



Sophomore **Claire Yang**: CEO and ambassador for Gen Z.

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THE WHOLE BALL GAME

Football, more than any fall sport, has all of our attention. Does it have to be that way?

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Teachers and students weigh in on their No. 1 pet peeves on bathroom use.

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BEAR WITNESS



SALARY DISPUTE

SEEING RED

Teachers' no-confidence vote is the latest sign of fraying relationship with district

Center of the storm 380 teachers, including all of Branham's teachers, signed a vote of no-confidence against district superintendent Dr. Robert Bravo.

Speaking out Math and engineering teacher Barbara Schremp was among two dozen speakers at November's board meeting. "Board meetings used to be a cause for celebration, rather than a source of stomach pain," she said.



Students and teachers on the same side Students joined teachers in picketing outside district offices before board meetings last month. Dozens of district students have spoken before the school board in support of their teachers, who are asking for a 4% pay increase.

JAZZY NGUYEN Co-Editor-in-Chief

For Leigh High School teacher Cynthia Williams, even a racial slur was more acceptable than the district's souring relationship with teachers in the ongoing pay dispute. "Today I was called a n- by one of my students," Williams said at the Nov. 4 board meeting. "I am an African American teacher at Leigh. That was less disrespectful than what is going on with negotiations." At the meeting, speaker after speaker — in all, 20 teachers and students — lined up to speak at the podium, each of them criticizing the board members directly, citing a decline in morale and trust in their leadership. More damning was the vote of no-confidence the

teachers union presented to the board, garnering more than 380 teacher signatures, pinning the blame on Superintendent Dr. Robert Bravo. Yet, after the outpouring of grievances, protests and a student petition that has so far garnered 28,000 signatures, the school board unanimously voted to extend Bravo's contract one year, through 2024. "It was a slap in the face" to teachers and student voices, said Kim McCarthy, Prospect High School history teacher and president of the teachers union, of the unanimous vote, presented without discussion. Board member Stacey Brown did not attend and did not vote. The two student board representatives, junior Ainsley Bateman of Branham and Alison Lubiens from Prospect, cast a symbolic vote against the extension.

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Inside Editorial

To get district to listen to teachers, parents must be part of the conversation. Page 4

Prospect student petition has gained nearly 29,000 signatures. Page 7

JANITOR OVERTIME

"My guys like to cover the overtime but they're already burned out right now." Vinnie Ramos, school plant manager

Janitor OT costs go over limits district set

New rule limits district funds to \$10,000

JIYON CHOI News Editor

Barely halfway through the academic year, Branham has already surpassed its \$10,000 annual budget to pay for overtime custodial services on weekends and holidays.

What happens once the money runs out is another question that school officials are tackling.

The overtime pay comes from a fairly new district requirement that all after-school activities on weekends and holidays have custodial staff for cleanup and operating the facilities.

With after-school and weekend band rehearsals, sports practice and ASB activities requiring extra hours of work, as of Dec. 6, Branham has used \$10,351 of \$10,000 in district funds, and is trying to find funding sources once the funds are used up.

For now, there's not much to worry about, said Plant Manager Vinnie Ramos, who oversees custodial staff at Branham.

SEE OVERTIME • PAGE 5

INSIDE Students attend board meeting in support of teachers in salary dispute page 5.

CTE OFFERINGS

New business class nurtures entrepreneurs in students

NOLAN ZILS Co-Editor-in-Chief

Freshman Ian Angelopoulos runs a business. His company, Corona Crafts, sells masks for teens that are made by teens. He's now learning to market his business with the help of the new Intro to Business and Marketing class, one of the school's few CTE offerings.

In his sixth-period class, he is learning more about how to run his business and pursue his interest in fashion. The business class has been a longtime goal of Principal Cheryl Lawton since she joined Branham in 2016, especially in the tech hub of Silicon Valley.

First-year teacher Jennifer Boltz is teaching the class, along with World History. She majored in business and worked at a law firm as an immigration analyst for three years before going into teaching this year. She said the idea of being given the responsibility of

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“As students, we are taught to speak out for what is right and that doesn't end within the classroom. I want our teachers to know we care.” — Junior **Angela Le Drew** on her Change.org petition.

COVER STORY

# TEACHERS | Mediation talks continuing

From PAGE 1

## BY THE NUMBERS

**69.3%**

percentage of teachers in who say they are considering leaving the district because of teacher pay.

**72.8%**

percentage of teachers in district who say they are considering leaving the district because of district leadership.

**100%**

percentage of Branham teachers who signed on to a vote of no-confidence against district Superintendent Dr. Robert Bravo.

