



# City/School Liaison Committee Special Meeting Final Minutes



Special Meeting  
April 16, 2020

Chairperson Collins called the meeting to order at 8:32 A.M. virtually via Zoom.

Present: City of Palo Alto Representatives  
Greg Tanaka, Council Member  
Lydia Kou, Council Member  
Chantal Gaines, Assistant to the City Manager, Staff Liaison

Palo Alto Unified School District Representatives  
Jennifer DiBrienza, Board Member  
Todd Collins, Board President (Chair)  
Don Austin, Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District

## Minutes Approval

2. Approval of the February 20, 2020 Meeting Minutes.

**MOTION:** Council Member Kou moved, seconded by Board Member DiBrienza to approve the minutes as presented.

**MOTION PASSED:** 3-0, Tanaka Absent

## **COUNCIL MEMBER TANAKA JOINED THE MEETING AT 8:34 A.M.**

Chair Collins recapped that the Committee just approved the minutes and there were no speakers for Oral Communications.

3. Superintendent's Comments and City Manager's Comments.

Don Austin, Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) gave an overview of the situation in the schools and said the ability of schools to switch over, and replicate in-person instruction was not possible, especially on a short notice basis; school was cancelled on very short notice. This was a National issue; all schools were facing the same problems, but he noted

# FINAL MINUTES

that Palo Alto was better off with regard to resources and school population size. Teachers were setting good examples professionally, and personally. They were making personal contacts. The schools were going to start weekly live webinar's, starting Monday, April 20, 2020 on a reoccurring basis. The purpose was to provide a context of what was happening because things took place so quickly, it was easy for people to miss the context or the details. He also wanted to make the webinar available so people could view it after the fact. He was going to host the first one, and then wanted to bring others in so the viewers understood other aspects of what was happening at schools.

Council Member Kou wanted to know if there was an assessment of the mental health of students.

Mr. Austin said PAUSD connected with a group called *Care Solace*. The schools had Care Solace in place before the pandemic began. Parents and students were able to go there directly; they were able to get services immediately and the service helped route people to the right places. Recently he noticed an uptake in the usage of services. He was glad the services were available but at the same time he was concerned about the uptake.

Council Member Kou noted that there was a list of therapists on the City's website of people that volunteered their services toward others.

Mr. Austin thanked Council Member Kou.

Council Member Kou wanted to discuss plans for the upcoming school year and wanted to know if social distancing was going to be implemented in the classrooms in the fall. The Governor gave out a strategy of re-implementing people back into daily life and things were not going to be as they were before. Businesses, as an example, were going to place patrons further apart, and there was going to be a limit on the amount of people in a restaurant at one time. She wanted to know if this would be implemented in schools.

Mr. Austin understood the Governor's position and he respected his office, but it was difficult to learn about what the plans were by means of news media. He noted that the California Department of Education was not leading any of these discussions and that was who he wanted to be hearing from. He thought it was best to think more in terms of what was possible and what might be, and not hold back brainstorming ideas that limited the

# FINAL MINUTES

thinking of what schools looked like three to four months ago. Extreme thinking was what was needed, and then to back off to something that was more acceptable. Regarding social distancing, some things were not practical because schools were already at certain sizes. He saw some guidelines on childcare, limiting it to groups of 10 and having them remain six feet apart. Realistically, having many six year-olds keeping six feet apart might be difficult. He was discussing an increase of blended and distance learning, which he supported, but the rules prohibited it. There was a lot of work that needed to be done with the lobbyist and PAUSD was well positioned to have their voice heard.

Council Member Kou thanked Dr. Austin and said it was good to hear all sides. She inquired if he knew about the County calls that the Public Health Officer was having.

Mr. Austin knew about that, and was also involved in Superintendent calls twice a week.

Council Member Tanaka watched Dr. Austin's videos and suggested he continue them after the pandemic. Regarding public versus private schools, he thought a lot of the private schools were able to begin online instruction fairly quickly, but it was much harder for public schools. He wanted to hear about the challenges and differences between the public versus the private schools. He was part of a lot of social media groups and this was a big question parents were asking.

