

Thank you so much for the opportunity to address you this evening as both a concerned citizen and local teacher's union president. I'm here to explain some things from the union's perspective about this year's negotiation process, not just to you, but also to the community and my fellow teachers.

What everyone should know is that Bear Valley Unified School District is in a hiring crisis. As the board, you are well aware of this. We aren't getting nearly as many applicants for positions as we used to in the past, and even when those prospective employees are called back for an interview, many don't show up. If they're offered the job, many go elsewhere, either because they can't find a place to live in the valley, and/or they realize they can make more in other districts. If we can't retain new teachers, what happens? Class sizes continue to go up and the quality of education we offer our community declines. Once we reach the tipping point and class sizes are maxed out, who teaches those classes without teachers? Well, we currently have a shortage of substitutes, so it will be admin, and they already have too much on their plates.

We, of course, realize that the economic issues we have here in the Big Bear Valley are not necessarily unique to us, many of them are systemic and widespread. We do, however, have the unique challenge of living and working in a resort town with a limited inventory of homes. Costs pre-pandemic have skyrocketed to unprecedented levels, up over 36% in just one year, with little hope for a reprieve. At the last board meeting, the negotiating team provided you with data we compiled of the San Geronimo comps, from districts located in either San Bernardino or Riverside county; this list of districts was provided to us by the California Teachers Association. On all of the lists of data we aggregated, whether it was starting salary, top salary, or health and welfare benefits, Bear Valley Unified School District falls near the bottom, every time, or at least in the bottom third. This isn't a new phenomenon, this has been the case for as long as anyone in the union can remember. The only time we're near the top is when you compare housing costs.

At our last negotiations meeting, we were told that our comps were off and our numbers for the housing market weren't accurate, so we've spent time re-compiling the data using only San Bernardino County school districts and housing prices from realtor.com; on all of these new lists, we're still in the bottom third in all categories. We'll be providing you with that research at the end of my comments. But regardless of where we fall on these lists...we need a reality check...what's it really like to live here?

The median housing prices we provided last month were an average of Big Bear Lake and Big Bear City, which fell in the \$620,000 range. We've received access to a sales comps list from a local realtor and for March 2022, Big Bear City came in at \$602,995 with 55 total sales and average square foot costs of \$404. Since Big Bear Lake and Fawnskin are much higher, our original number was low, if anything. Bottom line, if we use the 28/36 rule which states that your mortgage payment or rent cost shouldn't be more than 28% of your monthly pre-tax income and 36% of your total debt, what teacher can afford to live here? In regards to housing costs, this means that the average teacher should not spend more than about \$1700 and the starting teacher should not spend more than about \$1200 monthly. If the average two bedroom home here to RENT is \$2150, then any teacher, even established ones, cannot afford to live here. If a teacher were lucky enough to find and purchase a home for \$620,000 with 20% down at 4.8% interest, their house payment would be \$2665 per month. Only someone who is established and lived here for years, or someone who can live in their parent's house or with roommates and share living expenses, can live in the Big Bear Valley.

So here is the crux of the issue...how do we retain our new teachers and attract incoming teachers to our area, when they can work in our own backyard like Apple and Lucerne Valley, or even Yucaipa, and make 6-10% more, with a lower cost of living? Or, they could go to Rim of the World and make slightly less, BUT they could have all of their health and welfare benefits paid for as part of their employment package into perpetuity. Sure,

we've always had the "blue skies and green trees" factor here, which has acted like an "off-schedule" attraction for many, many years. But pre-pandemic, we also had some of the lowest costs of living in the Southern California area. Things have changed...according to areavibes.com, Big Bear gets a rating of F for housing and cost of living, and a D+ for employment. And now that Big Bear is the mecca for AirBandB, those blue skies are more polluted from all the traffic that is now a constant here. Can you go to the grocery store and find what you need during vacation times or even the average weekend? I know the answer to that, and it's a firm no! We just drive down the hill to get what we need...yet at \$6 a gallon, that's no longer an option for most.

Real talk here....How can we rely on former students whose parents still live here to come back and start their careers in the valley? That's what we did in the 2021-22 school year, when almost every single hire was a former student. What happens when they want to buy their own home, start their own families, and settle down? They will take the money they saved living in their childhood bedroom for a few years and buy their own home out of state, just like my own daughter just did, and we will have lost that investment in human capital. We will have a revolving door of teachers every single year. Here's what we know for sure.... Older teachers will continue to retire; what is the board's plan for retaining the ones we hire to replace them? While we have a 22% overall reserve/a 16.9% unrestricted reserve, we have to do something.

