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MINUTES FOR SPECIAL MEETING OF MARCH 31, 2009

Call to Order

The Board of Education of Palo Alto Unified School District held a Special Meeting in the Room A at 25 Churchill Avenue, Palo Alto, California. Barb Mitchell, President, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

Members present:

Ms. Barb Mitchell, President
 Ms. Barbara Klausner, Vice President
 Ms. Melissa Baten Caswell
 Mr. Dana Tom
 Ms. Camille Townsend

Staff present:

Dr. Kevin Skelly, Superintendent
 Mrs. Ginni Davis, Assistant Superintendent
 Mr. Scott Laurence, Assistant Superintendent
 Dr. Robert Golton, CBO
 Ms. Cathy Mak, CBO
 Mr. Chuck Merritt, Principal
 Ms. Sharon Keplinger, Coordinator
 Ms. Sharon Offek, Assistant Principal

Others present:

Ms. Jeanne Gobalet, Lapkoff & Gobalet Demographic Research
 Ms. Shelley Lapkoff, Lapkoff & Gobalet Demographic Research

Approval of Agenda Order

MOTION: Baten Caswell moved to approve the agenda order. Tom seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Information

PAUSD Student Population
 Growth and Boundary
 Adjustments

Skelly described the process thus far, including school capacity discussions, construction planning for Garland Elementary School, school boundaries including Palo Verde and Addison, staff work, values, and enrollment. He said it was hoped that enrollment boundary decisions would be made in May. Some issues to be discussed are traffic safety, Mandarin Immersion, peer streaming, enrollment projections, effect opening Garland may have on choice programs, and Tinsley program (VTP).

Laurence said incoming enrollment reflected 1% growth and high schools were running at 3.5% growth. He also described the process in further detail, including contracting with Lapkoff & Gobalet, collecting prior research from groups such as the AAAG (Attendance Area Advisory Group) and data from prior boundary discussion, and presentations to the community at school sites. He said many of the concerns raised during the process were similar to those raised by the AAAG, such as traffic safety, neighborhood schools, and peer streaming. He said a website had been created to gather community input on this.

Lapkoff and Gobalet gave a presentation focusing on:

- The bottom line
- The need for Garland
- Enrollment pressures without Garland
- Possible elementary attendance boundaries
- 2013 enrollment forecasts with Garland, assuming no intra-district transfers and historical enrollment rates in the alternative schools
- Will alternative school enrollments be affected by Garland opening?
- Ohlone analysis
- Hoover and Escondido analysis
- 2013 enrollment forecasts with Garland, assuming no intra-district transfers, and a much smaller number of alternative school students from Garland area.
- Middle school analysis
- If middle school boundaries remain
- Middle school forecasts, by component
- High school analysis
- If current high school boundaries remain
- High school forecasts, by component

Approved:

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- High school splits under new boundaries
- High school splits with current boundaries
- What if middle school boundaries changed and all of Garland were assigned to Jordan?
- JLS split if all of Garland were assigned to Jordan
- The bottom line (again)

Board member comments included AAAG findings and their effect on current work; possibility of continued localized growth and how staff might address this; improvements to Oregon Expressway crossings at Louis Road, Ross Road, and Middlefield; clarification of enrollment numbers presented by the demographers; Tinsley (VTP) student enrollment and distribution; number of students in the Ohlone neighborhood applying to the Ohlone program; a question about classrooms available at Greendell once the JCC leaves, increased capacity at Greendell and services offered; enrollment in Jordan Spanish Immersion program in prior years; peer streaming and boundary changes; negative impact of boundary changes on families living near major streets and having to cross them; and current inventory of classrooms and how many are needed per cluster including program considerations.

Public Comment

Sue Corell spoke regarding the evaluation of Garland and suggested keeping the Mandarin Immersion (MI) program at Ohlone. She said this program fit in Ohlone better than it would at other sites because of mentoring among age groups, the established relationship with PTA, and support from Susan Charles.

Kerry Kenny said she had applied for her child go to Ohlone and did not get in. She said it was frustrating that she did not yet know where her incoming kindergartener would be starting school next year. She was concerned about maintaining peer streaming, saying that splitting schools separated friends, and suggested secondary schools did not need equal enrollment.

Ana Simoes read a letter from a group of parents. They hoped MI would be kept at Ohlone, because families in that program had become a part of the Ohlone community. Moving the program would compromise the feeling of community and would adversely affect student enrollment.

Sara Armstrong said there is no MI program at Ohlone, but rather two tracks where Mandarin is spoken. All classes are fully integrated into the Ohlone program. Teachers of the Mandarin classes were specifically chosen because they fit in with the "Ohlone way."

Diane Reklis said it was a good idea to open Garland as a four-strand school. In the long run, tough choices would need to be made for the benefit of all students. She said Ohlone had demonstrated that two groups can occupy a site. Once MI is fully established, she suggested it either remain at Ohlone or be moved to Garland.

Grace Mah said moving MI to Garland would leave room at Ohlone for either more Ohlone choice students or a group of neighborhood students. She did not, however, believe adding a neighborhood school program would be appreciated, as there would be potential conflict with the rest of the students who observed the "Ohlone way."

Luan Wilfown said her son was a kindergartener in the MI program at Ohlone. She said MI families had been fully embraced as members of the Ohlone community, so being moved would upset the community. MI is not a program that can simply be shifted to another school site.

Penny Ellson said the City was working to improve safety for students crossing the Oregon Expressway. As the Oregon Expressway is very busy, traffic engineers need to consider both allowing small children time to cross the street and keeping up the traffic flow. In addition, the potential traffic impact was not yet known in regard to changing boundaries and adding Garland. She said it was possible to create a home for MI at Garland, and this would provide safer routes to school for many students.

John Markevitch observed that parents tend to want to go to closer schools, so this needs to be taken into consideration. If Ohlone has a neighborhood assigned to it, it can still maintain its program and give more parents a neighborhood feel. He then said that with the opening of Garland, and with the current suggested boundaries, more students would be required to cross Oregon Expressway.

Jessica Rothberg said the AAAG had been tasked with discussion of whether or not to open a thirteenth elementary school, not with moving boundaries. She suggested looking at core values and drawing boundaries to maximize them. It is important to make changes that benefit the majority of students, rather than to benefit specific programs. She also said past data shows that when a program is moved, students usually move with it to the new site.

Nadia Naik said discussions were occurring regarding extension of the deadline for enrolling new kindergarteners, and asked if this would change enrollment projections.

Debbie Ellisen said she would like to see data on how peer streaming helps students have a better experience at school, as there may be benefits if students are split up, such as broadening their circle of friends. She suggested that if a major street needs to be crossed, the crossing should be localized rather than spread among a number of intersections.

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Martha Bowden said the AAAG had looked closely at Garland and suggested it be opened. It was found that this location, however, was not ideal because of its proximity near major roads. The group recommended relocating choice programs to this location to avoid having neighborhood children crossing dangerous streets. She also suggested Jordan be expanded because it has more acreage.

Board member comments continued, including traffic safety concerns, especially in the Oregon Expressway area; peer streaming and equitable educational experience; choice program attendance and past moves of programs; a request for more information on the cohabitation of Escondido's Spanish Immersion students with English only students; a request for further enrollment projections, including cluster growth; loss of equitable experiences when school sizes vary; size of peer streaming groups; moving programs; capacity at Addison; making sure that future plans include adequate capacity at Addison; dedication of some Ohlone space to neighborhood students, and possibly Hoover as well; the need to discuss programs, including VTP; AAAG; making sure boundaries will last and will evenly distribute projected enrollment increases; relevance of proximity to choice schools; maintaining a critical mass of JLS students going to Paly; and loss of grounding in residential population.

Skelly noted that there were tradeoffs and tough decisions to be made, although he had confidence in the ability of staff. He said a recommendation to cross Oregon Expressway would not be made unless there was a safety plan in place.

Laurence said staff would meet on Friday to craft a plan for next steps by Monday. This would come back to the Board at the first meeting in May for discussion. It would then return for a second discussion at the following meeting, and for action at the next.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Secretary to the Board