**100%**

percentage of school board members present who voted to extend Bravo's contract by one year. Trustee Stacey Brown was absent and did not vote.

## WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

### Superintendent Dr. Robert Bravo

“There's no question that we want the teachers to have raises, and they will have their raises. The question is just exactly how much it's going to be.”

### Beth Wilson, special education teacher

“I'm not convinced yet that the board or Dr. Bravo really cares. I am really appreciative that so many students showed up and so many other teachers and community members showed up, I'm still not really convinced yet that they see like how bad things really are, at least as far as morale goes.”

### Ainsley Bateman, Branham junior and student board member

“The actions of the board have made the teachers feel unappreciated, is a problem wholly other than finances as well. Just because the teachers put in so much time and effort for the students and if they're not feeling that they're getting that return in the actions of rhetoric from the board, and we have a problem.”

— Compiled by staff

Teachers thought, that with the rockiest starts to the school year in recent memory, that the board might have reconsidered a vote amid the tensions.

“I would like to know why that decision was made when we've heard them say that they're listening to us,” said English teacher **Rebecca Gilmore** of Prospect after the meeting. “Because tonight, I don't feel like I was listened to.”

### Seeking a leadership change

The vote of no-confidence, with more than 70% of the district's teachers, and 100% of Branham teachers, signing on, was a sign that teachers are asking for a change in leadership.

Among the reasons for presenting the vote of no confidence were issues that teachers had with Bravo's handling of the return to school, not creating a “positive work environment” that invites and retains high quality teachers.

The statement from the district's teachers comes after months of protesting in front of school on Tuesdays and Thursdays before class, picketing at the district office before the bi-monthly meetings.

Teachers have also worn red and have donned pins encouraging others to “Ask me about my pay cut,” a term that the district disputes.

For the 2020 school year, teachers were given a one-time \$5,000 bonus that was not renewed. The district had pinned its hopes of giving the teachers a raise from the passage of a parcel tax. When Measures K and L did not pass in 2020, teachers and the district returned to the negotiating table to discuss the rest of the teachers' employment contract, which expires at the end of this school year.

Both parties met Nov. 15 and again Dec. 1 with a state-appointed mediator, but no agreement was made at that discussion.

### Rising costs a factor in impact of pay decrease

The district says that the one-time payment was just that, but teachers view it differently. **Tiffany Ylarregui**, who teaches math at Branham, said that it's in the way it's defined.

“While I understand they have not subtracted money from our base salary, it comes down to a practical definition of pay,” Ylarregui said. “There's two pay cuts. One is that we are taking home less money because the stipend ended, and two our dollars are worth less because of it. The cost of living has risen and our pay has not.”

The cost of living in San Jose is 49% higher than the national average, according to PayScale, which analyzes employment data. From year to year, the cost of paying for necessities such as food and housing have jumped between 6% and 9%.

The current request from the Campbell High School Teachers Association is for a 5.5% pay increase in addition to a \$5,000 increase in teacher salary schedules. They cite the district's \$48 million in reserves, which has grown in recent years, as an example of their frugality.

Ylarregui is not in the minority when it comes to financial difficulty due to the decrease in pay. Branham teachers approached the speaker podium during the board's last four meetings to share personal stories and requests for the return of the bonus, citing the difficulties they've had to face as a result of the \$5,000 cut.

“It means I'm going into debt,” said **Jen Ozdinski**, Branham social science psychology teacher. “I've given up some of my personal care things just to find the money, and even moved out of my storage unit to save that money. It forced me to try and figure out where I'm spending that makes life easier that I can't do anymore.”

In the face of inflation, rising rent and housing prices with no adjustment in salary, trying to live in the area near their place of work is becoming increasingly difficult. According to a CHSTA survey, 69.3% of teachers are considering leaving the district because of pay.

“When I first started with the district, there was five or six years where we had no pay increases because the district didn't have the money and we understood, and we tightened our belts, and we just made it through,” said Barbara \_\_\_\_\_, Vice President of the CSEA, at the Nov 4 meeting. “But then when things got better, then of course, compensation needs to go with that. We want [teachers] to get the money they deserve. If things go bad again, we'll



Alli Wang/Bear Witness

### Teachers unveil the no-confidence signatures gathered at the Nov. 4 board meeting.

be here for you. We'll tighten our belts again. We understand math. We get it.”

### Board support of superintendent

The district's \$48 million in reserves, above the \$7.2 million that is required as their baseline, has been a large point of contention for teachers as many question why money is sitting in a bank account, and not used toward giving teachers the raise that they've been asking for.

