

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Sun, May 5, 2024 at 11:01 AM
Subject: our experience as a Jewish BUSD family
To: <boardofed@berkeley.net>
Cc: <PIO@berkeley.net>, [REDACTED]

Dear Board of Education,

I am appalled about the campaign claiming “pervasive antisemitism” in BUSD. This is false and malicious. I want to share my Jewish family’s positive experiences in BUSD.

My child has been a happy BUSD student since kindergarten; he is now [REDACTED]. He adores school. He has had the wonderful experience of getting to know students from all over the world: Mexico, Salvador, France, Morocco, Brazil, Yemen, Indonesia, Ghana, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Turkey, Holland, and many more places. He has had amazing, caring, dedicated professional teachers who bring diverse personal experiences and backgrounds to their work, which enriches the educational experience immensely. He is getting a great education.

We are Jewish Americans, born and raised in California, and solely citizens of the USA. My son is the 5th/6th generation in the USA. Our ancestors are from Eastern Europe and Russia. I have no relatives in the state of Israel and no affinity or love for that state, which I have never visited. My son’s father’s father has some affinity and relations there but is also solely a US citizen.

We are practicing Jews. We practice our religion and our culture; we are proud of our heritage. My son became bar mitzvah, which means he has had private, extracurricular education on Judaism. He takes leave of school on major Jewish holidays, and often wears around his neck a gold Star of David given us from my Dad; and sometimes he wears Jewish iconography on his t-shirts. No one has ever said anything negative about what he wears, or what holidays he observes, or about his religion or cultural heritage.

In all these years in BUSD we have never experienced antisemitic violence or threats. Many though not all of my son’s BUSD friends are Jewish, and I know many of their families. We have not heard of our friends’ kids experiencing antisemitism. We know it happens in the USA. We were all shocked at the deliberate violent targeting of Jews in places of worship, for example in Philadelphia (Tree of Life synagogue) and San Diego (Chabad of Poway, just a mile from my Dad’s home).

We have never experienced or heard of antisemitic violence or threats at BUSD. We do not feel threatened in any way being openly Jewish at BUSD.

My son says a few times there has been antisemitic comments in student chat groups; we know there is also anti-Black, anti-gay, anti-trans, anti-female chat. This does not make school unsafe for Jewish students, nor is it evidence of “pervasive antisemitism.”

We support students' and teachers' rights to express opinions about Palestine and the state of Israel. This includes wearing t-shirts or pins with Palestinian iconography; having Palestinian imagery in classrooms; walking out in support of ceasefire; criticizing the state of Israel. These are absolutely not antisemitic actions.

I myself have participated in a street mural-making activity organized and led by BHS students in support of ceasefire in Gaza. This was a peaceful event, with Jewish student leaders and supported by Jewish community members. I felt perfectly safe as a Jew in this event.

My son may or may not participate in these events, but he absolutely supports the right of his fellow students and their teachers who do take these actions and speak out. We are not offended by these speech acts, and we certainly are not threatened or made unsafe. If anything, it is good to know that students' and teachers' rights to free speech are upheld.

We know that none of us are free unless and until all of us are free.

Our Jewish sages teach us that the essence of our faith is "Do not do to others that which you would hate to be done to you." We would hate for our and our fellow citizens' freedom of speech and right to peacefully assemble to be curtailed in any way.

Thank you,



BHS Jewish parent

From: [REDACTED] >
Date: Sun, May 5, 2024 at 7:42 PM
Subject: letter of support for Superintendent Enikia Ford Morthel
To: <BoardofEd@berkeley.net>, <PIO@berkeley.net>
[REDACTED]

Dear BUSD Board of Education,

We wanted to share our family's experience being Jewish in BUSD. We have two children in BUSD: an 8th grader [REDACTED] and a 4th grader [REDACTED]. Both of our children have had a great experience in BUSD and as a family, we love that they are a part of a diverse school environment. From high quality teaching to great sports to theater, our kids have had a chance to thrive in BUSD.