Mr. Austin answered the first point and said when this was over, looking back, institutions will have learned some things that they should have already been implementing; in this way, institutions may come out a bit stronger. Secondly, he noted that he was not following all the social media sites; the schools were getting plenty of feedback. The biggest challenge was decision making and how it was not following the typical process. There were actions taken that in the past, would have taken a year of discussion and committee work. This part was uncomfortable for people, especially in an engaged community like Palo Alto, where people wanted to know all the "why's" and "how's", etc. He recently engaged in a Study Session about what the sticking points were with parents and one point was to know the "why" behind things. He explained the "why" as a normal part of his job, but someone reminded him that he was explaining the "why" amongst other Superintendents, and the parents were not getting all of that. His solution to this was the webinar's he mentioned earlier, as an opportunity for people to submit questions and have a response. In connection to this, there was a very challenging balance between an overwhelming amount of information,

# FINAL MINUTES

and a simple explanation to things. This was not unique to Palo Alto or to schools, it was just a very challenging part of his job. As an example, staff spent three quarters of a day solving a problem or an issue and then the next quarter of the day and into the night trying to write it up, communicate it, do video's or whatever might be needed. He was grateful that he was working in a community that saw value in schools, and that they trusted the school system.

Council Member Tanaka reiterated that the reason private schools were able to start online education quicker was because the decision-making process was a lot slower in the public school system.

Mr. Austin noted a difference was private schools did not have collective bargaining. As an example, he spent hours going back and forth with the Teachers Union President about expectations for teacher contact with students, how they were reaching decisions about what generated credit, and private schools did not do that. Private schools had a Headmaster that said what people did and they did it. This was not how things worked in California, a Collective Bargaining State.

Chair Collins added the Ed. Code was also a consideration.

Mr. Austin noted there were a lot of instances where private schools did not have the same restrictions as public schools.

Council Member Tanaka inquired about the Ed. Code.

Chair Collins clarified it was the California Education Code, which was a list of regulations for the schools that they had to abide by.

Council Member Tanaka continued by saying some of the differences between public schools versus private schools were pretty stark. As an example, one private school switched to online instruction one week after the Shelter in Place Order took effect. It was good to discuss this because people were able to recognize the differences. Another point of discussion was the grade/no grade issue. Some schools had the option of having grades and others had a pass/fail option; people were worrying about their Grade Point Average (GPA.) Some colleges were taking the situation into account but there were other schools that had the option of grades, versus a pass/fail option. He wondered how this was going to affect their future, for example, if they wanted to attend an Ivy League school.

# FINAL MINUTES

Mr. Austin understood and said he was going to be attending a National panel later that day that was going to discuss grades specifically. Credit/No Credit was sweeping the Nation; it was one of the biggest equity issues in the entire Country. As an example, San Francisco Unified School District was thinking about giving all students an A. The reality was this semester was a total wash, as far as grades went. What he was able to say for a certainty was the disparity between teachers and school districts' ability to serve special needs students and English language learners did not get better when the schools went to distance learning. Those kids were going to be punished the most with a grading system and they were the kids that needed the schools the most, which was not okay. His response was PAUSD did not act alone; they called the experts on these topics, they called the top colleges and universities, and across the board, they did not make recommendations but said what PAUSD did was totally acceptable. Additionally, the Universities in California (UC) and California State Universities changed largely because of the School District's actions. Parents and people of the public were not able to know all interactions that were being had, but the School District was virtually in the room with the people that were making these decisions. As far as other districts went, things were going to break up in a few different places, people were going to adopt Palo Alto's system, or they were going to have other systems, like students choosing their own grade. The choice of a grade was about as inequitable as a person was able to get; the students that were already struggling were going to have the biggest hole to crawl out of, and the students that were in advantageous places were going to check out with the grade they had. There was no perfect answer; other school districts were following Palo Alto's lead.

Council Member Tanaka clarified that people were not thinking about equity, they were thinking about their own children. A lot of the parents in Palo Alto had high expectations of their students, thinking their children were going to very elite colleges. He felt the equity issues the parents were thinking of were when their child applied against a child that had grades; how was a PAUSD child going to fair. The second issue was grade/no grade, especially with parents that wanted their child to go to an elite college. If all the top colleges were going to ignore grades, that was one thing, but if it was just the UC system, that was not satisfying to a lot of parents. Maybe all the top universities were going to ignore grades, but it did not seem like that was the case.

