

District Union/Organization Statements  
August 11, 2021 Board Meeting

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Good evening. I am Anita Johnson, President of the Mt. Diablo Education Association. My pronouns are she and her.

MDEA is a united group of educators working together for the benefit of the students of the Mt. Diablo Unified School District.

We have been hearing a lot about the importance of having high expectations of students even when they are experiencing challenging circumstances. I agree that high expectations are good and I have high expectations of this Board and your managers even though we are all experiencing challenging circumstances.

In his speech at the beginning of the year meetings, Dr. Clark spoke about some statistics regarding the district's financial situation. I was not sent a link to view the speech and so I did not hear what he said. Members have reported to me that he seemed to care more about these numbers than about people. He gave the impression that he regrets that the district is spending money on their salaries.

As people who spend our time working directly with the students and worrying about them when we are not working, MDEA members believe that people are the most important thing that our students need. What could be more important than having people on staff to develop relationships with students and nurture their growth?

Members have reported that they heard Dr. Clark say that our district spends 94% of our resources on salaries. These statistics can vary based on what date the data is collected and how "resources" are defined. I based my calculation on the most accurate data available – the Estimated Actuals from the June Budget Adoption. This report shows that last year, our district spent \$208 M on salaries out of total Expenditures of \$401 M – a ratio of 52%.

If we expand the question to include both salary and benefits, these total \$ 328 M and the ratio is 80%.

Even if we narrow the question to only unrestricted funds, the total of salaries and benefits in this portion of the budget is \$180 M out of Total Expenditures of \$202 M – 89%.

Still not 94%.

And why is this statistic so important?

The Unrestricted portion of the budget is that part that is not controlled by specific spending rules, while the Restricted portion of the budget usually includes such items as money received in special program from the state and federal government or from grants for specific programs. When analysts compare district budgets, they might compare the unrestricted portion to avoid variances caused by special programs.

We know that MDUSD's percent of unrestricted budget on salaries and benefits is somewhat higher than the average for many districts, but it is not the highest.

To me, salaries and benefits are the best things that a district could spend money on because it means there are more people developing relationship with students, which is what our work is all about.

Some of the reasons our district might be higher than others are that MDUSD spends less on non-people items than other districts. For example, our electricity is mostly free because we invested in solar panels. We spend less on gasoline than many other districts because few of our students ride buses. We spend less on computers and less on building repairs because we do not have parcel taxes or as much supplemental funding as other districts.

Comparisons between districts can be helpful for identifying ways to improve efficiency, but no one should blindly based decisions on such benchmarks.

Which brings us back to the question: If Dr. Clark regrets spending money on salaries, what does he want to spend money on?

I know that some of you Trustees would prefer to have more funding for the reserve account or the ending balance. I want to make sure you understand that managing this statistic would not help achieve that goal. If the district had some how had \$20 M less in salaries, total expenses would also be \$20 M less and the ratio would still be 88%.

The recent FCMAT report indicated that the district's financial situation is stressed and suggested that the Board make strategic changes to correct problems. While we disagree with some of the statements in the report, FCMAT is a reputable agency whose concerns should be taken seriously. We agree that the Board needs to make strategic changes, but continue to believe that regular salary increases are an important responsibility to employees that should not be shirked. The most important thing our students need is a qualified teacher in every classroom and a qualified individual in every position.

The recent SIR report offered many more important and more specific suggestions, which included:

- Increasing trust with employees
- Continuing to stress equity
- Implementing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for students.

I encourage the Superintendent and the Board to focus more on these more important goals. There are the high expectations we have of you. Yes, these will be difficult to achieve in light of the challenging financial situation, but we expect no less of you. It would be wrong of us to lower our expectations because of the challenges.

As the SIR report pointed out, a culture of trust and shared values is necessary for successful work with students. I know it is possible to rebuilt trust and believe it is possible for the individuals involved to do so. It will not be easy, but we must do so for the sake of the students.

On a separate but also important note, I want to call everyone's attention to the ballots that just appeared in our mailboxes regarding the attempted recall of Governor Newsom. I encourage everyone to vote NO on the recall question. Our Governor has made many good decisions and is extremely supportive of our public school system. We must all show our support and appreciation by taking part in the rejection of this proposed recall. Please complete and send it your ballot today.

I know this is going to be another unique and challenging year for us. I look forward to working with all of you and hope you have a great year!

Thank you.