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SUPERINTENDENT
Michael E. Hanson

April 9, 2007

Dear Employees of Fresno Unified,

Like everyone who works in our District, I know that you care deeply about our students. We each have a profound professional commitment to provide them with an education that opens the doors to their future, an education we would want for our own children. To achieve this requires a huge effort. For many of our students, we are their best hope for a better life.

Having experienced perhaps my most challenging and exhilarating moments as a middle school teacher, I have the deepest respect and highest regard for the work you do. Everything I have done from the moment I walked through the doors of Fresno Unified has been focused on supporting your success for the sake of our students. I write today out of that respect to explain to you directly why we have reached an impasse in negotiations with the Fresno Teachers' Association.

First, we disagree over instructional time. In Fresno, elementary teachers in grades 1 through 3 are contracted to teach fewer instructional minutes than the rest of the elementary faculty. In comparison to neighboring districts, this means students in grades 1 through 3 receive approximately one month less of instruction per year. Students who are not performing on grade level by the 3rd grade have just a 20% chance of ever catching up. Only 23% of Fresno's third graders last year were reading on grade level – 77% were not. How can we justify teaching them fewer hours than children in Madera or Clovis when they are so far behind? It is both our proposal and our responsibility to increase instructional minutes provided by the regular classroom teacher in Grades 1 through 3 to match Grades 4 through 6 – as is the practice in most districts in the state.

Second, we have offered a compensation package totaling more than \$24 million. This represents approximately a 10 percent increase in teacher salaries and benefits over the last two years. With this year's proposed increase of 6.67% (5.5% of which would be a fully retroactive salary increase), Fresno teachers would receive total compensation second to only Selma Unified in Fresno County. This is not to say that our teachers and all school employees – across this state and across this country – earn what they truly deserve. As we have brought our District back to financial solvency, I have made increasing employee compensation a priority, because it is the right thing to do and, because we need to be competitive to attract the best and the brightest. We now offer a compensation package that surpasses even our wealthier neighboring districts. And we have done that within very real and serious fiscal constraints.

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Twenty-two months ago Fresno Unified was near bankruptcy, and made deep cuts in support services – nurses, counselors, librarians and classified employees. There were no funds available for emergencies. We are required by law to have reserves set aside for unexpected one-time contingencies such as a sudden spike in energy costs like the one we experienced last year. Twenty-two months ago, we were on the verge of state takeover, in part because the District had made ongoing commitments with one-time monies. This is like using your one-time IRS refund to join a gym. The expense continues even when the money runs out.

If we used one-time monies to pay for the raise proposed by FTA we would immediately be deficit spending, with a \$7.5 million deficit as of July 1, 2007. Our reserve would disappear in less than three years and we would be in the same position we were in twenty-two months ago. This cannot be allowed to happen. It is my responsibility to keep Fresno Unified solvent.

In the last two years, we have moved quickly and aggressively to increase resources and improve support services for all our employees and school sites for the simple reason that it was the right thing to do. For example:

- We have invested more than \$40 million to hire more than 200 additional teachers, counselors, and social workers to provide comprehensive academic and social/emotional support services to students.
- We opened two new schools two years ago and will open two more this summer.
- In response to a FCMAT audit of our technology systems, we have launched a massive overhaul of the technology infrastructure to provide faster, more efficient and effective inter-district communication and internet access.
- Beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, all year-round schools will return to a traditional calendar. We went from 21 year-round schools two years ago to no year-round schools beginning the 07-08 school year.
- We have reduced combination classes in Fresno Unified by one-third and plan to do more.
- We engaged FCMAT to conduct a comprehensive audit to improve our Purchasing/Warehouse procedures and are actively implementing their recommendations.
- We are providing more nutritious lunches with healthier choices and fresh fruit and vegetables from the valley.
- We are building a new Central Kitchen that will enhance the quality and nutrition of the 72,000 meals prepared daily for Fresno Unified students.

Finally, I want to address concerns about safety. I have children that attend Fresno Unified schools. I will never be less than vigilant about safety. Like any large urban city, we are the sixth largest city in the state, Fresno must confront and cope with real problems of crime, gangs and violence. These community issues affect our schools. Last month I met with the Governor and city officials to address gang violence. As a District, we may not be responsible for these problems, but we are obligated to do everything within our power and authority to help mitigate them. We have moved swiftly and forcefully to provide more security, better communication and greater community involvement to ensure Fresno schools are safe learning environments.

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The following are some of the safety initiatives undertaken by this administration:

- Establishment of a Commission on Campus Safety which will conduct multiple forums with students, families, community and staff to identify concerns, trends and ways to improve campus safety.
- Installation of door locks that are lockable from the inside of every classroom, currently in process.
- Addition of two Fresno Police Officers at FUSD sites including a coordinating sergeant who will act as point person and supervisor of all our School Resource Officers, who up until now reported to different area coordinators throughout the city.
- Establishment of police presence at every FUSD high school campus.
- Addition of two campus safety assistant supervisors who will supervise over 60 campus safety assistants, performing training, and assisting principals in conducting proper and consistent supervisory practices on secondary campuses.
- Addition of two fully equipped safety vehicles.
- Replacement of two-way radios with blackberry devices to provide more efficient, secure communication for more employees district wide.
- Requirement that every site review their safety plans and identify outstanding concerns, which will be addressed with Dr. Linda Hauser, Chief Academic Officer
- Institution of an identification process including an identification badge to be worn by all employees.
- Improvement of visitor signs in process at every campus.

In conclusion, student learning will always be the number one priority in this District while I am your Superintendent. We have offered our teachers a fair, competitive and responsible compensation package without decreasing critical instructional resources for students or putting our District at financial risk. We are moving far and fast on a variety of safety initiatives. Finally, we are proposing that all elementary grade students receive the same number of instructional minutes from their regular classroom teacher for the benefit of student learning.

I hope you enjoyed your spring break and have returned to school refreshed and recommitted to our important work ahead. I am deeply grateful for all that you do for the children of Fresno Unified.

Sincerely,

Michael E. Hanson
Superintendent