[REDACTED] our 8th grader, says: "I love going to school at [REDACTED]. I have had great teachers. I have a lot of fun. I participated in the walkout that students organized in support of a ceasefire. I felt proud to be a part of that event." In talking with both of our children, neither has experienced any anti-semitism or ever felt unsafe being Jewish.

We are excited for [REDACTED] to begin [REDACTED] and hope that she can be taught the liberated ethnic studies curriculum.

I was raised in a Jewish household that framed debate, disagreement, and critical thinking as part of our culture. I want my children to be in a school district where controversial topics can be taught so that they learn to engage in respectful debate, substantiate their arguments, and tolerate different perspectives. When a school fails to teach a subject, students take away a lesson from that choice, too. It is important to me that teachers are able to teach about Israel and Palestine without censorship.

Thank you,
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Sun, May 5, 2024 at 9:58 PM
Subject: Positive experience at BHS for this Jewish family
To: <BoardofEd@berkeley.net>, <PIO@berkeley.net>, <superintendent@berkeley.net>
Cc: [REDACTED]

Dear Superintendent Morthel and the School Board:

I am the parent of two Jewish students who have gone through the Berkeley Unified School District, one currently a [REDACTED] (the other has graduated).

Over the past six months, since October 7th, I've been checking in regularly with my son at [REDACTED] about the climate at school. He hasn't reported any incidences on a personal level, nor has he witnessed any, that have made him feel threatened or unsafe.

As a [REDACTED] grader, he went through the Israel/ Palestine curriculum with his ethnic studies class. He was very positive about it, and told me he learned a lot. I feel lucky that he had [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who was really communicative and balanced in her approach. I'm really glad that has been introduced, and I know that it will be a work in progress over the years.

My son chose not to participate in any walkouts, but understands people's rights to demonstrate. I have heard, through work of mouth, of a few instances of Jewish students being targeted. However, I still struggle to understand if they are truly antisemitic or just people stating their views about Palestine, which they have the right to do. Nothing I have heard has alarmed me as a Jewish family, or have made me or my son feel that Jewish children are unsafe in the environment.

I believe that antisemitism is on the rise in our society, and that makes me sad. But I don't feel that it's an overwhelming problem at [REDACTED] more than anywhere else, the kids say a lot of things they don't really understand and things are getting conflated between Pro-Palestinian and anti-semitic. I do think there are a handful of radical teachers are [REDACTED] that are not objective and frankly, not the best teachers, but I think that is the exception and not the rule. That has been true for years, not just with recent events.

Thanks for reading,
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Sun, May 5, 2024 at 8:33 PM
Subject: My Jewish Family is safe and has thrived in Berkeley Public Schools
To: Public Information Office <PIO@berkeley.net>, School Board <BoardofEd@berkeley.net>, [REDACTED]

Dear School Board Directors, and to the public at large:

My name is [REDACTED], and I am a Jewish teacher, parent, and alum of the Berkeley Unified School District. I have two Jewish children, one who graduated from Berkeley High School in 2022 and is a sophomore in college, and the other who is a [REDACTED], where I am a [REDACTED]. My children attended Malcolm X Elementary, Longfellow Middle School, and Willard Middle Schools in addition to Berkeley High.

My children's experience in the Berkeley public schools has positively enriched their Jewish identities, provided them a safe space to be themselves in every way (including as Jews), and has supported them to learn to think for themselves, ask questions about the world we live in, and become involved in issues of social justice -- all values that are shared by our Jewish community.

My children have never felt targeted at school for being Jewish -- quite the contrary, they have felt safe and supported. While at the current moment some members of our community criticize actions of the Israeli government, even to the point of questioning the wisdom of the existence of a Jewish ethno-state in Palestine, my children and I are not confused that this is a personal attack on us or on our Jewish identity. In the BUSD we were all raised to value multiple perspectives, and we feel lucky when channels of communication are open and we are able to hear the experience of Palestinian and other Muslim community members. We support BUSD teachers as they work to value and share multiple perspectives, and help us to wrestle with the complexity of current events.