CUHSD Board President **Kalen Gallagher** says that, of the reserves, \$17 million has been earmarked for other projects and cannot be used to fund an increase in teacher salaries. The rest isn't earmarked. Though the state only requires that 3% of revenue is kept, the district's policy is to keep it at 6%.

The board had recently considered bumping up the reserves to 17%, but had not voted on that proposal.

Despite the intense opposition to the district's leadership, board president Kalen Gallagher is defending the decision to extend Bravo's tenure.

“We obviously have some big issues that we need to solve as a community and as a district, but I think the people in this room can figure it out,” said Gallagher. “I think they're the right people. It's just going to take some time, and it's going to take some real frank conversations at the negotiation table.”

### Bravo: 'I have to do my job'

Gallagher attributes the quick, united vote to Bravo's competence and the effort he puts into understanding opinions that arise.

“Dr. Bravo is one of the better superintendents in the state,” Gallagher said, just after voting to renew Superintendent Bravo's contract. “He has done a lot for

students, he works really hard, he takes in lots of opinions, he understands them. You don't always have to agree on things, but I think he's the right person to lead us into the future.”

Bravo told the Bear Witness that he's taking a one-day-at-a-time approach to repairing the fraught relationship that teachers have with him.

“I have to do my job,” he said. “I appreciate that they're going to do their job. There's no question that we want the teachers to have raises, and they will have their raises. The question is just exactly how much it's going to be. I'm glad that we have mediators to help us with that.”

He said he was “disappointed and saddened” when the teachers union presented the vote of no confidence against him.

“I think all of us want to think that we do a good job with the people that we're working with, and nobody wants to think that they aren't,” he said.

He describes the relationship between the board and teachers as “strained,” and characterizes the public comments from teachers as being both “fair” and “unfair.”

“It's not more about me as much as it is about the board and the idea [from the teachers] that ‘if we don't get x particular amount, it means you don't care.’” he said. “We can disagree on how much the district can afford while still living in its budget. But to call disagreement ‘not caring’ – that's the [unfair] one – especially to the board members. What is most unfair about the whole thing, instead of just saying, ‘Look, we're disagreeing about this’ and ‘let's talk this out some more’ just to go to that place of assigning it as ‘you don't care.’”

When asked to elaborate on which of the teacher's comments he thought were fair, he responded, “I do need time to think about that one.”

## STUDENT SUPPORT



Prospect junior **Angela Le Drew** said the petition is a sign of strong community support of teachers.

# 29,000 sign on to teacher petition

**GYURI KIM**  
Staff Writer

Junior **Angela LeDrew's** Change.org petition in support of teachers in the ongoing dispute with the district has gained a staggering 28,000 signatures and counting, a sign of strong community support and beyond.

The petition, titled “Provide CUHSD teachers with a cost of living adjustment,” cites recent teachers union surveys and calls out the district leaders for lacking transparency.

“CUHSD teachers deserve better than 5,000 dollars taken from their paycheck this year. Please sign our petition and share,” she wrote in her initial Change.org petition.

The Prospect student is active at her school in raising awareness and support for her teachers, whom she says deserve a satisfying resolution to the conflict. LeDrew has attended several board meetings since the start of school, wearing red and protesting aside her teachers outside the district offices on Union Avenue. She also helped organize last month's districtwide walkout at her school.

LeDrew said her teachers have been an immense source of inspiration.

“My teachers' dedication to teaching and their students are what inspired me,” LeDrew told the Bear Witness. “Teachers do so much more than assign homework, they are truly the heart of Prospect. They are always offering to help students in any way they can, whether it is helping a student understand a concept or giving them advice.”

As negotiations and mediations have stalled, she can see that teacher morale has flagged. LeDrew said that on top of grading, lesson planning and teaching, teachers now have to worry about their financial struggles with approximately \$500 less in their monthly salary.

“We can see our teachers are more tired than usual,” she said. Having to go to board meetings to protest outside is taking a toll on them.”

Since starting the petition last month, LeDrew has shared the link on her Instagram and has promoted it, making fliers, and sharing it with her friends and family to sign.

“This would not have been possible without all the support I've received from classmates and friends,” LeDrew said.

With more than 28,000 signatures, she said she is astonished by the amount of traction it's received. It's currently trending on the “popular” section on the website.

She hopes that her petition can persuade the district into giving teachers a permanent wage that fits with the cost of living in this area.

So far, she has not received a formal response from the district. She is planning on speaking at the next board meeting on Dec. 2 to make a statement to the board, and give them a list of petition supporters.

“As students, we are taught to speak out for what is right and that doesn't end within the classroom,” she said. “I want our teachers to know we care.”