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August 19, 2019

Re: An Open Letter to the Stakeholders of the La Center School District

Dear Parents, Students, Staff and Community Members,

By now many of you have heard that the La Center Education Association, the local WEA union representing teachers, has threatened to strike and delay the beginning of school if their bargaining demands are not met. The district has been in negotiations with LCEA since June 4, and we have continued to meet throughout the summer.

I want everyone to know that we have great teachers with one of the highest education and experience rates in the entire state. The district and the board of directors want to pay teachers every dollar that the district, and by extension, you as taxpayers, can *sustainably* afford. We've all read the reports that districts to the south are currently reducing staff and programs for students due to the unsustainability of budget decisions made during last year's negotiations. We are trying to avoid making the same mistakes.

Our teachers agreed to a one year contract last year that gave them a 7.6% raise and represented every dollar the state gave us for teacher salaries due to the McCleary lawsuit. Additionally, we added another \$649,781 from funds meant for other student programs in an attempt to get our average teacher's salary near those districts around us.

Over the summer bargaining process, the district has continued to look for additional budget dollars and ways to trim expenses so we can offer teachers as much as possible, while maintaining sustainability. Our current best offer gives teachers every dollar the state has designated for teachers and an additional \$665,740 meant for other programs and services. This will allow our highest-paid teachers to make \$90,393 for a 185 day contract and represents a 21.7% pay increase over the last 3 years, an amount we think is quite reasonable.

You may hear the argument that the district has grown a healthy ending fund balance and we should use that money to pay teachers additional salary. Our ending fund balance is our savings account and obviously, using your savings to make ongoing payments does not work

for sustainability. These dollars are for emergency situations and for the anticipated one-time costs associated with opening the new middle school.

It is my sincere hope that we are able to come to a sustainable resolution to this situation prior to the first day of school. However, the board is committed to remaining good stewards of the district's tax dollars and will not put our district into deficit to settle the LCEA contract. We will announce as early as possible if it appears there will be a delay in opening school. We understand the huge inconvenience this places on families and the damper it puts on our students' enthusiasm for the first day of school, but we cannot allow ourselves to make short-term financial decisions that inevitably lead to bigger problems in the long term.

Sincerely,

Dave Holmes  
Superintendent, La Center School District