

Subject: Neighborhood Schools and Resource Distribution

Date: Fri, 29 Oct 1999 01:56:51 -0400

From: Shirley Issel <ShirleyIssel@compuserve.com>

To: Bruce Wicinas <bwicinas@value.net>

Bruce,

It is very difficult for me to know how to respond to your e mail. I like and respect you so it is painful to feel your disapproval. This is such an emotional issue and therefore subject to polarizing communities. "Know how, executive capacity and contacts". I agree that these are critical resources that translate poorly into financial measures.

It is important for you to know that during our discussions, my focus is in on student achievement and I believe that high achievement will derive from equal access to the best teachers, curriculum, and Principal leaders. I see some needlessly poor results taking place in our current system, so that I am not all that enamoured of it, nor am I convinced that diversity--or it's absence will have much of an impact on student achievement--even though I do hold it as a personal core value. What I think will make a difference for students is setting high standards, raising teacher's expectations for student achievement, implementation of staff development and good site management. Our students of color have been paying the biggest price for our failure to provide these essential educational elements. As our resources are gravely limited I think it is critical to pursue initiatives that have a demonstrated track record of success in improving achievement. It is only a good education that will insure all of our students equity of access to life's resources. While diversity is a core value, education is the goal and it cannot be compromised.

I am also very concerned with parental choice. Since I've taken office, I have received the calls of anguished parents of color who are unable to access the school of their choice because of our assignment plan. The helpless frustration in their voices is very difficult to bear and diversity is not on their radar screen. How can I defend a policy that denies them access to existing openings in schools they believe are critical to the well being of their child and their family because of our "controlled choice" plan? I've seen how it doesn't work and I don't feel I'm in a position to be telling anyone what is best for them. I'm a great believer in the law of unintended consequences and I don't think we can design an assignment plan that will achieve equity better than what is arrived at through individual choice. I guess I'm a "free market" type, inclined to reducing the excesses and abuses of free choice through policies that ensure equitable distribution of available resources under my control. I am also reluctant to set a financial value on the richness of the support that all families bring to the schools of their choice. Hopes this gives you some sense of where I am coming from.

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