

CONTROLLED CHOICE MEETING

King Middle School Library

Minutes

November 1, 1999

Introduction

This is the fourth meeting. Irv thanked everyone for his/her participation. The purpose is to make minor adjustments. We have not reached a decision. But it does not mean that your contributions do not enrich this process.

- One solution is to do nothing and keep the present plan
- Other is a whole list of various plans that we could recommend.
- We looked at printed document from Richard Hoyer's plan

Pedro Noguera was present to talk about Diversity.

- He stated that six years ago was here in the same room with this same question.
- We were losing kids at the 4th – 6th grades.
- Integration had not shown the expected benefits and achievement we had hoped for.
- Two things had to happen:
 1. Reduce the number of transition by going to K-5 school model. Keeping kids in school longer would give parents a chance to develop relationship with the schools, and the schools would know their students better.
 2. We need to keep integrated schools. It still offers the best promise we had in this community for addressing the inequality in our schools. That issue is well documented in Berkeley.

The question remains as to whether integrated schools offer a good education to all students. Some schools don't. One exception is Emerson Elementary. Parents, all parents, take pride and ownership of the school. When we put the effort into creating schools that set high standards for kids but also provide a means to support kids to reach those standards and when we invest in strategies, we will see that integrated schools work well for Berkeley.

Look at Berkeley High the CAS program (Communication Art School). Created an environment where kids know each other and are challenged.

Many cities and districts are retreating from integration. Charlotte North Carolina has been the most recent case. New comers who moved to Charlotte pushed for an end to integration. When parents were interviewed and asked the reasons, they said it was inconvenient for their kids to be bused.

It would be very sad if Berkeley went in that direction. In Berkeley race and class are very directly related. Break down our schools by zip code, there is a very high correlation between zip code, income and the racial make up. If we were to go to neighborhood schools, we would have racially segregation schools in Berkeley. This was one of the first districts in the country to voluntarily integrate their schools. The message we send to our kids and to the country would be a very bad one. It would say that we have given up on the idea of educating all kids.

The fact that we don't educate all kids should bother all of us. We have the resources to do much better than we do. We should ask all schools why aren't we able to do a better job on educating all our kids? However, we are not here to discuss this, but I hope it is forthcoming.

Pedro is working with Lowell High School in San Francisco, which is also court ordered to change its admission requirements. However, it is too early to determine how well this change is going to effect the incoming students.

Some of our schools have models that we can look at now. They have succeeded in creating a good environment for kids. Kids and parents of all kind feeling welcomed. We are not trading off between good education for racial integrated schools.

Integration and school success should be our goals.

QUESTIONS FOR PEDRO

Integrating the school based on social economic standards. If you used that you would have a very similar outcome. Do you have feeling about that? If we were not to use race based assignment process would that mean the City of Berkeley is coping out and not making a stand?

The court is requiring us not to use race. Not yet, but could happen any minute. These are things you have to test out. Other factors could be explored to produce student assignment besides race and those should be investigated.

REMARKS

1954 Brown Act decision was not about class. It was about desegregating the school population and that is still the issue. No one has proved that an integrated school can not educate, that's not the problem. People can file lawsuits every day, but the problem is that they will have to overturn a decision, which the courts made in 1954. We should not be afraid of lawsuits. School districts should spend a lot of time investigating why students are not achieving.

QUESTION

- Has anyone asked the community what they want? People might have an opinion as to what they want.
- Some people want to send their children to neighborhood schools. They want: 1) good education. 2). School location/student population; #) learning environment is what they want.
- What kind of things does Emerson have that are so inviting to diverse parents?
 - They have a good after school program. They are well articulated with the academic program. Teachers know what is going on in the after school programs and visa versa.
 - In some of our schools the after school programs are in such poor quality that it is a joke
 - They have invested in organizing parents and doing outreach to parents. Parents will come to school if they feel that they are being respect and are doing something good for their kids
 - Principal at Emerson blows this horn at the being of the school day
 - Emerson has put resources into their programs
 - it a priority to reach out to parents in an ongoing way, not just a couple of times a year

- A teacher is on special assignment focuses on reading to help students who are low achievers.
- Put into place a number of strategies to prevent the gap in achieving

COMENTS

Berkeley does not always do things because they are convenient, but because it is the right thing to do. I think we would be making a great mistake if we change the present assignment process because of a threat of a lawsuit. It is also ironic that in a democratic administration that the Office of Civil Rights seems to be moving away from racially balancing our schools as well. Someone needs to articulate what the values of Berkeley are, not the values of North Carolina or Huntington Beach or Washington DC. One of our values is a long history of integration and someone has to make a stand. Neighborhood schools are not integrated. We do not have integrated neighborhoods.

