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December 12, 1994

Dear Friends and Board Members:

The original reconfiguration decision (December 13, 1993) was imperfect. Even its proponents acknowledge this. It was probably no more imperfect than its alternatives. However, the imperfection of the plan has been increased, not relieved, by subsequent decisions. And as the the date of implementation approaches, hasty decision-making threatens to make it worse.

The original plan had liabilities. For example:

1. Will it improve integration? If parents don't get the school of their first choice will they stay in the District?
2. The burden of bussing for integration falls overwhelmingly 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 decisions and haste have added liabilities.

5. Longfellow will never be equal in facilities to the other two middle schools. It faces an uphill struggle to overcome its inherent disadvantage. The will of the Longfellow community, which opposed Longfellow as a middle school, is sacrificed to the necessities of the plan.
6. 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 are unconfident about the capital allocation calculations on which the decision was based. The diversion of Measure A money for Cragmont without public review violates the pact with voters and with parents whose schools may be affected. That abrupt decision has created an impression that Reconfiguration was designed around Cragmont.
7. The board-approved new boundaries are under attack. Some parents are lobbying, with effect, to get the boundaries changed. Most parents are unaware that the approved boundaries *are* being reconsidered, effectively granting influence only to those in the know. Other parents are threatening lawsuits if boundaries are enforced. Other parents are arguing that people near the boundary should be given exception. A possible outcome of this battle is district-wide K-5 choice.

8. The reconfiguration of some of the schools, particularly Longfellow and Malcolm X, requires changes to their facilities. These will not be ready by Fall '95. Without them these schools are disadvantaged in the choice arena.
9. Fourth grade teachers have not yet been assigned; consequently planning and community-building at the K-3s cannot begin. The relocated fourth grades will not achieve rigorous fourth grade programs for one or several years.
10. The fate and location of bilingual education is left hanging at this late date.
11. The Arts Magnet community, though seemingly protected by the plan, is still not happy and turns out at every board meeting to express their problems with the plan.
12. 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.
13. The planning burden at each school rests upon principals, teachers and parents. There is little assistance and there is no money. School staffs differ grossly in their capacities to do such planning, as well as in the amount of planning they need to do. Teachers at Malcolm X who are racing the January 24th Kindergarten Night are distracted from their normal teaching duties. They have enlisted help from sympathetic parents of fifth graders in constructing classroom equipment, decorations and materials to project an attractive (and competitive) Kindergarten vision. This not-so-comical situation is due to the crazed pace of implementation.
14. The frenzy to get ready for the spring is becoming a divisive race in which contestants are created unequal. In spite of this the administration and board assumes a "that's tough" attitude - what *can* you say? Among staffs and parents who are spared from grinding up in wheels of transition an "I've got mine, tough luck for you," attitude is setting in. Those who have to change most - the 4-6 teachers and staffs - have to bear the greatest burden of change and also the humiliation of presenting to prospective parents in six weeks an uncompleted miracle - a 4-6 metamorphosing into a K-5. Is this an outcome with which we are proud to be associated?

I'm aware of how hard you have worked on this. But I urge you to weigh how an additional year would allow its improvement.

Respectfully,

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

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