

October 6, 1993

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Berkeley Unified School District

Subject: Recommendations Concerning School Siting Criteria

A year or so ago I happened to read a news article in the Bay Guardian concerning your vision for the future of the elementary schools in the BUSD. You talked about grouping schools more toward central Berkeley and providing a variety of magnet schools. School location was an important component of this plan. Children of all ages, races, and socioeconomic groups would be bused into these schools in a balanced way. Everyone would have a choice of traditional or theme programs. Politics have not been generous to that vision, but I personally hope that creating a common set of criteria for school siting and rehabilitation might eventually point us in that same direction.

On Wednesday, October 6th you will be considering authorization for the selection of an architect for the Cragmont site. The District has a completed geotechnical report which appears to have been interpreted as a recommendation for siting an elementary school at a corner of the Cragmont site. After the report became available to the public, I requested that a local geotechnical firm review the completed report submitted by Cotton and Associates. There is agreement on the characterization of the soils at the Cragmont site, however the recommendations differ. Construction of a new elementary school at the Cragmont site may meet certain minimal requirements, but that does not necessarily make it a good idea. Their response back to me has pointed out some areas of significant concern. In their review they have found some important areas of agreement. For example, there was a thorough job done of identifying the fault risk and in defining the active landslide locations, but the analyses of slope stability are extremely complex with many assumptions. There appears to be an appendix item which acknowledges that there may be a three foot horizontal movement during a design event (7.0 earthquake on the Hayward fault), which is oddly downplayed in the conclusions. There are also no estimates made of the potential for a slide occurring at the 15 foot white clay layer depth and no estimate of the potential for a slide occurring at the 20 to 30 foot clay layer. There is no estimate of the size of the failure that should be designed against. The piers which may be required for just the 15 foot failure would be very large and might more aptly be compared with what might be designed for a nuclear power plant.

The physical risk posed to a school located on the Cragmont site has been glossed over by advocates. I will also point out that during the process of consultant selection for investigating the Cragmont site that the question posed to the consultants was changed from "Should we build on the Cragmont site?" to "Where can we build on the Cragmont site?"

What is needed is an impartial review of this complex situation. To my knowledge a review has been conducted by the California Department of Mines and Geology. I will point out to you the CDMG does not have high level soils people on their staff. A more appropriate review of this complex project can be performed by the California Division of Dam Safety which has a very large staff of PhD engineers who do nothing but specialize in slope stability seismic analysis. I strongly urge that this type of review be sought by the BUSD.

A copy of a letter summarizing some review findings by the consultant is attached.

It may also be time to look at safety criteria relative to other potential and existing sites. Each potential site in Berkeley (excluding no site) can be evaluated for seismic risk both geologically and structurally. These criteria can be evaluated in relation to each other so that we are comparing apples with apples. This would seem to be an appropriate theme in the midst of a 158 million dollar bond measure intended to make our schools safe and our investments sound.

And there are other criteria we can consider for determining which schools to rebuild. Location of enrollment might figure prominently. Schools should be constructed closer to the enrollment in order to minimize busing or at least to equalize busing among the different socioeconomic groups. It is my understanding that the NAACP is considering a lawsuit against the BUSD if "controlled parental choice" is selected for school assignment under the theory that controlled parental choice places too large of a transportation burden on minority students. What *really* skews the busing pattern unfairly is locating the schools *away* from the enrollment. Last year at Cragmont East one in eight students was from northeast Berkeley. All the rest were trucked in from west Berkeley. Enrollment at the East Cragmont school is even lower this year.

