

Proposal to the School Board for the Creation of Small High Schools

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Introduction

The KM Unified School District (KMUSD)[♦] is a large urban district facing issues similar to those of most large urban school districts: growing enrollment of students with high needs, overcrowded schools, low academic achievement, school safety, and student discipline problems. KMUSD reflects California's diverse population in both socioeconomic status and ethnicity.

The passage of a \$400 million bond measure for new facilities has created a window of opportunity for the district, which wants to plan new schools based on the soundest educational principles. The school board commissioned a study to analyze the situation and propose a policy to the district that would address the issues of student achievement and school safety following the publication of low API scores and rising violence for many of its low performing high schools and the passage of the bond issue. In this document we offer a diagnosis of the problem, our proposed solution, details of the policy, our theory of action, and the anticipated effects of our policy. In particular, we propose that the district create a new small high schools initiative. In developing this policy, we have examined what other districts facing similar issues have done. We also interviewed several practitioners and experts in the field of small schools development.

Diagnosis of the Problem

KMUSD has had rapid and dramatic changes in its school population due to a surge of immigration over the last 10 years. The demographics of the district are as follows: the numbers of African-American students has remained fairly stable, the number of Hispanic and Asian American students has increased, and the number of European-American students has declined.

[♦] This policy is modeled upon the Small Schools Policy: New Small Autonomous Schools from Oakland Unified School District. We would also like to give special thanks to Mark Gordon, a consultant with the Bay Area Coalition of Essential Schools, for his key comments and suggestions.

KMUSD has 61, 824 students, with 37 percent Caucasian, 32 percent Hispanic, 19 percent African-American, 8 percent Asian and Pacific Islander, and 4 percent other groups.

There are serious concerns surrounding the low performance of many of the high schools in KMUSD. These schools are located in poor urban areas and have few resources available to address the problems faced by a vulnerable population of adolescents. In particular, several high schools scored from 1 to 3 on the API¹ and have above average rates of violence, school disturbances, crime and vandalism.² The district's 10 high schools have an average enrollment of approximately 2000 students each. Half of these schools are in predominantly low-income and high minority neighborhoods, and 60% to 90% of the local students attend these high schools. For example, the rate of assault and robbery among our five lowest performing high schools has increased 7% over the last five years (see Appendix 5). Although this policy is premised on the belief that creating small high schools will raise the quality of teaching and learning district wide, this policy is particularly aimed at these under-resourced schools. These needs of these schools will be addressed by locating KMUSD within the larger context of American public education.

The recent rise and increased public attention on school violence following the tragedies in Columbine and Santee in which a student or students used firearms to harm other students have raised public attention and concern about school community and safety. There has been an increasingly negative view of public schools, particularly large urban schools, in America as a result of both a perception that schools are becoming more dangerous and have declining academic quality. This perception has led some parents to pull their children from public schools.

¹ The Academic Performance Index (API) is presently based on students' scores on the augmented Stanford 9 achievement test. Schools are then assigned rankings in deciles, 1 representing schools that scored in the lowest 10%, to 10 representing those schools that scored in the highest 10%.

² The violence statistics are based on figures from the California Department of Education website.

At a policy level, vouchers are being used in some states to allow certain students to opt out of the public schools. California, as well as many other states, has charter schools. At the individual level, many parents, particularly those in urban areas, opt to send their children to private school, or provide home schooling. All of KMUSD's schools operate within this larger social and political context.

Alternatives Explored

The current wave of the standards and accountability school reform movement was sparked by the *A Nation at Risk* Report (1983) that sounded alarms about the state of America's education system and future economic health due to a dearth of highly educated citizens for the twenty-first century. It shifted the accountability and education of students from a basic skills and minimum competency orientation to a focus on high academic standards for students, schools, and districts. In California, this reform has manifested itself on the state level through high stakes testing and the reporting of the scores through the API. A variety of sanctions and rewards are attached to improvements in test scores. While there is a multitude of research that raises serious concerns about the use of a single measure to make these consequential decisions about individuals and institutions (Heubert & Hauser, 1999), nevertheless, these are the conditions that schools and districts face.

While there are several potential solutions to address the needs of KMUSD's low performing high schools, we propose the creation of new small high schools to address the problems of student learning and achievement, low test scores, school safety, and discipline. After reviewing some of the alternative policies implemented in recent years to address these issues we chose to focus on the creation of new small high schools because we feel this policy is

the most promising one for our district. Below is a summary of some of the alternative policies and our findings regarding those policies.

