

April 25, 2000



Mr. Alan D. Bersin
Superintendent of Public Education
The Board of Education
San Diego City Schools
4100 Normal Street
San Diego, CA 92103

RE: Point Loma Cluster Work Group Reconfiguration Recommendation

Dear Mr. Bersin and Board,

Please let this letter register our sincere concern regarding the Point Loma Cluster Work Group's ("PLCW") recommendation to reconfigure the existing Point Loma Cluster grade-level configuration and increase school size for the 5th grade children.

The mission, as stated by the PLCW, was to create a model cluster within the San Diego School District, thus enhancing the educational and social experience of our children.

The proposed configuration includes, as recommended by the PLCW includes: (a) making all elementary schools K thru 4, (b) relocate all 5th graders to Dana, creating a 1,000 student 5th / 6th grade lower middle school, (c) maintain a 1,000 student 7th/8th grade upper middle school at Correia and (d) maintain a 2,000 student 9th thru 12th grade enrollment as Point Loma High School.

Despite numerous requests by a seeming majority of those commenting in numerous public forums (which PLCW believed to be a vocal minority), PLCW was unable to address the following community concerns:

1. Academic Performance of 5th Graders in a 1,000 Student Lower Middle School: The educational benefits/risks to moving 5th graders from a smaller approximate 400-student elementary school environment (with 70 grade-level peers) to a much larger 1,000-student school (with 500 grade-level peers).

2. 50% Student Population Turnover at the Middle School Level: The issues of continuity and stability in a two-year program. As proposed by the PLCW, since Dana and Correia would be 2 year schools, each school would have one half of the student population turnover each year, reducing continuity and stability for children, and minimizing the time available to develop the student-teacher-parent relationships.

3. Number of School Transitions: The difficulties for children that is inherent in more transitions. As proposed by the PLCW, the number of school transitions within the cluster would be remain at four. In addition, the greater the number of school transitions within the cluster, the more it reduces support provided by close-in-age siblings.

4. Social and Developmental Impact on 5th Graders: The adverse impacts or benefits to placing 5th graders in a 1,000-student school. Despite requests from the community (including

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parents who are trained psychologists), no professional, neutral, third party opinions were sought on these issues or on items 1 through 3 above.

Most research tells us that smaller schools are preferable, transitions are difficult, and high levels of turnover adversely impact children's educational and social success.

Most of the rational given by the PLCW for the proposed reconfiguration, however, was facilities-based. The "use it or lose" argument to build-out the Dana school to full capacity, district imposed programs that might "fill up" the middle schools with non-cluster students, and the crowding at a few of the elementary schools, were often cited by the PLCW to support their configuration choice.

Reasons also included "cluster unity" as well as apprehension of drawing a geographic line to determine the elementary feeder pattern for two separate 6th-8th middle schools. (There are ways to solve drawing the line issue, such as assigning the elementary schools to Dana or Correia based on a school-wide academic performance index, by way of example, the number 1 school goes to Correia, the number 2 school goes to Dana and so on...this would only need to be done the first year to establish equity between the sites.)

There is no indication or evidence that the PLCW grade-level reconfiguration supports this mission to enhance the educational and social experience. We are unaware of any research that supports the theory that larger schools and more transitions enhance the environment of our children. How does "cluster unity" and "not dividing The Point" improve our students' academic performance? How does creating a larger school environment for fifth graders provide students with a better learning environment?

We cannot support the reconfiguration of our schools without compelling evidence that placing children in larger schools would increase the educational and developmental experience for our children.

To that end, we ask that you postpone approval of the grade-level reconfiguration portion of this plan, and would request that the district please address the concerns of our community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

POINT LOMA PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS