

Meleah Hall

Why do you want to be a School Board Director?

My experiences teaching students phonics to calculus in special and general education gives me an important insight into our schools and knowledge of what works. I have worked with students who have developed from being retained twice to receiving the Who's Who in America High School Award within one year. I have also worked with students who were going to be retained and within four weeks they began to score at proficient and advanced levels. I teach with the precision a surgeon conducts a procedure and I pay attention to detail like a lawyer preparing for a trial. I would bring this same attitude of excellence to each board meeting.

I do not have a single-issue focus other than high expectations for all students. I learned to code in elementary school with my peers. In high school I learned to etch circuit boards, run DNA electrophoresis and conduct lung cancer research. I want the same for BUSD students. This is why I am applying.

What strengths would you bring to the School Board?

As the After School Coordinator I was responsible for the development, recruitment, organization and implementation of the program. In addition I was responsible for the budgets, salaries, contacts, ordering, data collection and reporting. Using my after school model, the district was awarded the largest 21st Century grant the State of California awarded that year. This program was a successful strategy to reconnecting eighth grade retained students. I also have been responsible for hiring and training over 30 staff and leading CDE onsite reviews as an assistant principal of a school for children with special needs.

I have been the president or coordinator of a number of committees including; ELAC, Site Council, State Testing Coordinator, Healthy Start and 21st Century Planning Grant Coordinator, and a Board Member for the Hendrix Music Academy. I received high marks in regards to how community members felt the resources were utilized.

What are your three top priorities for Berkeley public schools?

Intervene Early and Often to Promote Safe Schools and Healthy Students.

It is not possible to separate student success from ensuring that other social/emotional and health needs are addressed. Often parents or students reach out for help once a crisis has occurred. A counselor and I created a Social/Emotional Needs self-assessment. . It is also critical that school officials regularly monitor for bullying and remind students of how to report bullying in a safe manner. Bullying often is the root of school violence. Expand the school garden programs.

Fiscal Management and Cost Saving Measures

Adopt a fiscally sound budget and regularly monitor fiscal health. Investigate ways to reduce out of pocket costs for health insurance for staff.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Focus

I will advocate for science and technology to be infused into every classroom at every level. This includes special and general education. I also would advocate for a free computer take home program for students. Introduce coding to elementary students so that middle and high school students can build upon what they already have learned. It is also important to continue the development of the district's assistive technology program for students in special education.

How would you work with your fellow Board members and Superintendent to address these priorities?

In developing the social/emotional survey I would create an online survey to assess what types of concerns BUSD students and families face. I would work with counselors and local mental health agencies to develop an appropriate survey for our youth and the wrap around services to support them in difficult seasons.

In regards to the budget I will look at ways BUSD can implement cost saving measures. These include analysis of worker's compensation cases to see how the injuries can be prevented through safe practices and procedures. Expanding the recycling programs and creating a student led computer refurbishing program modeled after OTX-West. I will also investigate how other districts and communities fund visual and performing arts.

I would propose we as governance team would initiate collaborative relationships with STEM professionals in our community. I think it is important that we assess what is needed to best prepare our students to be competitive in the future and also in regards to Career Technical Education. I would propose we analyze the district's curriculum to ensure all students are aware of the variety of careers available in STEM. I would also propose district wide skype interviews with leaders in STEM arena.

How does your experience and knowledge lend itself to promoting the District goals of addressing the opportunity gap and the 2020 Vision?

I know the opportunity gap can be closed because I have seen it done. I have seen students who read at the pre-K and K level in 8th grade jump two to four reading levels in a year. I have seen students increase their attendance by 60%. I have seen entire communities of Laos and Mien students become reengaged through my after school program's outreach. I have seen students go from writing a sentence to writing powerful moving essays about the Khmer Rouge and document their families' journey using my BREP writing curriculum.

In order to achieve the 2020 Vision one must not start from the deficit model. I believe in using the strengths of each student and their communities. From my experience parents of students who are not reaching their potential often don't know what else to do. They want the support. It is time to reengage these communities as laid out in the BHS WASC report. It is time to recruit members of all communities to sit on school committees.

It is also critical for success of African American students to create a viable structure for the over 40 year old African American Studies Department. Diversity is a benefit to Berkeley High School. To ensure all students are able to take classes the AAS program should collaborate with all small schools to provide classes. BUSD should consider improving upon AAS and creating a exemplar Ethnic Studies Department.

What are the greatest assets and strengths of BUSD?

BUSD students are the heart of our district. Our students are gifted and talented. They each possess dreams and visions. The students have a social justice perspective that is refreshing for such a young population. Often people will point to parents and say they are the reason students are not succeeding. From my experience BUSD is comprised of parents who are serious about their student's education. At times they may not know how to best support their student or where to get help. I do not believe that Berkeley Parents are a deficit to BUSD. Far from that they are involved and are a resource that can be better resourced and connected with. Certificated staff, classified staff, school crossing guards, security guards, custodians, secretaries, nurses, after school program employees, parent resource center, and counselors each plays a role in the success of BUSD. The Berkeley Respective Communities and Businesses are an important asset to BUSD. The dedicated members of this community have donated time, resources and knowledge to provide a high quality of education. I believe the present momentum is what is needed to make unprecedented gains.

What do you see as your primary role and responsibilities as a School Board Director?

In order to provide excellence in education I must collaborate with the school board members, BUSD staff and community members to set the vision and goals of the district. I will perform the duties as director with an understanding that agreements made will impact the future of students for many years to come. As a member of the governance team I will be charged with balancing community interests and values, legal requirements, educational research, district data, and district capacity. I will be charged with aligning any decisions that are made with established law, district policy and collective bargaining agreements.

As a director I will help establish the direction of BUSD through the establishment of the vision and goals of the district. I also will be charged with hiring and evaluating the superintendent and adopting and overseeing the annual budget. It is also vital to demonstrate support of the needs that are brought before the board as well as engage the community in creative ways.

How does an effective School board ensure opportunities for families and community members to express a diverse range of views to inform Board deliberations on important policy issues?

Recruit individuals to be on the Brown Act Committees. Recruit parents to apply for both district wide and school specific governing boards. It is important that information is disseminated in the appropriate languages and in a manner that is easy accessible to all families and community members. Just as a teacher I believe ongoing assessments is critical for success the same is true for community engagement. We must have ongoing measures to obtain both qualitative and quantitative measures.

Effective school boards also attend community events and organize study groups to let the families and community members know that we are approachable. It is important to demystify government and empower all constituents through civic engagement education on ways they can become involved.

What has been your involvement with public schools and / or in the community?

I have provided free tutoring over a decade. I have also worked as an assistant principal, Special Education Teacher, and General Education Teacher. I have developed and coordinated after school programs as well as coached basketball.