

May 21, 2021



Dear Mayor Durkan,

Thank you for your email of April 2 and Deputy Mayor Sixkiller's April 20 email to select members of Seattle Public Schools Board of Directors, and the many conversations between staff in your office and board directors and district staff. In addition, I want to thank you and your team for last month's support to unsheltered residents who were camping at Miller Playfield and on district property near the gymnasium at Meany Middle School. The care taken to assist residents of the encampment and the sensitivity to the district's schedule for welcoming more middle school students for in-person learning were much appreciated.

Your email notes that, like Seattle Public Schools, you consider children and educational justice a top priority and you have demonstrated as much through partnership with Seattle Public Schools.

One area of rich collaboration between the city and the district is the joint use of publicly accessible playfields and park space. Seattle Public Schools and the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation have operated under a Joint Use Agreement for many years. This partnership offers a significant benefit to our mutual constituents, providing efficient and safe access to a broad portfolio of public spaces. Likewise, the city's support for the residents of the encampment at Miller Playfield facilitated greater access to the park by students and the community at large, and involved offering services to encampment residents living on both city and district property.

Similar conditions now exist near Bitter Lake Playfield, although the distribution of encampment residents across our respective properties is, at present, reversed from the situation that had existed at Miller Playfield. A significant number of unsheltered persons settled into an encampment over the course of the pandemic. Communication between district and city staff about the situation has taken place over several months. Most, but not all, encampment residents have settled on a parcel of district property between the park and Broadview Thomson K-8 school. This property is separate from the school yard and is rarely used by the school. To the casual observer, it might appear to be an area of the park and is likely enjoyed by visitors to Bitter Lake Playfield and Community Center.

Seattle Public Schools needs to remove this encampment from its property, and is reaching out to encampment residents and the community to determine what supports could be provided to encampment residents to help them access better choices for shelter and housing. That said, it is not realistic for the district to develop on its own a comprehensive program of supports for the unsheltered community.

Superintendent  
Dr. Brent Jones

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In his April 20 email, Deputy Mayor Sixkiller offered technical assistance to the district regarding shelter options and service providers. I would very much welcome this assistance from the city as a start and I am confident that only good things can come from continued collaboration between our respective teams. The city has the expertise and infrastructure to assist unsheltered people in our community. Seattle Public Schools recognizes the magnitude of the issue across our community, and we understand that while the city has made significant investments in unsheltered response, its resources are stretched thin, and the district may also need to contribute.

While I understand that the city will prioritize efforts on city property, my hope is that given our joint stewardship of many public spaces, rather than being divided by a property line, we can be united by our shared responsibility to the Bitter Lake community and to students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brent Jones", written in a cursive style.

Dr. Brent Jones  
Seattle Public Schools Superintendent