Another criteria might be cost. Dollars per square foot can be used to compare the cost of rebuilding or rehabilitating a site. These are important matters. Others in west Berkeley that I have talked to remind me that the BUSD is not required to spend every penny available. There was a promise during the Measure A campaign that state money would be used to reduce the bond issue. How can we save money? Why tear down a building which offers more square feet per student-class and has the lowest rehabilitation cost (such as Franklin school's \$70/sq. ft) in favor of schools which might cost millions more? Why favor small schools over slightly larger schools which will cost more to operate? Repeatedly, site committees and neighborhood groups have been quized on how large they would like their school to be, but no one has suggested that there is a trade-off between large and small schools. More numerous smaller schools are also more expensive to administer and maintain. The difference in cost of administration will ultimately be reflected in teacher salaries, money available for class room assistants, art, music, and gymnasium programs. Schools endowed with generous PTA monies can afford the enhancement programs, but schools who are not fortunate to receive wealthy donations don't get to have the enhancement programs. Yes, we should seek state money, but in these days of reinventing government, we should regard it as our own and spend it prudently.

I'm certain that we can find more criteria that everyone would find agreeable. Sites could be

evaluated in relationship to other community facilities, cost of administration, and cost of maintenance. In fact, we can mimic the analysis which was performed by the School Reorganization Task Force which broke down the selection of student assignments into various criteria then rated these criteria on a "poor, average, good, best" rating system. Many neighborhood school advocates ended up supporting "controlled parental choice" with no neighborhood preference and strict desegregation guidelines as a result of that workshop. Such a format might resemble the following matrix (you fill in the numbers ):

School Siting Criteria Evaluation Matrix

	Washington	Jefferson	Columbus	Franklin	Malcolm X	Cragmont	etc.
geological safety							
structural safety							
nearness to enrollment							
cost to construct							
cost of admin and maint							
nearness to public facilities							
etc.							

where 1=poor; 2=avg; 3=good; 4=best ( The criteria can also be weighted by importance. )

Some good things will come out of this kind of analysis. For one thing, consensus can be reached on criteria. The rating system will be applied to all sites. The analysis can optionally be available for everyone's scrutiny.

You may agree that based on a set of criteria like the above, that Cragmont would not fare well. About the only explanation I have heard for justifying a school at Cragmont is that " . . . the District should make an attempt to attract hill families back into the school system." What about the rest of Berkeley? Is this a criteria? If it is it should apply to the entire district. On my block south of Sacramento nearly one-half of the school age kids are in private schools. The numbers of flat land kids include a larger percentage of Afro Americans, Latinos, and other minorities. In terms of absolute numbers the kids in the rest of Berkeley who attend private schools exceed the numbers in the hills, that is, percentages are slightly lower, but densities are much higher. Shouldn't we try to get them back? The prospects of succeeding in getting flat lander kids back into the public schools would appear

to be greater because for their parents to send them to private schools in the first place is still heavily influenced by economics. This economic factor is not significant in east Berkeley. Whether the parents in an affluent family send their kids to public or private school is not usually an economic decision. It sounds like a good idea to find out how many private school kids there are in northeast Berkeley, but let's look at the whole city while we are at it.

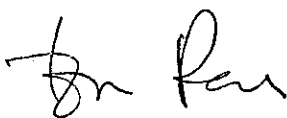
Then what else are we trying to cater to? The squeaky wheel? I heard recently that the most economic site for rehabilitation, Franklin School, would probably not be rehabilitated because it did not have an advocacy group?

There are fears, of course. Parents in east Berkeley don't like the other parts of Berkeley because they are perceived as dangerous or they are concerned about "disruptive" kids. I live in the area they are afraid of. Is it being suggested that so-called disruptive kids be kept away from certain schools? Again, what are the criteria for constructing?

Finally, there is also a very significant fear that the Cragmont property might be sold for commercial development. This last item is understandable. Do we solve the need for a community center and a park by building a school? This does unnecessarily burden the district. If there is a need to maintain this as a public property, then there is the possibility of forming a special district or to have the City purchase the property for park or community center. This is the appropriate way to meet that community need.

It is recommended that you do not authorize the hiring of a consultant for the Cragmont site unless a top-down review indicates such action is warranted. The further we go down the road of appeasing advocates, the more difficult it will become to say no. Do it now.

I would be happy to discuss any of these matters in greater detail. Please give me a call at work (415 459 1455 ext 144) or at home (510 549 2086).



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