

**Statement for the February 11, 2020 Kentfield School Board Meeting re. “Section M. Expenditure Reductions for 2020-21, 5 PM”**

By Heather McPhail Sridharan, President, Kentfield School District Board  
hmcphailsridharan@kentfieldschools.org

Thank you very much for making the time to attend our board meeting this afternoon. Given the critical significance and gravity of the next agenda item on expenditure reductions for the 2020-21 school year, I want to provide some guidance on how we decided to structure this part of our meeting.

Over the last several months, it has been our sincere intention to provide an open and transparent process for discussion of budget expenditure reductions for all stakeholders in our community. With this goal in mind, we structured this section as follows:

We will start with a brief update from our district’s attorney, Josh Stevens, on the process ahead from a legal perspective.

Then, we will hear an update from Sarah Killingsworth and Quoc Tran, who are the Board Members assigned to our Finance Committee, about the important work of the Finance Committee over the past six weeks. Please note that there are two documents that are attached to the agenda which will be referenced in their update (**Finance Committee Summary of Discussion with Potential Savings 2020** and **KSD Salaries and Benefits**). Printed copies of these documents, and all others referenced in the agenda for this section, are available here in this meeting.

We will then hear from Liz Schott, our Superintendent, with her recommendations for expenditure reductions. Note that there is an attachment for her update in the agenda, **Superintendent's Expenditure Reductions Recommendations 2020**, and it is also available here in printed form.

We will then move into the Public Comment section when we invite all members of our community to speak for up to three minutes. For efficiency’s sake, we have organized this section by the topics from the Finance Committee Summary

document. For example, I will ask those who wish to speak about “District Administration” to line up first at the podium. Then, we will move to “Site Administration,” and so on through the list of topics outlined in the Finance Committee Summary document. Note that there is an “Other” section at the end to allow for anyone to address an area related to expenditure reductions for the 2020-21 budget not already identified on the document.

We intend to allow everyone who wishes to address our board during Public Comment the opportunity to do so once for up to three minutes per person. I will call speakers up individually. Please state your name before you speak, and Maureen will alert you once your three minutes are up. Keep in mind that while alternatives being discussed today all affect individual people, all comments should be focused on programs and positions versus the individuals currently in these roles.

In the interest of maintaining a forum of civility and mutual respect for all stakeholders in this process, we request that the audience remains quiet during the comments and refrains from any applause or verbal commentary in response to speakers. We should all appreciate that it takes a great deal of bravery to get up and speak at a school board meeting candidly and with honesty. As such, we will continue to enforce a forum of mutual respect and civility.

Once all public comments have been completed, we will take a 15 minute break. Then the board will reconvene to discuss possible expenditure reductions for the 2020-21 school year. By the end of the discussion, our goal is to provide direction to staff to prepare a resolution authorizing agreed upon cuts for consideration at the February 25, 2020 Special Board Meeting.

Please note that during the time of board deliberation, we will not be accepting any further public comment or questions. Our deliberations will be in open session and we may have questions for staff that will be made. But ultimately, the board deliberation part of the meeting is a time for board discussion on the very difficult budget decisions we need to make as elected public officials by the Greenbrae and Kentfield voters on how to best serve the needs of all students in the Kentfield School District while keeping the district fiscally sound.

As a reference, I also want to provide some important context for the discussion happening today.

During our December 2019 board meeting, district administrative staff recommended that we can meet our financial obligations for the next three years only after reducing \$1 million in expenditures in the 2020-21 projected budget. This was not unexpected since we knew that by giving a 2% salary increase for 2019-2020 and a 2.5% salary increase for 2020-2021 to our valued teachers and staff, we would need to make expenditure reductions for the 2020-2021 year.

Last spring, we listened to, and agreed with feedback from our teachers and community during negotiations with the KTA (our teachers's union) that giving all of our teachers/staff a raise is an important budget priority, even if it means making difficult decisions regarding reductions of programs and staff. The KTA committed to being part of the collaborative process to help recommend the cuts necessary to balance our budget and were very active, instrumental participants throughout the Finance Committee meetings over the past six weeks.

As board members, we take our fiduciary responsibility seriously to make prudent financial decisions for the short and long-term health of our district on behalf of all our students. Our priorities and values are reflected in our latest District Strategic Plan, which we just completed through a collaborative process with balanced participation from 40 stakeholders across our district.

Throughout the ensuing discussion, we encourage everyone to keep in mind our [Strategic Plan](#)'s District Goals identified in the plan and highlighted on the screen.

- 1. We aim to produce balanced budgets that fund engaging programs we can afford.**
- 2. We want to attract and retain excellent teachers and staff who hold high expectations for all our students.**
- 3. We are committed to eliminating the achievement gap in the Kentfield School District.**

On January 9th, we sent a letter to our entire KSD Community outlining our directive to the Finance Committee to meet weekly in order to identify potential savings and recommendations for expenditure reductions at our Feb 11th board meeting. Shortly, we will hear the Finance Committee's summary of feedback by Sarah and Quoc. As with all of our Board Committees, the Finance Committee meetings are always open to the public. Meeting schedules and annotated agendas from these meetings are located in the Finance Committee section of the KSD website. Transparency and open communication are critical values of this board. We are always open to feedback on how we can improve, but know that we have intentionally tried to create a collaborative process that is fully open and transparent for all of our stakeholders.

Finally, it can not be overstated how difficult, emotional, and deeply personal this process has been for all of us on the board. Among the five of us, we have ten students currently attending Bacich and Kent, and three recent proud graduates of the Kentfield School District. In an ideal world, we would not be making any cuts to our truly exceptional program. But unfortunately, we do not have that choice. We have been elected by the voters of Greenbrae and Kentfield to provide fiscal oversight to the Kentfield School District, and today we have to make extremely difficult choices and trade-offs for the fiscal solvency of our district.

Rest assured that we have listened to and considered all reports and insight gathered from our Finance Committee, and carefully read and responded to scores of email from our community. It is important to emphasize that no decisions have been made yet by our board, and we intend to use the many insightful recommendations received to date and made today as a departing point for our deliberations in open session. We do not take this process lightly and remain committed to meet our community's expectations that KSD students have the highest quality teachers paid competitive salaries, and that retention of our amazing teachers/staff is a priority.

In that spirit, let's not forget why we are here. Throughout the upcoming discussion, let's continue to ask ourselves and remind each other, "What is in the best interest of our students?" so that we prioritize our students' needs in all of our decision-making tonight. Thank you.