Chair Collins wanted to move the discussion along because it was outside the scope of the Agenda.

# FINAL MINUTES

Council Members Tanaka explained that he was trying to iterate discussions he had had in the parent's group.

Chair Collins was aware of these concerns.

Ed Shikada, City Manager remarked that Staff were receiving commendation on the City's communication. There were weekly updates with the City Council and there was an emphasis on providing essential public safety services, in particular, ensuring that first responders had their needs met with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), as well as contingency planning regarding what they encountered on calls and their ability to ensure protocols were appropriately modified. This was so Staff were able to walk into a situation with the best information, and if exposure happened, there were clear systems in place to ensure the workers safety and the safety of the community were met. Another adjustment was having all City-Staff moved to a completely tele-working environment. The organization adjusted well in moving much City business to a completely remote operation. Distance Working was an entirely new model for everyone. Most public agencies were finding themselves in the same place, but he was amazed at how quickly everyone adapted. Adapting community services and recreation programs to a virtual mode was another adjustment. Much of the first few weeks was about transition, but now that the transition had taken place, the emphasis was on the content and the services themselves. Staff was focusing on the now, but also what he was calling a recovery because once people moved from sheltering in place to movement, it was going to be an adjustment. In line with recovery, Staff was preparing to adapt programming in the recreation space and on the administrative services side. On the Library front, much of the Library Staff activities moved when the Libraries needed to be closed, to refocusing on the service and skillset brought to setting up the Call Center. The Call Center dealt with ongoing questions the community had, many of which went to 9-1-1, in the absence of having some place to post questions people had about COVID-19 or where they were able to get tested. The Library and Community Services Staff made a very quick transition for Palo Alto community members to stay in touch and to have ongoing feedback with the City. On the Library front, much of the programming was moved to virtual programming and began a robust set of activities online, including having Palo Alto residents and students having library cards; it was joint card access to the Library. Another note was homeschooling and how it impacted Staff's ability to work while the homeschooling assistance by parents was in place. As a result, a partnership with Care.com was put into place, which was a matchmaking service for parents or anyone looking for care or to organize operations. Regarding the Budget, Staff was attempting to tackle the fiscal challenges.

# FINAL MINUTES

The City had been fortunate to have ongoing resources from Hotel Taxes, as well as from Sales Taxes, which were both really low at this time. As a result, Staff was needing to re-gear their financial planning, with the anticipation that they were not going to recover quickly. On April 20, 2020 there was going to be the first discussion at the City Council meeting where the Council was going to receive a transmittal of the City Manager's Proposed Budget. One piece was aligning revenues and expenditures to what was known, prior to COVID-19; and now with COVID-19, there was going to be the beginning of a conversation that was going to last through May and June, 2020. There was going to be discussion about the actions that needed to be taken to re-align things, starting with expectations and services provided by the City. Then Staff was going to discuss costs and revenues and how those things were going to reflect a traumatic reduction in expected revenues over the next year. He expected the Budget was going to take more than a year to recover from.

Chair Collins noted that with all that was happening, the City was doing a great job pivoting their model and communicating with the community about what they were doing. The City School Liaison Committee (Committee) was covering a lot of items before the pandemic, such as Grade Crossing, the North Ventura Item, revenue measures for the 2020 ballot and the Cubberley Lease; he requested an update.

Mr. Shikada commented that the term he was using was "baby steps." The City was moving full speed ahead, and now they needed to take smaller steps, just in the ability to maintain communication; there was a need to be reset all together. For example, it was remarkable to begin the Council meetings. One of the early actions by the Council was to discontinue the possibility of a Business Tax for the November 2020 ballot. Grade Separation financing was supposed to be part of that Business Tax. In the meantime, there has been a lot technical work that needed to be done on Grade Separation, which was proceeding with the City's consultant. The City was now taking baby steps with the Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP) to get them back into the Grade Separation conversation. Some of the same dynamics to run a Council meeting were what was needed to run an XCAP meeting. There was a need for the Chair and the members to participate, including the content they were going to discuss. There was a lot of technical work to share with the XCAP. The XCAP was scheduled to have their first meeting and they were planning to discuss: 1) the pace of the work of their assignment; 2) the local Revenue Plan being done away with; and 3) what was happening with the other major revenue sources for Grade Separation (which was the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), or the Santa Clara County Measure B funds for Grade Separation.) Some