We all live in a world where many are trying to censor public discourse in an attempt to promote false or unjust narratives. My Jewish family feels lucky to be able to attend public schools in Berkeley that are dedicated to the opposite.

Sincerely,
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Sun, May 5, 2024 at 12:37 PM
Subject: Testimonial: Gratitude from a Jewish parent in Berkeley!
To: <BoardofEd@berkeley.net>
Cc: <pio@berkeley.net>

Dear BUSD Board of Education,

I know the district is under a microscope at this time, and our dear Superintendent will be testifying before a House committee later this week.

You should know that, as a Jewish parent in the district, I have proudly sent two children through BUSD elementary, middle, and high schools. My children have thrived in all areas at BUSD, feel warmly welcomed to be their full selves, and have been generously supported to grow and learn about difficult topics large and small. Neither child has ever felt uncomfortable, othered, or disrespected for being Jewish, and while they appreciate the existence of "safe spaces" for students to express their Jewish identities, they've never felt the need to do so. They are proud of their fellow students for being involved in political activities that are meaningful to them, and feel welcomed to participate when moved to do so. They (and I, for that matter) are deeply troubled by stories of teachers being sanctioned, punished, or disciplined for teaching about Palestine, or for wearing or having in class pro-Palestine images.

In short, thank you for providing my kids a wide-ranging education about some of the most urgent topics we face in the world. You have much to be proud of!

Warmly,

[REDACTED]

Parent of a 7th grader and a 12th grader

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Tue, Apr 16, 2024 at 11:48 AM

Subject: Thank you for your approach to supporting student safety and addressing antisemitism concerns on campus

To: <boardofed@berkeley.net>, Enikia Ford Morthel <EnikiaFordMorthel@berkeley.net>, Jasmina Viteskic <jasminaviteskic@berkeley.net>

Dear Superintendent,

As you head to Washington DC to testify, I want to thank you for your focus on creating a safe learning environment for all students while emotions run high about how Israel/Gaza has been taught about in certain classrooms. My husband and I are Jewish parents. Our [REDACTED] grader proudly wears her Star of David to school every day. I want you to know that we do not see antisemitism as being severe or pervasive at BUSD, and neither do most of the other Jewish parents I know.

I am aware that some Jewish students have experienced remarks that felt antisemitic at school and at school board meetings, and a few have felt so uncomfortable in certain classrooms that they have requested to transfer to other teachers. The Liberated Ethnic Studies curriculum on the Israel/Gaza war appeared to many of us to lack essential context and contain factual errors, and it really hurt trust in BUSD that the curriculum was not provided for review by Jewish parents as requested, in advance of the lessons being taught.

But these serious problems come nowhere near to the level of severe and pervasive antisemitism.

As you know, I have seen other severe and pervasive problems at BUSD over the past ten years—particularly in the area of sexual harassment and harm. Over these 10 years, we have made a lot of progress, to the point where we have a trusted Title IX compliance officer, the culture has improved and incidents of harm have been substantially reduced, and students who do suffer harm feel safe to follow the District's policies and procedures for filing complaints. This is a great indicator of how well BUSD is doing helping kids in sometimes horrific circumstances feel seen and heard.

Superintendent, I have heard you tell folks over and over to please complain if they are being discriminated against -- and have heard you call out BUSD is no place for Hate and have heard you specifically callout both antisemitism and Islamophobia.

I guess my biggest point here is to say thank you. I think you're phenomenal, and I see how you center and love our children.

I can only imagine how ugly testifying will be. Please know that many many Jewish parents and students will be holding you in their hearts.

If there is some other way I can help, such as to send a letter or a phone call to a legislator let them know that the complaints about the District do not represent our experience or the experience of many other Jewish families I know, please let me know.

