



**SAN FRANCISCO ADVOCATES FOR MULTILINGUAL EXCELLENCE**  
ADVOCATE, PROMOTE, AND SUPPORT MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION IN SFUSD

July 29th, 2008

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Parent

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Parent

Kelly Dong  
Jose Ortega Elementary School  
Mandarin Immersion Program  
Parent

Dear Superintendent Garcia, and the SFUSD Board of Supervisors:

On behalf of San Francisco Advocates for Multilingual Excellence, we write this letter in response to the current situation regarding the over-enrollment of English speakers to the kindergarten classes at Flynn and Alvarado Elementary Schools.

Throughout the previous two years (and before that as the PPS Immersion Task Force Committee), we have been meeting regularly with the school district as representatives of the parent community to help shape policy for the immersion programs in SFUSD. One of our members (Tammy Radmer), sat on the Blue Ribbon Task Force and helped to draft both that committee's report, as well as the response to it from our organization. The authors of this letter (Maria Aldaz and Sally Payson Hays) also participated as members of the Spanish Immersion Two-Way K-8 Articulation Committee, and as such have attended meetings with Karling Aguilera-Fort (now the head of the Multilingual Department), and Assistant Superintendent Francisca Sanchez (meetings took place in from March through May). At no time during any of these meetings was it ever discussed that the enrollment at these two schools needed to be changed drastically before the next school year, despite existing knowledge on the part of the district that the Education Placement Center had made significant errors regarding the language balances.

All of us are hard-working parents and/or professionals. Our hours are volunteered, but worth the time if we are able to achieve our goals of equity and excellence for all SFUSD students. As such, we are strongly dismayed that SFAME as an organization was not informed of the situation regarding over-enrollment of English-speaking students at Flynn and Alvarado until after a decision was made to create a new SI program at Daniel Webster three weeks before the beginning of the school year.

This process of decision-making demonstrates a complete lack of consideration of our clearly written recommendations (please see attached), and does not follow the process that in good faith we have worked hard to try and establish with the school district. Moreover, the recommendations of the District's Spanish Immersion Two-Way K-8 Articulation Committee were clearly over-ridden in what frankly appears to be a floundering approach to a serious error committed by the EPC. If there is to be any trust and support between the parent community and the district, this cannot be how problems are solved, and we demand both an explanation for how and why things occurred as they did, as well as a full accounting of who is responsible for errors (including some specific and concrete outcomes to prevent such events from reoccurrence).

As an organization, SFAME (and before as the PPS Immersion Task Force) has been urging the EPC to more carefully consider the programmatic needs of immersion schools for years. For the past two years at least, incoming enrollment at 4 out of the 6 existing two-way SI programs, has not reflected the recommended proportion of 1/3 Spanish, 1/3 English, 1/3 Bi-lingual students. Had the EPC followed our recommendations, none of the Spanish Immersion schools would be over-enrolled with children of either language group for the school year 2008-09. We understand the chronic frustration of Spanish-speaking families turned away from popular schools like Flynn, as well as the concerns of both English and Spanish speaking families with a disproportionate Spanish-speaking children enrolled at Marshall and Monroe. Although the situation may seem limited to this year at Flynn and Alvarado, we can attest to the fact that this is a long-standing problem that has been complained of by families (of all language groups, when you consider all the language programs in SFUSD) for a long time. This current situation not only affects the 23 affected families but ALL SF families in public education as well as those who will be there soon with the negative PR this has caused for the district on an already unpopular enrollment process. we've been promised EPC changes in the past but nothing has been done and some concrete evidence must be given of something like this never happening again. We are tired of the quick fixes that are put into place without adequate preparation and forethought, and tired of having our voices not heard.

Finally, it is concerning to us that problems caused by the EPC are solved with blatant disregard of recommendations from committees consisting of experts both within the district and the community and created by SFUSD with the express mandate of trying to address these very issues. These recommendations include adequate preparation for faculty and staff at new programs (3 weeks is NOT enough), and an informed involvement from community stakeholders including PPS and SFAME. It very much appears that the left hand does not know (nor do they care) what the right hand is doing. At the very least this demonstrates poor judgment if not incompetence and complete disregard for the hard work of faculty, parents, and staff on these committees. The district is always talking about being transparent and then goes ahead with creating a last-minute program and effectively blind-siding all previous efforts at cooperation. If SFAME and PPS had been included in problem solving, we possibly could have helped mitigate the disaster we are all facing now.

In good faith, the district needs to show very carefully how they can ensure this is the last time EPC will make mistakes of this magnitude, and they must include us (SFAME, PPS) in the process of problem-solving regarding both the current and future situations. For the sake of our children and families of all languages, we will not allow this district to continue to disregard long-considered and well-researched recommendations that they have solicited and heard numerous times.

