



Where Do I Stand?

A Statement by Board Member Scott Schmerelson on Day 3 of the Teacher Work Stoppage

The repeated message to Board Members, over the last several months, was that the only way to avoid a strike was for the Board to speak with one voice. I have struggled with this concept because it is clear to everyone, who is paying attention, that the one voice that the Board majority supports is that of Austin Beutner.

I very publicly opposed hiring Mr. Beutner and nothing in my experience with him since last May has inspired confidence in his ability to provide effective leadership, accountability or transparency in his efforts, as a non-educator, to manage our school district and the future of public education in Los Angeles. I can no longer allow Mr. Beutner to speak for me or to suggest that the massive public relations, and often misinformation, campaign that he is waging represents my views about the current teachers strike. We need to end the strike and get back to our teachers teaching and our kids learning.

My constituents, and parents throughout the District, are demanding to know just where I stand. I will tell you: As a retired LAUSD teacher, counselor, and principal, I dedicated my life and career serving LAUSD kids. I continue to stand with the kids. For me, this means that ***I Stand with Teachers*** because today they are standing for what's best for students.

Our teachers are the foundation of our mission to provide a quality public education and opportunity for every child that passes through our school gates. They are dedicated professionals who work hard to serve our kids despite the very trying conditions for our families and their families that come with teaching in an urban school district like LAUSD. Our teachers deserve respect and fair compensation.

I also believe that too many of our classrooms are too crowded to truly serve our students. For example, how can we say that we are putting kids first when there are 45 students in an Algebra class? The recent Neutral Fact Finder between the parties agreed that "lower class sizes are one of the best predictors of successful teaching and student success." He also agreed that "lowering class size may be one of the keys to increasing ADA, and maintaining and recruiting students to LAUSD."

We need to find a way to significantly lower class size, not based on misleading district averages, but at every school site where there are just too many students in one room for the effective teaching and personalization to which we lend so much lip service.

I also agree that we need to work much harder to provide more support staff at all our schools. As a retired principal, I can tell you that our parents do not understand, nor should they, why many of our schools only have a nurse one day a week. We absolutely need more social workers, librarians and college counselors. How can we constantly talk about 100% graduation, and our students being college prepared, if our secondary students do not have adequate and easy access to a college counselor?

I am not convinced that we have tried our hardest to identify additional resources to fund what our kids need. This point became extraordinarily clear to me last June when Dr. McKenna and I put forward a resolution to place a parcel tax on the ballot in November based on polling that predicted ample voter support for a sensible measure to increase funding for our schools. Yet, by the narrowest Board majority, our resolution was defeated. In November, voters approved nine of the ten parcel tax or school bond measures on the ballot in Los Angeles County.

Instead of repeating the "doom, gloom and heading for bankruptcy" predictions that we have heard for decades, I believe that it is Mr. Beutner's job to honestly identify sources of funding buried in our existing budget, and the revenue growth predicted for next year, that could be creatively sourced and invested in the students who need smaller classes and adequate support services now.

LAUSD has a nearly \$2 billion reserve. Of course, we have financial commitments and need to plan for rainy days. Nevertheless, I believe that Mr. Beutner could at least temporarily repurpose a larger share of this reserve, for the benefit of kids, that could be repaid when additional sources of revenue have been identified and secured. We also need to work with state officials to increase school funding and resources to reflect the values we hold dear as Californians but such efforts do not offer immediate solutions for our students.

As a democratically elected trustee, sworn to protect our children and the long term stability of Los Angeles Unified, I believe that there are resources available to end this strike. What I do not see from Austin Beutner, and his supporters, is the political will to substitute constructive negotiations for the fear mongering, expensive taxpayer funded ads, slanted editorials and endless press conferences.

I am but one voice and one vote on the Board, but I believe that the posturing must stop and a sincere and adequate offer put on the table that will better serve our students and end this strike.

This is where I stand.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott M. Schmerelson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Scott M. Schmerelson
Board Member, District 3