# FINAL MINUTES

people were suggesting a slowdown, others to speed up the work. In the meantime, Caltrain was moving full speed ahead with their Electrification Project. The electrification poles were now up, and Churchill was possibly be closed now for construction. Regarding the Cubberley Lease, there were baby steps that needed to be taken with his Staff and Dr. Austin and himself to be able to work out some of the details on the lease extension. He felt they were close to finishing that discussion, but they still needed to discuss revenue, which was part of the lease and part of the budget discussion. He did not want to presuppose the outcome but said it was going to be a topic of conversation at the Council meeting.

Chair Collins thanked the City Manager and wanted to know if North Ventura was on hold.

Mr. Shikada answered that there was a community meeting, but the same theme of baby steps was being used because the City's ability to maintain effective engagement was entirely different. They needed to take a step back and look at how far they were able to get in the current environment, with the expectation of what and how the environment was going to change as things came up. There was some work done but nothing of significance.

4. Review of Recent City Council and PAUSD Board Meetings.
  - a. CITY: Recent Council Agendas Recap
  - b. PAUSD: Recent Board Agendas Recap

Council Member Kou mentioned that the Council meetings mainly entailed the COVID-19 updates, since the City declared an emergency. Prior to that, there was the enacting of the Palo Alto Stanford Citizen Corps Council, which upon declaration, the Emergency Center was opened. Council was getting updates from the different sector's twice a week and were in contact with Mike Jacobs, the School District's safety officer. The local hospitals were preparing for both their ability and their compacity to ensure that when a surge of COVID-19 cases happened, they were ready to ensure admittance to the hospitals. This dealt with hospital's being able to procure the necessary protective gear, such as ventilator's, and ensuring that testing was available. Regarding the Parks and Open Space Department and the Shelter in Place Order, Parks' workers were ensuring people were adhering to the County Shelter in Place Order.

Ed Shikada, City Manager noted that the enforcement of Social Distancing (the need to stay at least six feet apart from another person) was under the purview of local law enforcement. The non-emergency line received many of



# FINAL MINUTES

these types of calls, and the largest call for service dealt with gardening. The City was not only educating the gardeners but the property owners about the limitations of the Shelter in Place order.

Council Member Kou was told that there were also people gathering at the schools and there was some vandalism. The School Safety Officer and the Police Department were working closely to ensure this matter was being looked into.

Chair Collins related that all school campuses were completely closed, including all the playing fields, tennis courts and recreation equipment. Where there were gates, there were locks in place, and where there were no gates, caution tape went up. It was needed to have law enforcement patrol because people were congregating there. He drove by the school one day and saw about 10 people there; the campuses were supposed to be closed. It required constant effort to maintain the integrity of the campuses, so any help from the City was appreciated.

Council Member Kou reported that because of the streets being less crowded, there was speeding happening and some cars were not adhering to traffic laws, so Police Officers were patrolling more. At the beginning there was more of an education phase, but now there was more enforcement.

Chair Collins said there was an Emergency Resolution that passed about three weeks ago that gave power to the Superintendent of Schools to take action to address COVID-19 issues. This made it possible for things to move quicker during the crisis, particularly to protect the School District's facilities and assets. The School Board cancelled their Parcel Tax Election, which was supposed to be a mail-in only election, scheduled for May 5, 2020. As a result, the School Board needed to decide what they were going to do about the Parcel Tax because it ended in June, 2021. The School Board needed to prepare a budget for the next year that did not include a Parcel Tax. This was going to create a lot of disruption and organizational anxiety. They rolled out a full distance, three-phase learning program, for which they were now in the third phase, which was the long-term phase. Regarding their budget, the school's major source of revenue was Property Tax, which was not as sensitive to the immediate economic conditions, such as Sales and Hotel Taxes were. Their revenue was stable for the time being, but they expected a reduction for two reasons: 1) they had unbudgeted expenses this year; and 2) they had anticipated reductions for both non-local funding (State and Federal sources), as well as a potential reduction in Property Tax revenue. There was also uncertainty around the Parcel Tax, which was about a \$16 million of a roughly \$200 million budget. The Board's major

# FINAL MINUTES

focus was how to put all of these moving pieces together. There were also decisions that needed to happen regarding the summer and fall of 2020 education plan. Summer School was a wide open topic and there was a lot of learning loss that had happened. It seemed certain there was not going to be in-person school, so the discussion was around remote learning, what it looked like, who was eligible, what was going to be provided, the content, etc. The same questions revolved around fall 2020; they were hoping to bring teachers and students to the facilities by then. They were discussing adding time to make up for the time lost but it was not clear what circumstances they were going to operate under. For example, it was unclear whether there were going to be less students in the classroom, which was a driver for funding. There was a lot more work ahead of the Board regarding budget and operations.

Board Member DiBrienza remarked that budget was at the top of her list. Also, the School Board was getting a lot of feedback from the public. She referred to the learning that was happening as “crisis learning;” there were families that wanted more rigorous work and some that wanted lighter schoolwork, some wanted mandatory and some wanted optional work. The needs were different and varied. Also, people were trying to get to the lunches that the schools offered; people could fill out a form and have the lunches delivered. District Staff were trying to deliver the lunches, and then there was the issue of school supplies. Some students did not have working pens and blank paper, and that was even before some of the major issues were addressed. Some students were motivated independent learners, and some needed a structured schedule. They were trying to do what they could, without exacerbating the achievement gap. She appreciated the community communicating their experiences and reminding them that the experiences were different in other houses. There were small focus groups trying to get that feedback so school officials could make tweaks to the learning and to make it more aligned, like putting appointments in the school calendar. Making things easier to navigate was a goal.

Council Member Kou wondered about procuring laptops or devices for students.

Board Member DiBrienza thought there were thousands handed out.

Mr. Shikada said not on the City side.

# FINAL MINUTES

Don Austin, Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) said about 2,500 devices were handed out. They had enough devices for any student that needed it.

Council Member Kou questioned how a student would apply for a device.

Mr. Austin answered they sent a device home with every kid they knew would need one on the Friday of the closure. School staff also allowed students to come in the Monday of the closure and handed out over 1,000 devices that day. Since then, the Family Engagement Specialist identified additional families in need; another 250 were handed out about a week ago, and some of those were delivered and some were driven up.

Board Member DiBrienza remarked that the lunches and devices were not just handed out to students that were known to be low income, because as soon as lay-offs started the calculus changed. Families that were not food insecure were suddenly food insecure. Her family for example was financially fine but they did not have a device for every person in the house. Families that were not on the school's radar as needing assistance suddenly needed assistance.

Chair Collins related that he had a similar situation with his son, who didn't need a device but then suddenly needed one for distance learning. A lot of people that did not need devices now needed them, and the need continued to come up. The schools were doing a really good job of handing out devices, but the big challenge was what to do once people had the device.

Council Member Tanaka read in an article that 22 million people filed for unemployment over the past two weeks. He wondered if there was any data on the number of parents that were impacted by the economic meltdown.

Chair Collins did not think there was any information about that.

Board Member DiBrienza thought the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) was more closely connected to this issue. This was an ongoing stream of information that was being collected, the Family Engagement Specialists (FES) were reaching out to families but the growth depended on whether families were communicating their needs to the schools.

Council Member Tanaka suggested one way to tell if was if more families were coming in for meals, or more families needed devices. He wanted to know the growth in the need to meals or devices as an indicator.

# FINAL MINUTES

Chair Collins was not sure.

Mr. Austin replied that the schools have handed out about 600 meals per day, with the exception of a peak right before spring break. Additionally, every very family was going to receive a mailer in the upcoming week from the school stating how the schools could be contacted. The idea was to have one central contact, and then the call would be routed from there to make things simple.

Council Member Tanaka reiterated the meals were roughly level, but he wanted to know if the demand for laptops was going up.