One promising alternative we examined was the schools within a school approach. We chose not to pursue this policy because it contains many difficulties in implementation. We felt it would be easier to create new small autonomous schools rather than to break apart a preexisting school. Raywid (1998) examined several approaches to reducing school sizes and found that the schools within a school approach was the most problematic. She attributes the difficulties with this approach due to the difficulty of attempting to change the norms and culture of an existing institution, resistance to change among faculty and constituencies of the school and concerns about the autonomy of smaller schools within the umbrella of a larger school.

KMUSD has implemented various targeted programs aimed at improving student achievement. Remedial programs, tutoring projects, the use of specialized classes has all been attempted but did not significantly affect the achievement of low performing students. Our dropout rates have not decreased and our test scores have not increased in spite of these interventions. Various programs to address school violence issues have also been implemented. These include conflict resolution programs, assemblies, peer mentors and class assignments. The high schools have also increased security personnel and attempted to hire more counselors.

All of the above named policies have meant increased costs, which shifted monies away from other possible uses. Yet some of the policies may have created as many problems as they attempted to solve. Remedial programs often take students away from their regular classes and increase the amount of academic instruction they are missing. The myriad of programs aimed at at-risk students tend to break apart their already fragmented day, alienating these students even more from feeling a part of the school environment (Soo Hoo, 1990). The after-school programs

the district has initiated do not detract from the school day but have been poorly attended and unpopular. Targeted programs also have problems identifying students in need and many borderline students continue to fall through the cracks.

Security measures, such as increased guards, create an atmosphere in which students do not feel trusted. The resentment they feel may increase their proclivity to vandalism and misbehavior. It is impossible to closely monitor a large school of thousands of students at all times, even if this objective were desirable. On the other hand, small schools seem promising. They appear to be able to overcome most of the obstacles outlined in this section, without much additional cost.

Review of Research on Small High Schools

Since the beginning of the 1900's through today, schools and districts have grown larger. For example, there were 150,000 school districts in the early 20th century and 15,000 school districts today (Rothstein, 1998). Small was seen as inefficient and parochial, while large-scale schools were viewed as a means to reduce duplication of services and costs. In addition, it was believed that large comprehensive schools could offer more services, variety and specialization (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Cushman, 1999). But in recent years those assumptions have come under question.

Academic achievement is viewed as a primary measure of school performance. Over the last fifteen years, there has been research on the merits of large versus small schools, with a strong consensus that small schools come out ahead on almost every measure of performance, especially for low SES students. For example, a regression analysis study conducted by Friedkin & Necochea (1988) examined the interaction between school and district size, SES and student academic performance on the California Assessment Program. They examined students'

academic achievement at the 3rd, 6th, 8th and 12th grades throughout schools in California and further divided their analysis between metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions. Friedkin & Necochea created a new theory that SES and school size interact to create “opportunities and constraints” on students’ academic achievement. Their analysis found that larger school size has a detrimental effect on low SES students throughout all the grade levels studied. A positive association was found between high SES students and larger school size for student achievement. Huang & Howley (1993) built upon this work. They conducted a regression analysis study on data from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills administered to over 23,000 students in grades 4, 6, and 8 in Alaska during the fall of 1989. They found that small school size helped counteract low student achievement among disadvantaged students while larger schools tend to “compound the negative effects of disadvantages” for low SES students.

Pittmand & Haughwout (1987) attribute student achievement to the school’s social climate, especially the level of student participation in extracurricular activities. For instance, Nova, a small innovative high school in Seattle, sends 85 percent of its graduates to college and its students’ average SAT scores regularly stand at the very top among Seattle’s high schools. In the spring of 1997, a new citywide writing assessment program found 62 percent of Nova’s 11th grade students proficient as compared with the district’s average proficiency score of 28 percent (Seattle Weekly, 1997).

School violence is a major public issue. From the extreme of tragedies such as Columbine and Santee, to more daily issues of fights and harassment, various sorts of violence can permeate today’s large comprehensive high schools. By contrast, small schools have low incidents of violence and destructive behavior and do not usually require armed guards and metal detectors. This improvement is due to a variety of factors such as decreased student and teacher

alienation, less student anonymity, and increases in students' feelings of confidence and competence. In fact, the police-state mentality of many large urban schools may even exacerbate the issue of violence, due to implied disrespect toward students. Major studies have documented that small schools are far more likely to be violence-free than large ones (Toby, 1993/1994) and that students are likely to be better behaved (Gold & Mann, 1984; Gottfredson, 1985). Students are also less likely to drop out of small schools (Pittmand & Haughwout, 1987). According to Mike Klonsky, new federal support of small schools moved much more quickly through the beltway in large part due to Congress' interest in reducing school violence in the wake of the Columbine incident (interview, 2/12/01).