Should you have a response or any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us by e-mail at [maria.e.aldaz@ceridain.com](mailto:maria.e.aldaz@ceridain.com) and [slphays@gmail.com](mailto:slphays@gmail.com) or to our community at large by writing to join our SFAME list serve at: [subscribe-SF\\_AME@yahoo.com](mailto:subscribe-SF_AME@yahoo.com).

Respectfully,

Maria Eugenia Aldaz, Chair  
Sally Payson Hays, Co-Secretary  
SF AME

**Italics added for emphasis:**

**Excerpts from the Blue Ribbon Task Force Report to the Board of Education:**

**"Well-designed immersion programs are most effective for English Learner children.**

Studies show that *well-designed* K-8 immersion programs are the most effective programs for long-term achievement and preservation of native language. Late-exit bilingual programs are more effective than early-exit programs, but still may not produce academic competency in native language. Under current conditions, however, *immersion and late-exit bilingual programs are not adequately supported by the district*. Disaggregated and longitudinal data has not been available to improve programs, programs are not consistent, and parents do not fully understand how they work. Planning for middle school immersion programs has been inadequate and doesn't guarantee seats for 5<sup>th</sup> grade immersion applicants. There are almost no high school immersion options or heritage language classes geared to their level of proficiency.

***Education is needed for Education Placement Center (EPC) staff and incoming parents.***

*Parents, teachers, and EPC counselors need to be better informed about programs and options. Often students are improperly placed, either in the wrong program, at an inappropriate level, or in a school that is geographically difficult for the family to access. There is a great deal of confusion with the terms "bilingual" and "immersion." Parents of English Learners are often comfortable with the school and staff of bilingual programs, but are unaware of the academic benefits of two-way language immersion programs that continue through 8<sup>th</sup> grade.*

***There is a lack of curriculum articulation between schools and grade levels.***

*Some programs within an elementary school are well articulated, as are some programs within a high school. The lack of middle school programs interrupts the articulation from elementary school to high schools. In addition, there is generally little articulation between schools at the same level. There is a lack of consistent outcomes, benchmarks, and standards.*

**Excerpts from the SFAME response to the Blue Ribbon Task Force Report:**

"Section III. Additional Recommendations:

8. For Kindergarten placement at Two-Way Immersion schools, the *EPC must honor the program design and improve their efforts to create the correct 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 balance of native English speakers, bilingual speakers, and ELLs, whenever possible*. EPC has not historically balanced programmatic needs appropriately with placement of newcomers (especially at the higher grades) that take into account the effect on the program. *This has tended to weaken the effectiveness of programs (especially Spanish Immersion, where some schools have a majority English speakers, and others are majority Spanish-speakers) causing school sites to alter how they meet students' needs in such a way that schools vary widely within the district. This makes setting district standards and evaluating program effectiveness difficult if not impossible.*

Furthermore, if the proper 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 balance cannot be achieved (Mandarin Immersion programs for example), then the district needs find a quick and fair way to open up those slots to parents who were turned away."

**Excerpts from SFUSD's Spanish Immersion Two-Way K-8 Articulation Committee (which included parents, teachers, administrators and staff from Multilingual):**

**Recomendations:**

**Placement**

- *Better entry testing process, informed counselors*
- *Ensure correct student placement (1/3, 1/3, 1/3 or 50/50)*
- *There should be criteria for admitting students into the program*
- Ensure that there is enough space in MS as elementary programs grow
- Ensure adequate and appropriate programs at the high school level for students exiting MS Spanish Immersion Programs

**If SFUSD's were to be the model Spanish two-way immersion program, what would it look like?**

- *1/3, 1/3, 1/3 (appropriate placement of students)*
- More training/materials for transference
- *All schools in alignment*
- One department overseeing immersion
- Extra support for ELs (tutoring/paras, etc)
- More \$ from Weighted Student Formula
- Incentives for bilingual teachers
- On-site bilingual/immersion coordinators
- Sufficient funding for parent liaisons
- Assessment for all students in Spanish
- Disaggregated data to include whole district and cross program comparisons
- *Parent Ed – parent leadership from all programs*
- Enriched curriculum (music, art, etc.)
- *Strong ELAC/DELAC*
- High Level Spanish and English for teachers

**How can this “model” program be created?**

**a. What steps need to be taken?**

- *EPC must be on the “same page” so that students are placed in the programs appropriately*

**b. How can we best involve each/all stakeholders to effect this change?  
(parents, students, administrators, teachers, community members etc.)**

- *Board and superintendent and all district with same commitment and vision about the immersion program*
- Work with organizations such as CAFE and collaborate w/other districts' immersion programs
- Education for families about data analysis, such as trajectory of development

**c. How can we hold ourselves accountable?**

- *SF Advocates for Multilingual Excellence (SF AME)*