

Berke - Kulsch - Restructuring

Rumors About School

Changes Worry Parents

BERKELEY TRICITY POST 11-24-93

By JoAnn Mar

As the deadline approaches for the Berkeley Board of Education's final decision on school restructuring, many parents are growing increasingly nervous over the changes under consideration.

At the board's Nov. 17 meeting, nearly a hundred anxious parents and children show-



Dr. Pedro Noguera
Board President

ed up in response to a report that the board was considering the elimination of the Whittier Arts Magnet school as part of its school restructuring plans.

Board President Pedro Noguera assured the audience that the board had made no decision to close the Arts Magnet school. Nevertheless, parents made passionate pleas on behalf of preserving the school.

"We are prepared to argue any point vigorously and publicly," said parent and Whittier PTA president Ronnie Braga, "We are a two-time recipient of the California Distinguished School award. And we have a very well organized parent-teacher group to defend our position. We are a model for all the other school sites."

A few concerned residents from the West Campus neighborhood appeared in response to a rumor that the school district was planning to sell the West Campus site and turn it into a retail shopping center with low income housing.

Berkeley School Superintendent LaVoneia Steele sought to quell that rumor. "There is no

However, Dr. Steele admitted that the district is looking at developing the West Campus site as a possible source of revenue-generating income. Franklin school has been mentioned as one possible site for relocating the West Campus adult school.

The board was quick to reassure the audience that no decisions on West Campus would be made without public discussions. "Whatever is going to happen on that site will not happen without a full dialogue with the community and the neighborhood," said Board Vice-President, Elizabeth Shaughnessy, "There's no way you're going to suddenly wake up and find something has been imposed on you. We don't do business that way."

Up until recently, the board has been discussing school restructuring in generalities. The board is now examining some concrete scenarios for changes that may involve grade reconfiguration, changing zoning and boundaries to improve the racial balance at all schools, and implementing a system of school notice.

"It does not surprise me that there is now something for people to react to and that reaction is going to be rather strong," said Board Director Irene Hegarty, "I think there are other school communities that have not come out in an organized fashion yet, but they will as they hear about various options."

Although board discussions have led to unfounded rumors, Board Director Miriam Topel stressed the importance of talking about every possible consideration. "You have to have open discussion in order for there not to be hidden agendas," she said, "In connection with the elimination of magnet schools, it's worth daring to ask those questions."

Topel asked the school administration to return to the

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board with more information on whether magnet schools have an adverse impact on racial balance and whether they tend to increase the district's transportation costs.

Board President Noguera said that whatever decisions are made on school reorganization, not everyone would be happy. "There are competing interests

that conflict with one another," he said, "So what we're trying to do in an objective way is to look at what's in the best interests of the district as a whole."

The board's next public discussion on school reorganization will take place on Saturday, Dec. 4th at 10 a.m. at the Jefferson elementary school.