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December 12, 1994

Dear Friends and Board Members:

The reconfiguration decision on December 13, 1993 was imperfect. Even its proponents acknowledge this. It was probably no more imperfect than its alternatives. However, the imperfection and inequality of the plan has been increased, not relieved, by subsequent decisions. And as the the date of implementation approaches, decision-making becomes even more hasty.

Recalling the acknowledged imperfections in the December Decision:

1. Will it really improve integration? Will parents comply with the dictates of the "random assignment" aspect of school choice? If they don't get the school of their first choice, will they stay in public school?
2. The burden of bussing falls overwhelming upon non-white children. Each bussed child faces six years of bussing.
3. Malcolm X, now one of the District's strongest assets, will be completely wiped out and started from scratch. The dread of the 4th grade transition to Malcolm X, which practically spawned Reconfiguration, was based upon a Malcolm X of the past. At the Malcolm X of the present, my fragile daughter flourishes.
4. Lots of programs will perish, some for good. The Gilbert and Sullivan program, one of the gems of the District, will never exist again in its present visionary form. The music program will be severely curtailed, permanently, because of the dis-economies of conducting it at many small schools.

Subsequent Layers of Compromise and Inequity:

5. Longfellow will never be equal in facilities to the other two middle schools. It is unlikely to be able to overcome its inherent disadvantages.
6. The will of the Longfellow community, which opposes Longfellow as a middle school, is being sacrificed to the necessities of the plan.
7. Measure A money was diverted to the rebuilding of Cragmont by a sudden decision during a time when the public was not tuned in. The Superintendent's serious reservations were discarded. The District and the Board themselves have low confidence in the financial figures on which this decision was based. The diversion of Measure A money for Cragmont without adequate public review is a violation of the pact with voters and parents. (This and other decisions begin to make Reconfiguration look like it was designed around Cragmont.)
8. The board-approved new boundaries are already under attack. Some parents are lobbying, with effect, to get the boundaries changed. Other parents are threatening lawsuits if boundaries are enforced. Other parents are arguing that people near the boundary should be allowed to go either way. *One of the main rationales for reconfiguration was the need to put an end to this kind of exception-taking.* A possible outcome is district-wide choice. If district-wide choice, ~~this~~ is the

anticipated plan, the Board and Administration should level with parents immediately.

9. The reconfiguration of some of the schools, Longfellow and Malcolm X most particularly, requires changes to their facilities. These will not be ready by Fall '95. Without them these schools are severely disadvantaged.
10. The relocated fourth grades will not achieve rigorous fourth grade programs for one or several years. The K-3 schools will require years to shift their curriculums and their enrichment programs to fully enfranchise their 4th and 5th grades.
11. The fate and location of bilingual education is left hanging at this late date.
12. Arts Magnet parents, formerly given assurances of "grandfathering", may have to reapply within a year or two for assignment to their school.
14. The ranks of the District's closest parent friends have been severely thinned over Reconfiguration. Of those people who sat on committees, ran campaigns, helped with planning and public process two years ago, many are now dropped out or have become public critics of Reconfiguration. A good plan should not have such a casualty rate.
15. The planning burden for change at each school rests upon principals, teachers and parents. There is limited or no planning assistance and there is no money. School staffs differ grossly in their capacities to do such planning. This is causing not merely stress but something akin to insanity at those sites that start with greatest disadvantage such as Malcolm X. Teachers at Malcolm who must meet the January 24th deadline to present an attractive Kindergarten to prospective incoming Kindergarten parents are completely distracted from their normal teaching duties. They are desperately seeking help from the parents of their current fifth graders in constructing equipment and preparing materials to try to project an attractive Kindergarten vision. This is madness, brought on by a brutal and unrealistic implementation schedule.
16. The frenzy to get ready for the spring is becoming a divisive race in which some contestants are severely disadvantaged. In spite of this the administration and board assumes a "that's tough" attitude - what *can* they say? An "I've got mine, tough luck for you" attitude is setting in among staffs and parents who are spared from crushing in the wheels of transition. Those who have to change most - the 4-6 teachers and staffs - have to: a) bear the pain of greatest change and b) face the inevitable humiliation of presenting to prospective parents in late January a school of "choice" which is inherently disadvantaged because of their unfavorable starting position. Is this the sort of process we are proud to have participated in?

I propose that we delay implementation for one year. Time will allow some of this to be improved.

Respectfully,

Bruce Wicinas
LeConte/Malcolm X Parent, 12/3/94

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