Warmly, [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Mon, May 6, 2024 at 11:08 AM
Subject: Jewish mother/grandmother of BUSD students
To: <BoardofEd@berkeley.net>
Cc: <PIO@berkeley.net>, [REDACTED]

Dear members of the BUSD Board of Education:

My two Jewish children flourished at BUSD, and now my grandson is in kindergarten at [REDACTED]

NEVER have I witnessed any sign of antisemitism; never has any such transgression been reported to me.

While our identification with Judaism is more cultural than religious, our experience of Berkeley schools and the City was and remains a crossroads where many worlds meet. I call Berkeley a 'global village.'

While kids in BUSD schools, like kids everywhere, may encounter bullying, intolerance, and even cruelty, because of color, economic status, religion, et al., these incidents, when verified, should serve as an opportunity to further understanding. **The principles of restorative justice are one model of how kids can safely come together in circle and talk through their feelings, deepen their understanding of others, and make amends.**

There is no US against THEM. There is only US! Let's make sure that this is the vital lesson learned.

Thank you.
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]

Date: May 6, 2024 at 1:58:07 PM EDT

To: boardofed@berkeley.net, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Subject: [School Board] my jewish kids are safe and thriving in BUSD

Dear Board of Education and Dr. Ford Morthel,

I am writing as a Jewish parent of fourth and seventh graders, and a Jewish auntie of 9th and 12th graders. My kids love being jewish, they are proud of it, and love to explore their Jewish identity in connection to the diverse students around them.

My seventh grader is studying for her bat mitzvah this year and describes how "cool" it is to be Jewish and have such a fun social life going to peers' b'mitzvahs and sharing this with other seventh graders. It's a way to expand her social network, and she is so proud to invite her non-jewish friends into the mix. I asked her if she feels unsafe at school or if she has witnessed antisemitism. She said it's the opposite, she feels being Jewish is something to be proud of and show-off. Everyone has Star of David necklaces. My question prompted her to ask ME if she can please have a Star of David necklace too. I told her *maybe* - she already has stylish rope bracelets with Hebrew beads that spell out L'Chaim (life!) which she wears most days.

Most days my fourth grader proudly wears his bright yellow Jewish summer camp ([REDACTED] [REDACTED]) hoodie with a big Star of David on it to school. He asked if he could please also attend Hebrew school because he hears kids at school talking up how much fun it is.

Every year when my kids write "I am" poems or the other enriching activities in their classes where they explore their multiple identities and think about their family's ethnic and cultural identity and our family's immigration story - they revisit how their jewish identity makes them part of a Jewish community, and connects them to other kids whose families have related, but distinct histories of oppression and immigration.

My kids are curious about Palestine. They want to learn about it. We teach them that criticism of the Israeli state or expressions of support for Palestine (even if they sound mean or angry) are not directed at them as Jews, but directed towards a nation state and

its government, just like we criticize the US and that is not targeting Americans. We teach them that our Judaism is about solidarity with the oppressed.

Still my kids are curious and WANT to learn about this in school. They see that their teachers are nervous, that their teachers are silent. And they are confused about that.

They hear the accusations of antisemitism getting so much media attention and attention at the Board meetings, and they are asking: what about all the other kinds of racism? Why is the media ignoring all the other kinds of racism? Why are we talking about antisemitism so much? That is hard to answer.

The environment of censorship and fear targeting our teachers hurts our Jewish kids just as much as it hurts the Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim kids because we all need to learn about this. When teachers are too afraid to address the complicated myth that Israel = Judaism, it actually exposes our kids to more danger.

With appreciation for all you to take care of ALL the kids, and hoping you treat all forms of racism with equal attention,

██████████

[REDACTED]
Date: May 6, 2024 at 1:43:43 PM EDT

To: boardofed@berkeley.net

Cc: pio@berkeley.net, [REDACTED]

Subject: [School Board] Jewish Parent whose kid is thriving in BUSD

Dear School Board members,

I am the Jewish parent of a Jewish BUSD student who is safe and thriving in the Berkeley Schools.