Students benefit from small schools in many social and affective ways due to the more personal and interpersonal nature of small schools, where the adults can get to know students as individuals. When asked about the advantages of small schools, researcher Mike Klonsky of the Small Schools Workshop responded: "Kids do better, they achieve higher, they are safer, they're generally more engaged. Small schools have better graduation rates. They are more cost effective [and] seem to be good at attracting good teachers. Teachers do better in [these small schools]. They [also] seem to be more equitable from a social justice perspective" (personal interview, 2/12/01). In a small high school, each teacher is usually responsible for 40 to 80 students, instead of the typical 120 to 180 students in large comprehensive high schools. An added benefit is that since teachers know their students well as individuals, they are more likely to pursue parental and family contact. These schools are more likely to have a sense of belonging with an increased ability to create a community where everyone is known to each other. Students are less likely to be overlooked or isolated in small schools (Gump, 1964). Small schools generally have a more cohesive and caring environment, which leads to greater personal effectiveness (Cushman,

1999). Students are more likely to want to come to school, and are more likely to feel that what they do makes a difference (Fowler, 1992).

The creation of small high schools helps create a better sense of community within schools and the larger community. Students, parents and educators are better able to develop more meaningful relationships, isolation between groups decreases, and educators have increased opportunities for collaboration and innovation within smaller schools. While small high schools will not and cannot solve all the concerns surrounding education, it will foster conditions that address the societal factors that impact student learning and will help lead to more meaningful education for students, educators, and the community. Small schools increase student achievement, students' and faculty's sense of belonging, students' sense of acceptance and competence. They also reduce violence and create a safe nurturing community for all involved. It's important to keep in mind, though, as most of the practitioners and researchers we interviewed mentioned, smallness in and of itself does not guarantee any of the above. Small schools can be poor schools. Deborah Meier points out that "Smallness is a necessary but insufficient ingredient for successful schools." (personal interview, 2/13/01).

KMUSD wants to assure that all of its students receive a high quality education in a safe nurturing environment. This is presently not a reality for many students, especially for those from underprivileged backgrounds. The district is concerned about its graduation and dropout rates because the senior classes in the lowest performing schools are 60% of the size of the original 9th grade class (see Appendix 4). The academic intervention programs that the district's high schools have attempted have not made significant inroads into this problem. Of equal concern are incidents of violence in our schools. Violence rates in the lowest performing high schools are double the rates in other district high schools. This violence is one of the most

egregious symptom of students who do not care, or who feel that no one at the school cares about them.

Various solutions in other cities were examined. The research reveals that small school programs have been implemented in a number of places. For example, New York City has had a small schools policy in place for over a decade, and now has over 100 small high schools. The most famous example is Central Park East Secondary School — a school with a predominantly minority population of low SES backgrounds, which boasts a record of over 90% of their incoming students graduating and going on to four-year colleges (Meier, 1995). Chicago also has had a small schools initiative in place for the past five years. These schools demonstrate positive effects in student achievement and reducing school violence. Oakland has written a small schools policy based in part on the success of New York City and Chicago, and is currently accepting proposals to create small high schools. Our proposal is modeled in part on the record of these policies.

Our Policy

The model this policy proposes views schools as small cohesive communities that provide safe, supportive and an academically rigorous environment for all students to learn and achieve to their full potential. Small schools have the potential to address issues of student achievement and school violence. This policy is constructed on the experiences of other districts and the recommendations of experienced practitioners (see references) in the small schools movement.

This policy calls for the creation of 16 new small high schools built on four campuses. Each campus will house four separate autonomous schools developed over a seven-year period. A design team composed of community members and educators will be solicited to create the

proposals of these new schools. This policy addresses various aspects of the creation and support for these new small high schools. The following section will describe the structure and definition of these small schools and the issue of district and external support, including funding and development of sites. Finally the time-line and scale of this proposal will be presented.

Structure and Definition of Small Schools

The following structures and supports are necessary for the success of these small schools. Each school will develop a plan that falls within these structures and support systems

- Small schools will have approximately 300 students
- Each small school will select its own faculty and leadership
- Each small school will develop its own vision and focus
- Each small school will develop curriculum and assessment systems aligned with their vision and focus
- Each small school will have a plan to minimize the number of students for whom faculty members are responsible
- Each small school will have control over its own budget

Rationale

Small schools will have 300 students. The first obvious aspect of a small school is its size. This limit is based on research findings and particularly on our conversations with researchers involved in small school initiatives in other cities. The schools will initially start with only the ninth grade class and build year-by-year to full capacity. The schools will begin with only the freshman class in order for students to become enculturated in the norms and expectations of the new school. This plan also provides time for schools to slowly build a complete faculty, as well as develop and refine their curriculum and assessment systems. Developing these tools is a lengthy process and the time line allows these instructional policies to be refined based on students' needs.