As a teachers union, we are very aware of the predicament that management and the board is in. First of all, we all must keep the district financially solvent. For those that don't fully understand how this works, the district is required to use a funding formula which shows the county that three years out we can still afford to continue to pay our teachers and run the school district. That being said, the current funding formula is based on two extreme assumptions, the first of which is that we will be losing 200 students between now and October. This assumption was based on the passing of a COVID vaccine mandate, and the regular amount of declining enrollment. The only thing is, now that we've settled for our raise for this year, the governor has announced that the vaccine mandate for Summer 2022 is off the table, and while it MAY be on the table for Summer 2023, it's not a sure thing. It may NEVER happen! These numbers that severely diminish our reserve in the projections are also based on the assumption that the current state funding formula which looks at past years' average daily attendance and drives how much money we get from the state, will become severely diminished in the 2023-24 school year due to the attendance during the height of the pandemic. Every single school district in this state will be in the same boat, and I believe that whoever the governor is, they will realize that they can't send every single school district in the state over the fiscal cliff because those districts had poor attendance in the 2020-21 and 21-22 school years. What I'm saying is that I understand that we have to make those assumptions now, but do we continue to make them next year when we aren't sure a vaccine mandate for Covid will ever become a reality? We have real issues now and that's hiring and retaining teachers. So, let's please stop with the "sky is falling" routine about a potential vaccine mandate and fiscal cliff situation, and use our unprecedented reserve to fix the problem in front of us, as soon as possible.

I sent out a survey to our teachers on Monday night, and 71 of them responded. I was wondering how many of them do extra work either inside or outside of the district because they need the money for basic necessities. Of the respondents, 51% do extra duties within the district for this purpose, and 11 of our teachers have a second job outside of the school district, most of which need that second job to make ends meet. Teachers who are having to split their time between their career and a second job are probably unable to give all of their attention to their students and doing their best job as an educator. This should be a serious concern for the board and management. I also asked the question, "In the last calendar year, on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being seriously considered, have you ever considered leaving BVUSD to pursue a teaching contract elsewhere or any other job outside of education?" Of the 71 respondents, an overwhelming 42 teachers gave this an answer of a 4 or a 5, meaning that they have or are seriously considering leaving our area to pursue other opportunities. I asked teachers to explain why they would consider leaving and 35 of them stated that the salary isn't enough and they can make more money elsewhere. Health and Welfare package was also a

consideration for 25 of them. Sadly, 27 of them said they are burned out on teaching. Cost of living in Big Bear is also a concern for many. One of our highly respected teachers summed this situation up well, and stated, "A meaningful raise would go a long way in mitigating some of these situations and prove that the Bear Valley Unified board of education and management team appreciate all that their teachers have done and continue to do every day. If higher compensation and respect for the job teachers do continue to be things this district chooses to fight us on, I will leave. I took a \$10,000 salary cut and chose to accept a terrible benefits package to move to this district ten years ago. Back then, it was worth it to work in an excellent school district. But, things have changed. The shine is off this apple. Bear Valley is an average school district that does not appreciate and respect its teachers. A wonderful benefits package and a \$15,000 per year raise await me in a district only a 25 minute drive away."

The raise we have accepted, as long as it is also approved by the membership once we hope it is approved by you all, has a contingency factor that if we don't lose the 200 students predicted by management, we will be back at the table in the fall. As a negotiating team, if we are re-elected, we're looking forward to finding a way to increase teacher salaries in a way that helps teachers along each month, instead of waiting until the end of the year, when we usually receive a retroactive raise. As a union, we believe that while we will unfortunately continue to see declining enrollment, next year, and beyond, we will not see the drastic drop predicted in the near future, and that the powers that be in California will have to address and change the current funding formula to stop districts throughout the state from falling off that fiscal cliff. This means that we should easily be able to provide our teachers with a more reasonable salary which will help to address cost of living disparities.

Thank you so much for your time, as well as the increases in salaries that you've already agreed to. I look forward to speaking with you again in the near future, and to working as a team to address these serious issues within our school district and community.