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From: Robert Broecker <broeckerr@sfusd.edu>
Subject: Reassignment of Kindergarten Immersion Students
Date: Sunday, July 27, 2008, 11:49 AM

Dear Alvarado Community:

As you are aware, fifteen incoming English speaking kindergarten students have been reassigned from Alvarado for the 2008-09 school year. Their places will be taken by Spanish speaking students who had requested Alvarado immersion as a first choice but were erroneously assigned to other programs and/or schools. In this message, I will attempt explain the back-story of this problem and the reasoning behind the solution the district came to.

Two-Way Immersion

First let me begin with a brief description of two-way Immersion in SFUSD. Most, if not all, two-way immersion programs grew out of existing bilingual programs. As such, the primary intent was and is to assist English Learners in the acquisition of English. To that end a balance of language proficiency must be met in the classroom. There must be sufficient numbers of English speakers for Spanish speakers to learn from and vice versa. When first created that balance was set at 1/3 Spanish speakers, 1/3 English speakers and 1/3 Bilingual. In recent years, due to overwhelming popularity of two-way immersion programs with English speaking families, the district has relaxed that requirement to ½ English speakers and ½ Spanish and Bilingual speakers. It is important to remember that anything less than the 50/50 balance undermines the effectiveness and intent of our immersion program. No parent at Alvarado signed their child up for a one-way immersion program with only the teacher, and a few children, as language models, yet this, in effect, is what has been happening at Alvarado.

Incorrect Assignments for 2008-09

I had expressed our concern regarding the over enrollment of English speakers to the Educational Placement Center (EPC) in August 2007 and we were promised that the 50/50 balance would be respected in 2008. However, this spring we were shocked to see that the incoming two-way immersion kindergarten group was even more heavily non-Spanish speaking than previous years. In fact here were the numbers:

Number of students	Home Lang	Dominant Lang
8	SP	SP
2	EN	SP
30	EN	EN
2	DU	DU
1	FR	FR
1	JA	JA
1	IT	IT

At first we thought that this was simply a problem of recruitment. Namely, that we weren't doing our job in attracting Spanish speaking families to Alvarado and the applications didn't exist. However, the next thing we discovered while looking at our copies of enrollment applications was that Spanish speaking families *had* in fact requested Alvarado but had been denied and were placed in general education at Alvarado. This left us wondering, of course, how many families had requested Alvarado immersion but not gotten into Alvarado at all. Simultaneously, the two-way immersion program at Flynn was experiencing the same dilemma.

Further, having gotten wind of the error, Spanish speaking families that were denied correct placement were threatening legal action since their children were being denied an appropriate educational setting as required by *Lau v. Nichols* and the *Equal Education Opportunities Act* (1974).

How did it Happen? Siblings Incorrectly Designated

Darlene Lim, director of EPC, was shocked as well to see the imbalance at Alvarado and Flynn. She had thought she had a handle on the problem and had specifically told placement clerks to respect the 50/50 balance. After a lengthy investigation it was determined that the error was, as these things tend to be, a technical one. There are 19 incoming siblings in the Alvarado kinder immersion program. Siblings are guaranteed placement. In EPC's placement system all 19 of these students were erroneously coded as Spanish speakers when in fact most are not. This left EPC thinking that the remaining 21 students should be mostly English speakers.

Solution

Several propositions were made. In the end, the district decided that the best way to maintain integrity of programs and meet class size, space and resource constraints was to admit error and reassign misassigned students. This was a district-level decision agreed upon by EPC, School Operations, Assistant Superintendents, the Multilingual Department and Superintendent Carlos Garcia. It involves families at Alvarado, Flynn, Marshall, Paul Revere and Daniel Webster.

At Alvarado fifteen English speaking students will be assigned elsewhere (probably at a new dual immersion program at Daniel Webster in Potrero) and their places taken by Spanish speaking students who had requested Alvarado but had been denied. The same will be happening with Flynn families.

Here is the process:

- First EPC filtered out pre-assigned students (siblings & inclusion) and staff's children. These students were not included in those reassigned.
- Then the remaining EN students were assigned a random number.
- 15 English speaking Alvarado students (& 8 Flynn students) will be assigned elsewhere.
- 10 Spanish speaking students will be given spots at Alvarado (& 7 at Flynn). Why only 10 new students in exchange for 15 exiting? In addition to having too many English speaking students, Alvarado was overenrolled by five students making class size over the 20-student limit.

Why No `Bubble Class'?

One of the proposed solutions was the creation of a 'bubble class'. This would be a third kindergarten immersion class which would accommodate space for the students denied Alvarado immersion and those overenrolled. The extra class would follow up grade levels for subsequent years. There were several problems with this solution:

- Pedagogy: with a bubble class you need a bubble teacher. Either the same qualified, bilingual teacher would follow the class up each year meaning that one teacher would have to learn a whole grade's curriculum each year, every year for six years (and students could potentially have the same teacher). Or we would have to hire a new teacher each year. Or we would have to force a teacher with established expertise at a grade level to change each year (this year Teacher A leaves kinder to teach 1st. Next year Teacher D leaves 1st to teach 2nd, etc.) We had great concern about the quality of the education these bubble students would receive.
- Resources: These extra students would put more strain on already overburdened resources: literacy, reading recovery, special education, counseling, etc.
- Space: every classroom at Alvarado is used. Also to consider: space in the cafeteria, computer lab schedule, arts schedule, library schedule, science schedule, etc.
- Ratio: There is no certainty that the new class would have the correct proportion of English and Spanish speakers. We could have the same problem, just with more students.

We understand that the reassignment of families at this late date creates hardship and stress. Many families put long hours into researching and choosing a school, setting up child care, getting involved with the Alvarado community. We know that families were making major life plans and children were settling on the idea of Alvarado. I myself have personal friends who were, until Thursday, coming to Alvarado with their son. The district is doing all it can to help with the transitions. We truly wish we could accommodate everyone. Unfortunately, we can't. Even if these families remained at Alvarado, they would not be getting the program they signed up for. A 72%/28% English to Spanish ratio is not two-way immersion. Displaced children will still be able to attend a quality immersion program. We know that there is concern in the community and voices are rising in protest. Your voices deserve to be heard. Also, remember that until now there were at least ten, probably many more, Spanish speaking families out there who had no voice, who were simply overlooked by the system.

Sincerely,

Robert Broecker
Principal, Alvarado Elementary School