The school will select its own faculty and leadership. The school needs to be able to select both the teaching faculty and leadership of the school because these are key components to a successful school. The entire faculty must share the values and norms of the school, and must be answerable first to the school and its community. Each school needs to be able to select faculty that understands and can adapt to the particular context of each school. This faculty should be diverse in ethnicity, race and experience so that students have a variety of adult role models. A variety of backgrounds also improves the chances that the teachers' professional community will create norms and standards that are sensitive to the makeup of a diverse student body.

The school will develop a common vision and focus. A school community is more than just a collection of individuals. One of the things that makes a group of individuals a community is a common vision and goals. This shared focus sets clear expectations for students. In addition, this small cohesive community will share responsibility for all students within the school.

Each school will develop a curriculum and assessment system aligned with the school's vision and focus. Teachers will collectively develop the school's curriculum and assessment systems, which include graduation requirements and periodic evaluations of progress. The curriculum will clearly spell out how students will meet each school's goals with assessment tools clearly aligned with these objectives. These schools are still California public schools and are accountable to the state standards and assessments. The school plan will address how the curriculum will meet these external standards as well as follow the schools' individual vision. Curriculum and assessment tools will be based on effective research based strategies and examples of exemplary school practices in small school settings.

The school will have a plan to minimize the number of students for whom faculty members are responsible. One of the strengths of small schools is the sense of community and connectedness that students can obtain. The school will have a plan to reduce the teacher/student ratio, so that every student is known well over a period of time, by at least one, if not more, adults. A small school that reproduces the typical six period high school day, with students shuffling through class after class, will merely replicate the structure of a large school. Each school's proposal will include a plan as to how the school will build family/school/community connections to help the faculty know students and their families well.

The school will have control over its own budget. Control over monetary decisions is key to each school's autonomy. The use of a budget is a telltale sign of a school's priorities; therefore, each small school will set its own priorities through the use of the budget. Outside of additional funds that will be provided for startup costs, schools will develop a budget that is based on the district's per pupil budget. A draft budget will be included in each school's proposal.

The district will provide these new high schools with autonomy within the guidelines of state laws and regulations over the above-mentioned areas. As budgetary inexperience has been the downfall of many fledgling schools, the district will offer accounting and budget support. The district accounting office will review the budget to assure that all necessary costs have been included and that the budget is realistic. The budget will also be reviewed to assure that it adheres to legal requirements for use of state and federal funds. Beyond legal requirements, the actual use of the funds will be at the discretion of the individual school.

Student Selection

Since the purpose of these schools is to alleviate the problems of the most vulnerable and impacted students, care must be taken in considering how students are selected. Outlined here are the criteria to be used in selecting students for these small schools.

- No entrance exams or entrance requirements may be used
- A lottery system is to be used if schools are over-subscribed
- Priority is given to siblings of already enrolled students
- Priority is given to students from over-crowded schools
- Priority is given to students from low performing schools
- A balance will be maintained of students with different academic abilities
- The school will attempt to reflect district demographics in terms of ethnic and racial diversity
- The school will attempt to reflect district averages in terms of students with special needs

Rationale

The district is committed to the principle that public education cannot be elitist. When a school can select its clientele, it then ceases to be really public in the democratic sense. Schools with selective entrance requirement can use this selectivity to filter out “undesirable students,” unfairly burdening other schools with these high need students.

If there are more requests than spaces available for each new small high school, then a lottery system for admission will be used. While the goal is a diverse student body reflecting the demographics of our district, preference will be given to several categories of students. Since part of the purpose is to build community and have strong relationships between school and family, siblings of already enrolled students will have preference. As this policy is aimed at alleviating the problems for the most vulnerable students, preference will be given to students from low-performing and overcrowded schools. This policy is not meant to replicate the

problems of schools made up of only students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is important for the community in the school to be, as much as possible, a microcosm of the society at large, and for students to learn to negotiate a world made up of many types of people. Therefore, the school will work to maintain a balance of students with different academic abilities, reflect the district averages in terms of students with special needs, and reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the district.

