

SPECIAL MASTER  
DR. HAWLEY'S  
COMMENTS ON  
GRADE  
RECONFIGURATION  
PROPOSALS

October 19, 2015

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**To: Parties**

**From: Bill Hawley**

**Re: Proposed Grade Reconfiguration**

## **General Comments**

### Financial Analysis

The District was requested to provide a financial analysis of the effects of these grade reconfigurations. Such an analysis would presumably examine costs and revenue streams required for implementation. Instead, the District tells us nothing about the revenue that would be derived from bringing new students into the District and discusses only the cost of transportation and physical facilities. To be sure, such analysis is not easy but neither is it mysterious. Teachers have to be hired support services provided, etc. Revenue varies with the context and the particular students recruited. Costs of implementation are higher when most of the students coming into the District and up in one or two schools. Both revenue and costs are higher depending on student characteristics. In short, we cannot tell from the information provided whether the result of grade reconfiguration will be positive or negative much less how much of each.

### Rationale

There appear to be four major reasons for grade reconfiguration. First, there might be opportunities for increased integration. This justification has little merit except for one case. Second, we might make better use of existing facilities. But we do not know whether this will reduce overcrowding in some schools or ultimately provide the justification for closing others. Third, increasing the size of some schools could lead to greater curriculum choices for students, but no specifics are given. Fourth, moving to K-8 eliminates a significant transition time to middle schools and research on this matter is generally positive. But we know much less about whether the transition from fifth grade to middle school has any different effects than the transition from sixth-grade to middle school.

### The Issue of Stability

In the absence of a compelling reason for grade reconfiguration, the possibility that changing schools within TUSD will cause families to rethink whether they should select options other than TUSD should be considered.

### **My Positions**

#### Support

I support the proposal to create a K-8 school at **Cavett** because it will likely have a small integrative effect.

I support the creations of a K-8 school at **Borman**.

I support the addition of a sixth-grade to **Collier** and **Fruchthendler**. In the case of Fruchthendler, this could have a small negative effect on the enrollment of white students at Magee but the numbers will be small. And it may be, that a positive experience for one's sixth-grader will increase confidence about sending one's student to Magee, especially if the quality of Magee is enhanced.

### Reservations

Drachman is an exceptional school with unique educational program. While it is racially concentrated its entry class is not (though the margin is tight). My concern is that there are very few Montessori middle schools; given the popularity of Montessori in the early grades this should be a caution. Only a few teachers at Drachman are Montessori-qualified and one wonders how middle school teachers would be certified as Montessori trained.

I find it hard to build a case that a Montessori middle school at Drachman would become integrated. On the other hand, I find it believable that the middle school grades would be racially concentrated given the schools from which they would

draw and that this in turn would affect decisions made to enroll one's children in the early grades.

"If it's not broke, don't fix it". Adding new grades developed with an undefined curriculum will surely take away from the expertise that could be applied to the current grade structure. In my discussions with the principal, he said that if they cannot be a K-8 school they do not want to be K-6. By what logic would one want to be K-8 but not K-6? Only the logic of a good soldier.

### Opposition

I oppose the development of a middle school at Sabino. Actually, the District appears to be proposing a 7-12 school. In its earlier proposal this spring, the District argued that it would keep middle school students in high school students were quite separate now it argues that the former will have the advantage of taking courses available to high school students. And, it is more than a bit disquieting to contemplate the engagement of middle school students in the activities of high school students both during and after the school day.

But the major reason for opposing this proposal is its certain negative effect on Magee and the students in that school. The District makes the unusual argument that by reducing the number of white and middle-class students at Magee, Latino and African-American students who remain will benefit.\* I have never heard such an argument in all of the years I worked on desegregation issues. The proposed changes in the demography at Magee will undermine the diversity and rigor of the curriculum and almost certainly cause white parents now satisfied with Magee to look elsewhere. Magee needs to be strengthened not weakened.

The District's analysis of the loss of white students from Magee is almost certainly understated. One cannot extrapolate from current data when there is an entirely new context within which parents will be making choices. And consider the differences in the apparent quality of the choices-- a middle school embedded in an A high school compared to a C school not only serves a greater number of relative low income students but serves as a site for an in school suspension program serving other schools in the district.

The District argues that by providing express buses to Sabino middle school from the central and western sections of the District, integration could be achieved. But my understanding is that this option has been tried and abandoned. And, the proposition could be tested by providing such buses to Fructhender or Collier. The more than \$300,000 involved in transportation costs alone could make a big difference is invested well in Magee middle school instead.

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\*When I asserted last spring that those leaving Magee would be middle-class, the District pointed out that there were many students into the white students into USD on free and reduced cost meals. That, of course, is a non sequitur. Only small numbers of students in the northeastern section of the District received free and reduced cost meals.