



Subject: SB 916

From Andy Gardner the Greater Albany Public Schools Superintendent – HD-15:

This bill is highly concerning for all school districts, but Greater Albany School District's recent experience with a strike has given us additional insights. First, our strike lasted three weeks, which would have meant that our workers would have qualified for unemployment. **The Greater Albany District, like many districts, self-insures its unemployment claims, which means that we pay the costs directly.** Even districts who pay for unemployment insurance would end up paying—they would simply experience an increase in rates from their provider. With this bill, **the State is once again spending the District funds which should go to kids.**

A second concern is the length of strikes. Strikes are difficult and, in some ways, become a test of emotional endurance. **This legislation adds fuel**, as after two weeks of strike the union can cite the arrival of new reinforcements. After two weeks of strike, the District would need to account for its costs at a whole new level. This year, after experiencing a strike without the need to do the unemployment calculations, I can say that working with the Unemployment Department to unwind this would be an absolute mess that would take months—long after the strike is settled. We began last year to pay Classified staff unemployment for “rest” periods. Receiving information was spotty and invariably slow. The amendments to this bill are perhaps well-intentioned, but they make nothing but a bigger mess.

I want to be clear; my rationale is not to oppose our employees; they work hard, and we want to always compare with other districts and the cost of living to make sure that we are not building a system that rests on them being paid less than a fair wage in the market. However, while the strike was occurring, the e-mails I received from parents who were home with their kids were the ones that resonated most powerfully for me. **The sense of helplessness came through in each e-mail. We do not have schools to provide jobs—we have schools to educate kids.** To set conditions unlike any other state for strikes to be longer is to move closer to adult interests and away from students and families.

Education is about our students and their learning and growth—it is not about giving the adults more leverage and the ultimate result of less school for kids.