My son has been in BUSD since Kindergarten and is now a [REDACTED] at BHS. He was raised with a very strong sense of his Jewish identity within his family, went to Hebrew school, had his Bar Mitzvah at 13 and was a camper, then counselor at a Jewish summer camp. I am happy to have been able to raise a kid who knows his own cultural traditions and practices, while also learning about the rich traditions and practices of the multi-cultural community in Berkeley.

When my son was in kindergarten, his teacher invited me along with another Jewish parent to come and share something about our Jewish New Year: Rosh Hashanah. We brought apples and honey and sweet challah bread to share. When we asked the students: "How many of you celebrate this holiday?", I was surprised to see about 25% of the students' hands went up. This surprised me for two reasons:

- 1) I realized that, unlike my own childhood, my son is being raised in a school environment in which he is in company with other Jewish kids--not isolated or alone or othered.
- 2) Not all of the kids who raised their hands were Jewish!

The second point says so much about what I love about my child's experience in Berkeley. Berkeley is about belonging and inclusion. In Berkeley, we share our cultural identities and traditions with our larger community. We celebrate WITH one another.

Berkeley High School has been a special time in my son's educational experience. He has found a truly wonderful community on the [REDACTED]. As you know, last year, this scrappy little team with a lot of heart and perseverance, got themselves qualified to go to the [REDACTED] Championship [REDACTED] and ended up making it to the final round.

Just as impressively, they raised the funds needed to get there in a matter of days. This year, the team [REDACTED].

My Jewish son is living the dream. He's found his people at his High School, is doing what he loves, and is thinking about college and dreaming about what he wants his life to be. He lives in a world that meets his hopes and dreams with a big YES!

Every child on this earth deserves to be welcomed by a world that says: Your hopes and dreams matter. They are both relevant and possible!

Children in Gaza experience nothing like this. In addition to lack of food, water, shelter, basic supplies, electricity, medical care and physical safety, no real school experience can happen. All of the students in our district, including Palestinian students, are witnessing this.

That any Jewish parent in Berkeley would complain about their child's sense of safety at a moment when the situation described above needs to be highlighted, offends me to the core. To my Jewish sensibility, the weaponization of antisemitism at a moment when we are watching (and complicit in) a livestreamed genocide, is grotesque.

My child is fine. I hope that the needless and wasteful distraction of the congressional hearings will be over soon so that our Board and Superintendent can get back to focusing on the work the district needs to do to support and provide the best educational experience for all of our students.

Sincerely yours,

[REDACTED]

PS. You are welcome to quote any part of this letter, except anything which might make my son identifiable publicly, such as [REDACTED].

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Mon, May 6, 2024 at 3:15 PM

Subject: Support for Superintendent Enikia Ford Morthel's testimony in Congress

To: <BoardofEd@berkeley.net>

Cc: Public Information Office <PIO@berkeley.net>, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

To BUSD Leadership,

I'm writing to decry the lawsuits claiming "severe and persistent" harassment & discrimination against Jewish students in Berkeley schools. My daughter is Jewish and attends Ruth Acty Elementary School, and I have never once felt that her Jewish identity has any negative impact on her school experience. Berkeley schools can and should be a place where all perspectives are welcome. Students and teachers who want to express their views on Palestine and on the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, at an age-appropriate level, should be welcome to do so.

As a Jew, I do not take any issue with pro-Palestine imagery in schools and in classrooms. Those who conflate support for the Palestinian people with "anti-Semitism" are no better than the parents in the South who seek to ban teaching of critical race theory because it makes their white children feel uncomfortable

I hope that BUSD leadership does not let the Zionist bullying silence the voices who speak out on behalf of the oppressed people of Gaza.