Concern that getting rid of race without having been told to do so. Because once we move away from it could lead to slippery slope.

- Only replace race if we have some strong assurance that we would have diversity in our schools. Lot of kids do not fit neatly into one box. What really matters is what the outcome is in our schools.
- I drive past Cragmont, and to think that we have just built this new school and now we go to neighborhood schools. It would look like we sold this community.
- Before we move away from integrated schools, we must make sure we can have diverse schools

COMMENTS

1964 placement was not on race but from neighborhoods, we moved kids from one neighborhood to another. We used the method for 30 years, it was not based on racial quotas, but its objective was racial desegregation. Race was not a factor to determine the school. It is now, but it wasn't in the original busing program.

Jefferson after Reconfiguration. When given a choice between an integrated school or neighborhood school, 90% of the parents chose an integrated school. Parents would like to have a neighborhood school, but they knew that we would have a segregated school. At an integrated school their children would have better shot at getting the resources.

QUESTION

What is your thinking of open enrollment? Let parents make the choice.

- If you make it an open system you make it a lot more complicated
- If we have open choice what is going to be the criteria?
- What would be the consequences of actually letting parents make the choice?
- Don't have a lot of parents in the flats that chose a hill school and visa versa
- What parents come in first round?
- Even with outreach many families of color and economical financial disadvantaged families enter the choice later.
- Have to have system to have late comers to choose
- Who is choosing for the child?
- If it's the children we have to make sure it is fair for them for not the parents
- Therefore we don't let the parents choose

- How many African American children are in Jefferson's Kindergarten? 50 kindergarten and 9 are African American
- Teachers are already upset about the fact about the imbalance that we have
- When you correlate race to socially economics and zip codes some classrooms will be unbalanced
- Why is Jefferson racially unbalanced? The highest academic school in Berkeley
- Caucasian parents applied first. Make assignment, if they do not want to go to that school we cannot force them to go. That's why we have the numbers we have. If we don't have space at that school then we have to assign students at another school
- Need to make sure the district is not failing the Hispanic and African American students
- Real issue is achievement.
- Irving has been involved in desegregation for a long time. Kids go to school whose population looks the same.
- 1954 decision has been undermined quite vigorously.
- You hear all the time that if you had neighborhood school parent would participate more
- Usually it goes on for one or two years and then it is gone
- Kids in that situation find that they are worst off and if nothing had really happen
- Unless we have diversity in schools we will be short changing our children
- Pacific Legal Foundation has requested information
- If we get sued, it would cost over a million dollars to defend ourselves
- If we lose, and it looks like we will lose, the we will have to change our assignment policy
- If we let someone else come in and decide we will lose control
- We need to stay in control. We have to find another way
- Find another mechanism to have diversity in our schools
- Need to find middle grounds
- Need to come to a closure
- Our system is legal
- Do not let Pacific Legal Foundations or any right wing group decide for us
- What ever change we make it is very important and that we understand the consequences
- We have to stand for the principle. It is worth fighting for
- Don't see us making any changes this coming year
- Feel rushed
- Nothing concrete that everyone in this room agrees on
- Have not made any progress.
- Some African American parents don't chose hill schools because of transportation problems
- School Board will meet and discussing this issue on November 17th
- If Board makes a decision then we will know
- What is the process of this committee?
- Will you be voting on a decision?
- Open meeting, not a Board appointed committee
- Whose going to do the fighting?
- Whose going to stand up
- A lot of work to be done
- Not a fight going on nation wide
- Decision is not to be taken lightly
- Committee looking at a way to balance out the school