

January 8, 1993

Superintendent's Task Force on School Organization
Berkeley Unified School District
2134 Martin Luther King Junior Way
Berkeley, CA 94704

Dear Sirs and Madams:

We the undersigned are parents of children who currently attend or will soon attend Cragmont School. Most of us reside in west Berkeley, attendance district 3.

All
We want to go on record as disagreeing strongly with the "consensus" report arrived at by the Cragmont Site Committee and delivered to the task force meeting January 5, 1993. This report recommends a pre-K-through-5 school at the original Cragmont site with a population of 300 children. It also proposes a neighborhood component which would give an absolute right of attendance to those living within a 1/4 mile radius of the school. Finally, it would require some form of parent participation, either money or volunteer time.

We argue that insufficient outreach was done when the committee was constituted and that the purposes of the committee, as well as of the task force, are at this very moment not known to most of the parents of Cragmont School. We are finding that as we bring these matters up with neighbors, friends, and acquaintances, the universal reaction is "What?," and "I had no idea!"

A survey of the 1992-93 Cragmont School directory (published by the Cragmont PTA) indicates that only 20% of Cragmont School students reside at attendance district 1 and 2 ("hill") addresses and 70% reside in attendance district 3 (west Berkeley or "the flats"). Similarly, only 22% of Columbus School students (grades 4 and 5 only) reside at hill addresses and 68% reside in the flats. Nevertheless, the Cragmont Site Committee consists exclusively of persons living in the hills: one non-voting member resides in west Berkeley. It is our understanding that only one or two other persons from the flats even addressed the Cragmont Site Committee before the meeting of January 4, 1993 which 14 residents from the flats attended (see below).

The Cragmont Site Committee is seriously considering recommending that the new Cragmont be a "language arts" magnet school. Nevertheless, although an estimated 26% of the students at Cragmont and 22% of the students at Columbus (grades 4 and 5), are Spanish-speaking children now enrolled in bilingual classes, only one person from the bilingual community at Cragmont was asked to attend Cragmont Site Committee meetings and when he demured no further outreach was attempted.

Another singular fact should not be overlooked. Both Cragmont and Columbus are currently housed on a temporary basis in the Franklin School. Columbus has a "real" site to which it will eventually return. Cragmont has a "real" site to which it may or may not be able to return. Franklin itself is of some concern to parents as a potential transient site through which many schools will pass. Thus the energies of parents whose children live in the areas designated for Cragmont School are actually divided among three site committees—Cragmont, Columbus, and Franklin. Under these circumstances, no single site committee can adequately represent the interests of the children in these schools. Something other than a site committee—perhaps a "Future of the Cragmont/Columbus School Committee"—would be a more appropriate, democratic, and representative body to discuss the issues and advise the task force. We think this is needed immediately.

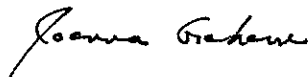
On Monday, January 4, 1993, fourteen Cragmont parents from west Berkeley, having been belatedly informed of the intentions and activities of the Cragmont Site Committee, went to a meeting at which the site committee had planned to finish its work on the model described above in order to submit it to the task force at its meeting the following evening. Instead, with facilitation by Cragmont/Columbus

principal Dr. Beverly Smith-Miller, a lively and often contentious discussion took place, by the end of which it was clear to all that no consensus was possible at that time. We feel that an adequate report as to the depth and width of the disagreement revealed at the site committee meeting of January 4 was not delivered to the task force.

Considering these facts we ask the task force to set aside the report from the Cragmont Site Committee. and to urge the Cragmont Site Committee to engage itself strenuously in such actions as may be necessary to publicize its own existence, purpose, and range of activities, and to solicit opinion from and to include within the ongoing dialogue as many members as possible of the highly energetic and wonderfully diverse Cragmont/Columbus community. Only after such an outreach program is successfully concluded will any report from a Cragmont committee be valid.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours truly,



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CC: Superintendent LaVoneia C. Steele
Dr. Beverly Smith-Miller, Cragmont School Principal
School Board Director Pedro Noguera
School Board Director Elizabeth Shaughnessy
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Meredith May, *Bay Guardian*