

November 28, 2007

Dear Kirsten, Denise, and Renato:

Thank you for all of your work ensuring transparent and fair enrollment procedures for the 2008-2009 school year open enrollment period. We're looking forward to hearing your recommendations for the Board meeting of December 12th – and for clarification about the possibility of a Hillcrest Community meeting on December 6th.

That said, we want to clarify one issue that has created some confusion amongst all the caucus constituents of the Hillcrest Long Range Planning Committee. The fundamental basis of our report to you that was emphasized in our meeting was that families need certainty so that they can make the appropriate plans for their children. The confusion – and anxiety – that now exists based on last week's district meetings to clarify the Options Program is especially acute because those meetings seemed to be intertwining options with the separate topics of involuntary redirection of siblings of students who are already attending the school and the overall rules regarding redirection for all pre-K families.

The recommendations we submitted in our October 19th report were made to address the problem of Hillcrest as an impacted school. The overcrowding at Hillcrest – and those of any school where there is more demand than supply within that school's attendance area – is a problem of overcrowding, rather than how the Options Program is implemented. With overcrowding in our school, we don't have space that even permits us to go through any of the Options priority check-off list: neighborhood, siblings, program improvement, safety, lottery. (It's why one of our main findings and recommendations is to redraw – shrink – the Hillcrest attendance area.)

This is where the issue of "neighborhood" and "siblings" becomes very muddy in the eyes of existing and future Hillcrest families. A great number of existing Hillcrest families have become concerned that younger brothers and sisters won't be able to attend the school with their older siblings. They're looking at families being split up. At the same time, incoming families remain concerned that they will be given zero priority on the alternate neighborhood schools to which they apply. This enrollment issue is one of Hillcrest being impacted, not an issue of how to implement the Options Program. (Again, this concern becomes less acute if the attendance boundaries are changed to balance demand and supply.) Rather than creating more certainty, applying the guidelines of the Options program to an impacted school creates more uncertainty amongst an even wider population. We recommend a set of guidelines for impacted schools. Impacted schools (unfortunately) don't even have table stakes to participate in the Options program.

For Hillcrest or any impacted school, we strongly urge OUSD to:

- First and foremost, implement a redirection plan whereby attendance-area children denied a place at their neighborhood school are guaranteed priority for the alternate schools they request (LRPC Report Recommendation 5); The policy proposed for use by the Alameda Unified School District (LRPC Appendix A) is a good example of what we are recommending.

- Secondly, and only in the context of implementation of a redirection plan as outlined above, we urge the OUSD to adopt a policy for any impacted school that allows all children in a family to attend school together. As conducted last year by OUSD, the first admission group would be siblings of neighborhood (attendance area) children where those children are currently attending the impacted school and then all other neighborhood children. When any of these groups exceeds the remaining capacity in the entering kindergarten class, a fair and transparent prioritization method (lottery or otherwise) would be used to determine which of the children in that group are allotted the spaces in the kindergarten class. (LRPC Report Recommendation 5).

We're looking forward to continued dialogue with OUSD on these matters. And we hope to be able to work with OUSD staff in advance of any meeting on December 6th so that we can inform our caucuses of your recommendations to the Board.

Sincerely,

The Hillcrest Long Range Planning Committee