



July 27, 2008

Dear District Leaders:

During the last three days, PPS has fielded nearly a hundred calls and emails regarding the reassignment of Flynn and Alvarado students to Daniel Webster. Most of the comments were grouped around specific concerns, and we have summarized these concerns.

Due to the nature of summaries, the raw emotional tone is missing. We urge you to read between the lines and see the real family hardship caused by reassigning students at the last minute, as well as the commitment of school communities who insist on maintaining the integrity of a balanced immersion program. Unfortunately, there is no way to convey this emotion. In addition, there are hundreds of testimonials on the SF KFiles Blog (thesfkfiles.blogspot.com) in reaction to this decision.

Sincerely,

Ellie Rossiter

Interim Executive Director
Parents for Public Schools – San Francisco

Here are some of the concerns from parents of children who have been reassigned:

Logistics

1. Parents have already re-arranged their work schedules to accommodate the start time for Flynn (8:30 a.m.)
2. Parents have already purchased uniforms at considerable expense. Will they be reimbursed for these costs?
3. Parents have arranged carpools and childcare for Flynn and Alvarado. It will be difficult to make other arrangements on such short notice.
4. How will families who planned to walk or take public transportation to Alvarado or Flynn get their children to Daniel Webster? Will the district be providing transportation for these families?
5. Many families are on vacation, or will be shortly. How will they get information if they cannot attend the district meeting Tuesday?

Appearance of a Double Standard

State law requires a one-third, two-thirds split by native language. While this is not considered ideal, it meets the requirements for dual-immersion. As recently as last spring, Flynn elected to form a one-third English, two-thirds Spanish 4/5 split class. Other schools (Marshall, Monroe) also have ratios that are closer to one-third native English speakers, and two-thirds native Spanish speakers. Both Flynn and Alvarado met the one-third, two-thirds split by native language at the start of the reassignment process. Why are students at only these schools being reassigned? There is an appearance of a double standard in defiance of state law.

Lack of Transparency

Apparently the district has been aware of this problem since March, and is only now reassigning students, four weeks before school starts. This problem could easily have been addressed by only admitting Spanish speaking families in the second round.

The district held meetings on this dual-immersion issue without parent input. Had the district sought parent input, some of these problems could have been avoided.

Lack of information about Daniel Webster

Parents need more information about the program at Daniel Webster. How can SFUSD pull together a functioning immersion program in only a few weeks? How can these families tour Daniel Webster when it is closed for the summer?

Future Problems with Enrollment

One of the biggest concerns parents have with the district is lack of certainty regarding enrollment. This decision, while affecting only 23 families this year, will add another layer of uncertainty in the coming years. Are all assignments considered “tentative”? When is an assignment really final? How will the district re-establish trust with incoming families?

Here are the concerns of the parents supporting reassignment

Program integrity

Parents are concerned about the integrity of the immersion program. Research shows that the ideal ratio for two-way immersion is fifty-fifty. SFUSD has committed to maintain this ratio.

New Spanish-native families were left out of the process for Alvarado and Flynn

Because of a coding error, all pre-assigned students were designated Spanish native at Alvarado and Flynn even though a majority were English natives. Therefore, no new Spanish native students were assigned to these Spanish immersion programs. Instead these families were assigned to general education programs or Spanish immersion programs at other schools.

District is trying to address the problem

The district is trying to correct the problem. The biggest part of immersion is maintaining the correct ratio of native and non-native speakers mix and having qualified teachers.

Unless there is a fifty-fifty mix, children will not become truly bilingual. .

The district needs to guarantee that Daniel Webster will achieve a fifty-fifty mix, otherwise children are essentially taking a Spanish class.

Unless the district fixes this problem, parents will lose trust in the immersion program

Parents who enroll their child in an immersion program need assurance that the district will maintain the program as promised.