

Dem - P.UBB SUMMERS - Resisting

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Rumors rally Arts Magnet parents

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by Shannon Morgan

Somebody pushed the panic button at Arts Magnet school last week.

A rumor that district reconfiguration plans do not include the continuation of the city's choice school drew more than 50 parents and the children marching to the Board of Education meeting last Wednesday.

"We just found about this today, if we had a week we could get the whole school out here. I'm optimistic about it. This is the only California Distinguished school in the city. You don't get rid of something that works," parent Donna Griggs said.

The parents, many with children in tow, are passionate about making sure their school remains the same.

"I think the district is going to make a big mistake if they don't build on their existing strengths. Why don't they figure out what's working and make it work everywhere else?" said parent Ellen Brodsky, who also served on the School Organization Task Force last year.

The rumor was perhaps generated by questions raised at a BUSD workshop Nov. 13 about whether

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district zones would be better integrated without Arts Magnet and John Muir as choice schools.

Concern was also raised that such schools place additional busing costs on district finances.

"I got a call tonight at work and was pulled out of a meeting because my wife said our son was told his school was going to close. It took awhile to calm him down. I need something to tell him, he cares about it and so do we," Lee Soule said.

After cutting off public comment, without hearing from all who wanted to speak on the issue, board members took time to attempt to answer questions and address concerns.

"We had some specific questions about magnet schools and we asked for information on whether eliminating magnet schools would help improve ethnic integration, and would it improve communication and collaboration between schools if there were consistent grade configurations across the district," Schoolboard Director Miriam Topel said.

While board members reiterated that no decision on school make up has been reached, they said it is important to consider every variation possible.

"We really do need to throw out every idea and talk about it. We have to be free to talk about it or else we become paralyzed," Director Pamela Doolan said.

Schoolboard Director Irene Hegarty noted that as reconfiguration options are refined the board should hope for and expect more public outbursts.

"For over a year the board has been talking about reorganizing in a somewhat abstract fashion. We're at the point now of looking at real scenarios. It doesn't surprise me that there's something to react to and other parents will likely come forward" as the deadline for action draws near, she said.

The board is scheduled to choose a reconfiguration plan on Dec. 15 and is holding two more public meetings to garner input on the decision before that time.

(The next meeting is Dec. 4 at Jefferson School at 10 a.m. Call the BUSD meeting hotline at 644-8931 for information.)

"We're delighted to see the parents here. This is not going to be an easy thing for us. We know whatever

their school might get the axe.

School Board President Pedro Noguera also noted the hard choices before the district.

"Obviously there is pressure to change the district by competing interests and there's no way to make everybody happy. What we're trying to do is look at what's best for the district as a whole. Hopefully we can work out a compromise that's best for the whole," he said.

Options currently under consideration by the board include:

- **The Crescent Plan** would work under a three-zone system and would keep k-3 and 4-6 schools district-wide. The new zones would include Cragmont, Jefferson and Columbus as k-3 schools feeding into Thousand Oaks in the Northwest zone. A Middle zone would incorporate Oxford, Washington and Whittier (currently Arts Magnet) feeding into Longfellow, and LeConte, Emerson and John Muir would feed into Malcolm X in a Southeast zone.

- **The K-4, 5-8 Two-Zone** plan is another under consideration. If implemented, Malcolm X, Thousand Oaks, King and Willard would become 5-8 schools, while all other elementary schools switch to a k-4 format. The zones, at this point, would divide the northeast and west portions of the city from southeast and central campus areas.

- **The Mosaic** plan would allow each school its chosen grade configuration, as reported last spring, and would result in three different school zones with myriad options. At this time it is unclear if parents would be able to choose which schools their children would attend within the zone in which they live.

The first zone, if implemented as is, includes Emerson, LeConte and Jefferson as k-3 schools feeding to Malcolm X, which would remain 4-6. After sixth grade students would attend Willard, which also remains 7-8. In this zone there would be more students at Malcolm X than at Willard.

The second zone would include Cragmont and Columbus as k-4 feeding into Thousand Oaks as a 5-8. Washington, Oxford, Arts Magnet, John Muir and Longfellow would round out the third zone as k-5 schools feeding into King. As proposed King would need to accommodate more than 1,000 students under this plan (it currently serves 800).

- **Under a K-5 Choice** parents