supplies, and art, science and music programs to the extent that there are commercial breaks of sorts embedded in concerts and school activities underscoring the fact that what happens at school is powered by LPIE and inferring that parents should continue giving. LPIE funds are

largely used for tools to help with teaching and some part-time positions relating to art, music and science. Teachers say that while those resources are important, so is the district's need to attract and retain excellent teachers.

Scott Moe, a fifth-grade teacher at Lafayette Elementary School who's been in the district for 27 years, says classrooms are powered by teachers and their students. Moe pointed out at least one important cut that was missing or left unacknowledged in the email that the district sent out. "The list the superintendent sent out was very district-sided and it didn't include cuts we've made. [For example] some years ago, we agreed to a cut in our healthcare coverage. Instead of covering whole families, just the teacher themselves was covered. That money adds up over the years." The cuts made on the backs of teachers, he explained, may be rooted in the hope that teachers will join their spouse's plan. Of course, this begs the question - what about people who don't have spouses or are single parents?

Allie Jones, Instructional Support Teacher at Lafayette Elementary School said she wants the 14% raise teachers are asking for and credit for all her years of service counted. "I'm pretty fired up. I wish the superintendent and the board would understand that what we're asking for is just what's due. We're trying to get a fair wage," Jones says. "I've been in the district more than 20 years and this is the worst it's ever been in terms of feeling undervalued."

Jones gets credit in the district for 12 years of service to the profession, in spite of having over 20. Even if the recognition of those other years doesn't necessarily bump her pay schedule, she says having all of her years of service recognized is an important level of validation. That being said, Jones was heartened by the overwhelming support from fellow teachers. "It felt so good to see Orinda and Acalanes [and teachers from other districts] joining in this," Jones said.

Lindsey Brown is a parent of two students in the district. She not only marched in with the teachers, she made a passionate statement to the board. "The teachers are the heart of the district. The district keeps saying they don't have money for teachers. My view is that teachers are more important than fancy smart boards or anything else in the classroom," she said.

Superintendent Stephens said that although there has been some frustration for both the teachers and the district in reaching an agreement, it ultimately signifies a deep level of care about the success of Lafayette schools. "We know that we are one team with a genuine sense of common purpose," Stephens said. "The District views this process as an ongoing dialogue about our shared priorities and appreciates the engagement of our community to understand the issues we're working to resolve. We continue to feel great respect and gratitude to our amazing and dedicated staff."

Stephens adds that the district is looking forward to sitting down with teachers again next week. On Oct. 27, the District and the Lafayette Teachers Union will meet with a mediator. Meanwhile, although teachers strongly prefer to avoid a strike, over 90% of them indicated they would do so if necessary. For now, however, the teachers and the district are hopeful an agreement can be reached at the bargaining table.

"We are optimistic that we can reach an agreement," Stephens said.

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