[REDACTED]

Parent of [REDACTED]

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Mon, Apr 15, 2024 at 5:26 PM
Subject: Appreciating You
To: <superintendent@berkeley.net>

Dear Superintendent Ford Morthel,

I am a [REDACTED] teacher in BUSD, a parent of two BUSD children, a member [REDACTED]
[REDACTED], an ethnic studies curriculum developer, and a member of the
Berkeley Jewish community.

I wanted to express my deepest gratitude to you for your leadership and advocacy over the last months. I can see just how much you are holding for our district and our collective children and I can only imagine the strain it is making on you.

You have been steadfast in your support of teachers and upholding our rights to teach about structures of power. You have also been an open listener and strategist for continuing to explore how the district can be more inclusive of all identities. I appreciate you tremendously for all of this and want to shower you with gratitude for your work and advocacy.

With gratitude,
[REDACTED]

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Mon, Apr 15, 2024 at 5:39 PM

Subject: Thank you Superintendent!

To: <superintendent@berkeley.net>

Dear Superintendent Ford Mothel-

I'm writing to say thank you for your advocacy for ALL Berkeley's students, and your continued commitment to education as social justice in action.

I'm a second generation graduate of Berkeley schools, an educator, a Berkeley resident, and a Jewish woman of color who is so proud to say our schools are led by you! It's appalling but not surprising to know that Congress is misusing its power and resources to demand you and BUSD answer for standing on the right side of history.

Please know that there are many anti-Zionist Jews like myself who stand beside you, and that we know our liberation is deeply linked with the liberation of Palestine. Thank you for fighting for all the diverse students and families in BUSD's care.

With deep appreciation,

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Mon, Apr 15, 2024 at 6:14 PM

Subject: Thank you!

To: superintendent@berkeley.net <superintendent@berkeley.net>

Dear Superintendent Ford Morthel,

Our family thanks you for doing what is right and best for the students of BUSD. Our Jewish/Christian family recognizes how difficult your work is at this time and how important it is to hear the voices of Berkeley students and teachers and reflect the beauty of our diverse community.

Our daughter graduated last spring and is well prepared to meet the world. This is because of BUSD—its teachers and their openness to appropriately struggle with realities people face and not some sanitized or skewed version of history and current events.

Thank you from all of us.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Tue, Apr 16, 2024 at 2:50 PM
Subject: Sending Support
To: superintendent@berkeley.net <superintendent@berkeley.net>
Cc: [REDACTED]

Dear Superintendent Ford Morthel,

I am the parent of a [REDACTED] grader at Malcolm X elementary school. We are Jewish and I work [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

I wanted to let you know that yesterday when I saw the news that you are being called before congress, my heart broke. I feel complicated and confused about the status of antisemitism in our schools but I also know that this summons has nothing to do with that and is a ploy by the republican lawmakers to chastise and humiliate you and, by extension, Berkeley. I am furious at the members of congress who are using me and my people as a weapon.

I can only imagine what you are feeling about this right now, but I want you to know that as a parent and a Jew, I support you. Please reach out if I can be of any help.

Best wishes,
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] >

Date: Fri, Apr 26, 2024 at 2:03 PM

Subject: Re: Superintendent Ford Morthel to Testify in Washington, DC

To: <superintendent@berkeley.net>

Hello Superintendent Morthel,

I am writing to lend my support as you go speak before the congressional committee. As a Jewish person who has lived in Berkeley my entire life, with two children in BUSD, I have felt that the community values all cultures and religions.

Thank you for all that you do for this community,

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Mon, Apr 29, 2024 at 9:06 AM

Subject: Support and good luck in DC

To: superintendent@berkeley.net <superintendent@berkeley.net>

Dear Superintendent Ford Morthel,

I am a parent of three students in Berkeley schools, and I wanted to take a moment and send you a message of support before you go to testify in Washington. I think you've been doing a good job of navigating the tensions over Israel and Palestine here in Berkeley. It is not easy! We have people on both sides of the issue who are intent on escalating their attacks against each other. They are looking for a fight. I really appreciate that you are trying to de-escalate and trying to find a way to allow everyone to speak their mind while maintaining an atmosphere of mutual respect.

