



September 22, 2024

An Open Letter to SFUSD Families from Mayor London Breed

I know this is a very difficult time for families in our public schools in this City. There are more questions than answers. Questions around financial stability, school closures, and the long-term outlook for our students, educators, and families. The uncertainty and frustration are driving very real fear for too many who rely on our public schools.

Let me start by saying that at the foundation of my thinking of any issue regarding our schools is this: I am where I am today because of San Francisco's public schools. When I think about your children's education, I think about what mine meant for me and for those growing up in my neighborhood. Our public schools created an opportunity for a young girl from public housing to go to college, to start a career, to work to support my community, and to be elected to serve as Mayor of this great City. It helped so many of my friends and family pave their own paths out of poverty, and I'm grateful for the education and support we received.

That's why it has been so painful for me to see the difficulties and confusion playing out in our School District. There are times when governmental agencies and leaders have to make really hard decisions, even unpopular ones. I've been there. I've had to make difficult choices. That's the job we sign up for and the responsibility we bear.

But that's not an excuse for what we are seeing right now with our schools. What concerns me with what has transpired most recently at the School District has been the uncertainty, particularly around school closures, and confusion around the path forward. What concerns me is the lack of information, and the need for better communication to help families and the public understand what is happening and why.

When there is a crisis, clarity matters. During the COVID pandemic, as we faced unparalleled uncertainty, fear, and confusion, I returned to the same thought again and again: *What would I, as a member of the public, want to hear from my Mayor?*

And I know this: my concerns, though deeply held, absolutely pale in comparison to the concerns and fears of every parent in this City. For families, this is not just some painful but necessary bureaucratic exercise. This is about your children. This is about the bonds they've built with their teachers and the community they've created with friends. This is the world they know and feel safe and secure in. This is their education and their future.

Based on my conversations with school leadership, with parents, and with educators, there is much more that must be done. I also believe that while I do not have direct control over decisions involving the School District, there is more that the City must do to help.

To start, I've created a new School Stabilization Team, led by top City leaders to provide immediate and ongoing support for our schools. I am also dedicating additional funding to support this work.



The School Stabilization Team will be led by Maria Su, Executive Director of the Department of Children, Youth and Families, and Phil Ginsburg, General Manager of our Recreation and Parks Department. These proven leaders led our Community Hubs program during COVID, which successfully provided safe learning environments in our clubhouses and community facilities for thousands of kids at a time when our schools were shut down. They know how to deliver for our kids in a crisis.

The School Stabilization Team will consist of trusted subject matter experts from my office, the Controller's Office, the Human Services Agency, the Treasurer & Tax Collector, and the Department of Human Resources, that will provide independent analysis and support so that students, parents and educators can have confidence that the decisions being made are based on sound information, best practices, and rigorous analysis.

The Team will be supported by Special Advisor Dr. Carl Cohn, Professor Emeritus and Senior Research Fellow in the School of Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University. In his celebrated public education career, he served as a State Board of Education member, and then as Executive Director of the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence. Previously, he was Superintendent of schools in both the Long Beach and San Diego school districts, as well as the Federal Court monitor for the Los Angeles school district.

I will also be providing additional financial support through Student Success Fund emergency grants to help aid the work of the School Stabilization Team. This is on top of the more than \$100 million per year the City already provides as part of our annual budget – which will not be going away. Ongoing City support for before and after school programming, education, arts, athletics, and enrichment opportunities, mental health services, graduations, and more will all be continuing.

We will work with the Board of Education and the Superintendent to deliver on what matters – a comprehensive, logical, and sustainable long-term plan for our schools. We know hard decisions have to be made, but they also need to be the right decisions based on good data, sound analysis, and clear communication. Trust is essential if we are going to get through the difficult choices ahead. And we will help build back that trust.

I want to end with this: our public schools may be under state oversight, and this may be an incredibly challenging moment, but they will not fail. Our children will continue to be served and supported by our public schools, and they will get the education they need to thrive. This City has always done what is necessary to give our children, families and educators the schools they deserve, and we will continue to do so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "London Breed".

London N. Breed
Mayor