

1 **Declaration of Vicki Silkiss**

2 I, Vicki Silkiss, hereby declare:

3 1. I make this declaration based on my own personal knowledge and if called to  
4 testify I could and would do so competently as follows:

5 2. I am a Spanish and E.L.D. teacher at Oakland Technical High School in Oakland.  
6 I have taught at Oakland Technical for nine years.

7 3. Seven weeks into the school year during the 2001-2002 school year, I know that  
8 teachers are still searching for desks and chairs because their classes are overcrowded or because  
9 the administration continues to put additional students in their classes. It is the beginning of the  
10 second marking period and this should not be happening. Almost every year that I have taught at  
11 Oakland Technical there have been classes that are so overcrowded that students must sit on  
12 counter tops or at chairs without desks, or they must stand for a period of time before the  
13 administration can either balance the classes, the teachers can scrounge up more desks, or the  
14 students just get so frustrated they drop out or stop coming. I remember in one of the first years  
15 that I taught at Oakland Technical two of my classes had over 50 students and so students were  
16 sitting on the sinks, standing in the back and "squishing" in anywhere they could find a place.  
17 This is unacceptable and breaches our contractual class-size limits.

18 4. Too many teachers leave Oakland Technical each school year because of lack of  
19 support structures. For example, at the end of the 2000-2001 school year we lost approximately  
20 1/3 of our teaching staff. The students need consistency and, in order to create a stable  
21 environment, we need to provide enough support and assistance to teachers so that they want to  
22 stay on at Oakland Technical.

23 5. In three years we have had three different principals at Oakland Technical. Also,  
24 for the past two years, all but one assistant principal each year is new at her or his post; the same  
25 happens for counselors. This is a real problem. There is no consistency in follow-through of  
26 programs when this happens. As a result of this turnover we often lose specially funded

1 programs because no one is at the school to follow through with the requirements for those  
2 programs. Additionally, we have a different set of rules each year and each principal brings new  
3 agenda that may or may not be implemented before he or she is asked to leave. Again this  
4 creates chaos and confusion for staff and students and it makes it difficult to really see  
5 improvements at the school.

6           6.       My classroom has been freezing cold for the last five years because the huge vent  
7 in my class that is supposed to heat my classroom blows out cold air even when you try to turn  
8 up the thermostat. I have been complaining to the administration about this for as long as I can  
9 remember. In November, December, and January I completely relax my no-hat class policy  
10 because it just gets too cold for the students not to keep their hats on in my classroom. Parents at  
11 back-to-school night during the 2001-2002 school year kept asking me why it was so cold in my  
12 room and I explained to them that the heating system is broken and asked them to please  
13 complain to the school board or anyone who would listen that we could get some heat in the  
14 class for the students. It is very difficult to teach when it is so freezing in my classroom. The  
15 students have a difficult time concentrating and they are very uncomfortable. As of October 26,  
16 2001, my vent is working properly and it seems that this problem has been fixed for the time  
17 being.

18           7.       The books the seven of us in the foreign/world language department have to teach  
19 with are at least nine years old and many have pages missing from them. The foreign/world  
20 language department was supposed to receive new textbooks two or three years ago, but for some  
21 reason we were passed over; so who knows when we will get a new set of textbooks? When  
22 textbooks are defaced or ripped, it makes it more difficult to teach because the students have to  
23 share or they must use photocopies of texts. For example, some assignments have color  
24 photographs which accompany them and the questions may ask students to identify the hair, eye  
25 color or some other such characteristic of the person in the picture and to describe it in Spanish.  
26 The students often are unable to decipher these characteristics on a blurry photocopy. It is very  
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1 important that students have up to date textbooks that are in good condition.

2           8.       So far in the 2001-2002 school year we have not filled all of the positions that we  
3 need in the foreign language department and so several teachers are teaching classes that are  
4 overcrowded. Also, in the English, math, and social studies department I know that for  
5 approximately six weeks of school several classes in each department had approximately 40  
6 students in them. During the week of October 1-5, the teachers had a meeting with the principal  
7 and he said that because there are many classes that are overcrowded, we are going to need to  
8 hire more teachers in several departments. I don't know if the principal has been able to fill  
9 those positions and so there may still be classes that are overcrowded. It is important that classes  
10 not be overcrowded so that teachers and students are able to interact and so that students can get  
11 the help they need. It is also important for the Oakland Unified School District administration to  
12 take care of problems of overcrowding quickly -- not after six weeks into the school year or  
13 more, or never -- so that students' schedules are not disrupted and so that they have some  
14 consistency. Even if we lower the class size in some of those classes, students will have to start  
15 over almost from scratch with a new teacher; that transition can be very rough. During the 1999-  
16 2000 school year I had a class with approximately 50 students in it for about the first two months  
17 of the school year. The class was virtually impossible to teach but we did not have enough  
18 teachers at the school and so instead of placing the students with another teacher, the  
19 administration just took away my resource period and I taught an additional class during that  
20 time.

21           9.       The facilities at Oakland Technical are falling apart because they have not been  
22 maintained. The windows in my room have rotted out and are broken in places. Because the  
23 system for opening the windows is broken, I have to use a broom handle if I want to open or  
24 close the windows. I really don't know when my classroom was last painted. (It has not been  
25 painted since I began teaching at the school nine years ago.) I try to cover up the peeling paint  
26 and bare spots with posters so that the students have a comfortable environment to learn in but  
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1 we really should have better conditions than this. Periodically in my class I have cockroaches  
2 that come in and crawl on the floor or other areas. During the 1999-2000 school year, the  
3 principal had a huge leak in his office and water was dripping all over his desk. I don't know if  
4 this has been fixed this year or not.

5         10.     The bathrooms at Oakland Technical are pretty disgusting. I know that the  
6 custodians make an effort to keep them clean, but for at least two years one of the girls' bathroom  
7 toilets on the first floor flushing continuously. Often the sinks in that bathroom are clogged up  
8 completely so the students do not have a place to wash their hands.

9         11.     We do not have enough counselors at Oakland Technical. The students need to be  
10 able to get in to see their counselors, not just to change classes but to talk to someone about what  
11 credits they need for college and how to ensure that they graduate on time.

12         12.     I worry that the state sends too many emergency credentialed teachers into the  
13 classrooms at Oakland Technical who are not trained and do not receive the support or mentoring  
14 they need to succeed in the classroom. Often these new teachers leave our school shortly after  
15 they arrive. Teaching is a profession. It is important that teachers have training and mentoring  
16 when they enter the classroom so that they can provide students with the type of education they  
17 need.

18         13.     People often ask me how I continue teaching when the conditions are so terrible  
19 and at times depressing. At Oakland Technical approximately 50% of the students who come  
20 into our school during their freshman year drop out of the school by their senior year. This must  
21 change. The students need good teachers and resources. They need smaller class sizes and  
22 additional support. They need counselors who have small enough caseloads that they know the  
23 young men and women as more than ID numbers. They need to know implicitly that the adults  
24 in their district and state consider the education of youngsters important so they in turn will feel  
25 that it is indeed important. If we don't recognize that schools need to change, we are going to  
26 lose an entire generation of youngsters - or at least those that are not raised well-to-do or in

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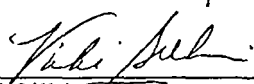
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1 suburban schools. I want to see Oakland Technical High School have the resources and support  
2 it needs to really serve the students here and to allow them to get the best education possible.  
3 They deserve it.

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6 I declare under penalty of perjury of the laws of the State of California and the United  
7 States that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed this 26<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2001 in Oakland,  
8 California.

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Vicki Silkis

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