I'm Jewish, but I don't think there is a big problem with anti-semitism in Berkeley schools. I haven't seen that from you, or anywhere in my kids' school experience. I mean, there are occasional things that come up - I recall a swastika being scribbled a year or two ago at BHS - but I guess I would say that Jews are probably less discriminated against than some other minority groups. You can see that in the achievement gap data. And there is anti-Black, anti-Asian, anti-Asian racism in Berkeley; these are all serious problems, and I don't think Jews need a special place or status. We need to combat anti-semitism by making Berkeley schools more inclusive and welcoming for everyone.

Personally I think a lot of the accusations of anti-semitism are a cynical attempt to use anti-semitism in order to suppress critiques of Israel. I also think that this is the motivation for the congressional hearings. Those folks are not your friends, they are going to attack you, mislead you and try to manipulate you. I know you will do your best to represent our community and everything that is good about it.

So I'm just sending you good wishes and letting you know that whatever goes down in Congress, there are lots of parents and community members here at home who support your efforts for inclusion and respect.

Yours,

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] >

Date: Wed, May 1, 2024 at 10:16 AM

Subject: BIG Blessings to you in preparation for May 8th

To: <enikiafordmorthel@berkeley.net>

I am sending you big blessings and praying hard for the Congressional hearing to go as well as possible. May the Congressmen/women be respectful and find their deepest well of integrity. Your ancestors are at your back. Your Berkeley supporters are at your back. Jewish BUSD Parents for Collective Liberation (of which I'm a member) are at your back.

You've got this!

with gratitude and admiration,

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Mon, May 6, 2024 at 2:41 PM

Subject: Positive Testimonial

To: <BoardofEd@berkeley.net>

Cc: <PIO@berkeley.net>, [REDACTED]

Hello,

My name is [REDACTED], and I am a Jewish BUSD parent of three.

I am writing to express my support for our Superintendent in addressing the needs of our students.

My children are Jewish and have many Jewish friends. None of them ever report experiencing anti-semitism at their schools. My eldest, a [REDACTED] at Berkeley High, expresses feeling worried about showing her love and solidarity for the Palestinian struggle. She's seen her teachers punished for speaking out about the Palestinian struggle- and worried that she should remain quiet about the genocide happening in Palestine.

My three children want to learn about Palestine as well as learn about other indigenous peoples and their struggles against colonial powers. **We do not agree that teaching about the atrocities committed by the state of Israel is an act of antisemitism.** We know that antisemitism, like all forms of racism and bigotry, are very serious issues. However, we also know that **teaching Palestine is not anti-semitic.**

I love the BUSD schools and know there is much work to be done to support all learners and to close the achievement gaps. I believe what is happening to our superintendent is a witch hunt, and a complete waste of time and precious resources. These resources should be used towards student success.

I support BUSD Schools and our superintendent.

Thank you for your time,

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Mon, Apr 15, 2024 at 6:45 PM

Subject: Message of support

To: <superintendent@berkeley.net>

Dear Superintendent Morthel,

I was really saddened to see the news about your being summoned to a congressional hearing. I'm the Jewish parent of two BUSD students and I've never felt that they were in any danger or mistreated in any way by anyone at school. These concerns feel to me to be blown way out of proportion. I hope you will go to D.C. feeling that the BUSD community has your back.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Tue, May 7, 2024 at 12:16 AM
Subject: Jewish Family with Positive Experience at BUSD
To: BoardofEd@berkeley.net <BoardofEd@berkeley.net>, PIO@berkeley.net <PIO@berkeley.net>
Cc: [REDACTED]

Dear BUSD Board of Directors,

I am writing to share that my child and my family have had a positive experience with being Jewish in the Berkeley Unified School District. During my son [REDACTED] 12 years at BUSD, he has sometimes been the only Jewish student in the room. He and we have always felt supported and safe with being Jewish at BUSD.