Mr. Austin said the need for laptops has pretty much stabilized, about 125 more laptops were given out this last week.

## **COUNCIL MEMBER KOU LEFT THE MEETING AT 9:32 A.M.**

Nelly Baumb, Deputy City Clerk asked the Chair to check in with members of the public.

Chair Collins relayed that if anyone wanted to make a comment, they could raise their hand on the Zoom application, or if they dialed in, a person could press \*9 on their phone, then you would be recognized.

## 5. COVID-19 Coordination Update.

Chair Collins remarked that the City School Liaison Committee (Committee) covered much of this topic earlier in the Agenda and asked if there was something else that needed to be added.

Don Austin, Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) expressed how great it was working with the City, especially the City Manager, they have had a really good relationship.

Ed Shikada, City Manager echoed that sentiment and said the communication lines were open and available when necessary. It was great to stay in close coordination.

Council Member Tanaka noted that he was not as tuned into the School District as the other Committee Members were, perhaps, but wanted to know what the City could do to help.

# FINAL MINUTES

Mr. Austin felt that immediately there was very little to do, but it was more the work that was on the horizon. The rules were changing so quickly; he and Mr. Shikada were going to talk about this and how this was expected impact the City and the School District. Childcare was an upcoming issue and it was good for both of them to know what the other was doing. There were discussions on food distribution and the role of the different organizations.

Mr. Shikada noted that there was earlier mention of the Citizen Corp Council (CCC), for which Mike Jacobs was representing PAUSD. This was a helpful venue for the City to flag issues that might be coming up and was also a way for the City to stay in touch; it was a way to reality check what the City heard may be an issue. Ultimately, organizations that had essential workers, like the healthcare organizations, were able to take care of their needs, to the extent that they needed. The CCC was a good way for the City, PAUSD and the community to stay in touch.

Board Member DiBrienza commented as a parent of a high schooler, she thought it was good for the City to try to break up social gatherings. This was an issue, and although there was a hold on this issue, lately she heard other parents talk about how people were gathering in groups again.

Mr. Shikada agreed. The Police Department was keeping tabs on these types of calls for service. As the City was one month into the Stay at Home order, the community was getting anxious. As the days went on, there needed to be some way to release that pressure, but he was not sure what that was at this time. Recognition was a good means to begin resolving this issue.

6. Updates on Ongoing Matters.
  - a. Cubberley Update
  - b. Grade Separation (Rail Crossings) Update

Chair Collins said there was some discussion earlier on Cubberley and Grade Separation; he heard there was going to be a joint taskforce meeting at one point, and he wanted to know if that was still happening.

Don Austin, Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) recalled that before the pandemic began, he understood the lease agreement was going to be completed first, and then discussions were going to be made from there. There was discussion of a swap of space at Ventura Elementary School for some space at Cubberley, which might factor into the

# FINAL MINUTES

sub-group. He agreed with the City Manager and wished the lease was completed three months ago. The two organizations were close to making decisions but there were some significant sticking points that needed work. Ed Shikada, City Manager agreed.

Chair Collins reiterated that the Cubberley Lease was still on hold until the lease was completed. He wished to give an update to the School Board and added that economics were a factor.

Mr. Shikada concurred that economics were a factor. Part of the Legacy Lease was the childcare component, and there was talk of splitting that up. He owed Dr. Austin a draft of what that piece looked like and then they were able to put the two pieces together. He reiterated that on the form they were close, then there was discussion on how it related to economics and the Ventura School. He felt they should proceed with that discussion and then report back.

## Future Meetings and Agendas

Chair Collins thought the next City School Liaison Committee (Committee) meeting was going to look a lot like this one. There were baby steps everyone was trying to figure out and what was going on on both sides of their agencies, figuring out what the new normal was.

Ed Shikada, City Manager mentioned that Chantal Cotton Gaines, Assistant to the City Manager was not going to be at the next Committee meeting.

Chantal Cotton Gaines, Assistant to the City Manager agreed and said Monique LeConge Ziesenhenné, Assistant City Manager was going to be the main point of contact for the Committee, as well as the Clerk's Office.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 9:42 A.M.