[REDACTED] has freely shared his Jewish identity with the school community throughout his entire time at BUSD. In elementary school I prepared latkes for school holiday celebrations and his dad taught his class to play dreidel many years in a row. Teachers and students were receptive and made us feel welcome and free to express our Jewish identity at school. In middle school my son researched our family's heritage and created a poster presentation explaining the Jewish customs and culture that are dear to him and to our family. In the presentation, he explained how ancient Jewish values and a history of persecution have informed his moral and ethical outlook, and our family's commitment to Tikun Olam (repairing the world). [REDACTED] spent much of 7th grade preparing for Bar Mitzvah and invited classmates and teachers, many of whom are not Jewish, to attend and share in his Bar Mitzvah service.

In High School, [REDACTED] joined the Berkeley High Jewish Student Union and this year he holds a leadership position [REDACTED]. He reports that students in the JSU hold a variety of views on Israel/Palestine, including some who support a ceasefire and Palestinian self determination, and others who are in favor of Israel continuing the war in Gaza. The JSU is open to Jewish and non Jewish students. Since October 7, the students have been in conversation with each other about the difference between antisemitism and criticism of Israel, the future of Israel/Palestine, and what it means to identify as Zionist, Anti Zionist, or neither. These adolescents are able to engage with each other on highly charged topics, even when they have vastly different perspectives. For me, this illustrates that BUSD's approach supports all students, including Jewish students, to be curious, engage in thoughtful debate, hold different viewpoints, and learn from each other.

My son is appreciative that some teachers have integrated information about the Israel/Palestine conflict into their lessons and he wants to learn more about Palestine. [REDACTED], along with Jewish and non Jewish friends, participated in the student walkout to support teaching Palestine. He experienced it as a peaceful, non violent expression of students' desire to learn about Palestine and support for teachers who are trying to make it happen. Recently he told me: "If we learned about Palestine in school, we would better understand what is happening there instead of people just accusing anybody who wants a ceasefire of antisemitism."

As a parent, I am thankful that my Jewish child has been able to learn in a school district where he has felt celebrated, seen, included, encouraged to be compassionate and curious about others, and free to express his views.

Respectfully,

[REDACTED]

(mother of [REDACTED])

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Mon, May 6, 2024 at 9:34 PM
Subject: A parent's perspective on the question of antisemitism at BUSD
To: PIO@berkeley.net <PIO@berkeley.net>, Boardofed@berkeley.net
<Boardofed@berkeley.net>

To the Berkeley Unified School District Board of Education:

I am a Jewish parent of two [REDACTED] children at Willard Middle school in the Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD). We've been in Berkeley schools since kindergarten. Our family has a strong Jewish identity; [REDACTED]. My children and my family have never experienced antisemitism at BUSD. In contrast, we have benefited from BUSD's strong commitment to diversity and inclusion. These are longstanding Berkeley community values, which Superintendent Enikia Ford-Morthel has continued to uphold and cultivate during her leadership.

I have never seen any evidence of systemic antisemitism at Berkeley Unified. Rather I have seen the teachers, principals and district administration consistently demonstrating that people of all backgrounds and experiences are welcome in the schools here. As I suspect is the case at most school districts in the U.S., BUSD has had isolated incidents of anti-semitism, racism, sexism and homophobia--we do not live in a perfect world. But when these incidents occur, I have seen swift messaging that they are not acceptable behavior, and more importantly efforts to bring parties together through a restorative justice framework.

Under Superintendent Ford-Morthel's leadership, BUSD has continued to prioritize creating a safe, positive and culturally diverse learning environment in which students feel valued and welcome. After nine years at BUSD, I am struck by how seldom my children have reported any offensive language or actions at school. My guess is that most Jewish parents with children enrolled at BUSD would agree that they and their children have benefitted from being a part of the BUSD community and its inclusive values.

I hope the year ahead is one of healing for us all, and that BUSD is able to put its full focus where it most belongs: on educating our children.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]