District Support

The district will provide support to these new small high schools through:

- Small schools office
- Professional development support
- Support of small schools through the Small Schools Workshop
- Provide assistance with sites and maintenance
- Provide sites

When asked what were some of the biggest impediments to the survival of small-restructured schools, respected researchers and practitioners all mentioned district requirements and regulations that were based on the needs and structures of large comprehensive high schools. In order to alleviate this problem, the district will develop a small schools office to support these new small schools. These schools will answer to this office for bureaucratic district requirements and to receive professional development support. This will assure that general district policies developed for the large comprehensive high schools will not be applied to small schools and the personnel in this office will be attuned to the needs of small schools.

Small Schools Workshop

Outside consultants will be used to support these new schools. The non-profit consulting firm entitled, The Small Schools Workshop (SSW), will be hired to provide outside support, consulting and professional development to help the small schools in their initial and ongoing planning and development. This organization has experience with creating new small schools in other cities. The district is in the process of developing a partnership with the local UC campus to both be involved in researching the process and to work with the schools through their start-up processes. This group will help support and protect these new schools.

The schools will be partnered in a “critical friends” dialogue. The SSW will facilitate the partnership of these schools. The purpose of this partnership will be to both support and ask difficult questions of each other. This network of schools will support and continue these reforms. While each school will determine its own professional development plan the small schools office and SSW will attempt to facilitate these plans with resources, and facilitate small schools to coordinate their efforts where feasible. At each stage of the process, the small schools office and SSW will monitor the development and implementation of curricular and assessment systems to ensure that these policies address state guidelines for curriculum and assessment. In addition, these offices will provide resources to each school on curricular and assessment systems that have been well researched and effective in small school environments. The district will also offer support on developing budgets and financial planning, as well as financial oversight.

Community Support

Community support and buy-in is another crucial component to the success of these new schools. For example, a public relations campaign will be enacted to inform the public as to this

new policy. In addition, speeches and presentations by supporting community groups and the SSW will be held to facilitate community discussion and involvement. Other community groups such as churches and youth organizations will be used as forums for support of this policy. The district has approached the ABC group, a community based organization (CBO) dedicated to developing closer school and community relationships, to gain their support and assistance. Continued dialogue with the community is essential in generating public goodwill towards the creation of new high schools. For this reason the proposal requires each new school to hold regular open forums and progress reports in the local community.

Accountability

Accountability of each school will be based on:

- Ongoing evaluation
- Meeting set goals
- Meeting state requirements
- Community input
- Five-year review

The most important accountability of public schools is to the students, parents, teachers and the community. These groups must be able to see how students are being assessed, and see how students perform on these assessments. Each school will be held accountable to see that their students meet the goals set out by each school, as well as meet state curriculum and testing requirements. These assessments, developed by the schools, will be open to the larger community for examination and input. Regular community meetings will be scheduled by the school to present and accept feedback from the public on the schools' progress and plans. Results of the assessments will be made public.

Schools will be given five years in which to demonstrate effective results. After five years, the district in conjunction with the SSW, will review the school's performance. The review committee will consist of representatives from the SSW, the district office, the unions, the CBO, and the small schools. The assessment will address such issues as API scores, drop out rates, graduation rates, progress toward meeting the schools' goals as outlined in their proposal, and a school self review process. The district will have the right to reconstitute the schools or ask for particular improvements based on the outcome of this five-year review.

Small School Funding

Monetary concerns are crucial to the success of new schools. The district will assist these schools in the areas of:

- Budgetary autonomy
- Start up funding

A design team composed of community members whose proposals are accepted will be given a \$50,000 planning grant to be used the year before the school's opening to recruit a faculty and develop the school plan, vision, curriculum and assessment. The schools will base their ongoing budgets on per pupil funds based on their enrollment and average daily attendance (ADA). Each school will be granted autonomy to allocate these funds as per their school plan within state and federal regulations. For their first year of operation, an extra \$200,000 will be provided for initial startup costs. Then \$100,000 per year for years two and three, and \$50,000 per year for years four and five. These extra start-up funds are to be used for capital and nonrecurring costs. Within these guidelines of use and adherence to legal regulations, schools have discretion over the allocation of funds. The district will review these budgets every year to assure legal requirements are met.

Requests for Proposals (RFP)

The requests for proposals will ask a series of questions based on the issues raised in this policy section (see appendix two). Interested design teams are expected to consult with the SSW and the ABC group in the development of their proposal. Proposals will be submitted by April 1st of each year. A committee consisting of a district representative, a CBO representative, a SSW representative and a union official will review and recommend for authorization four proposals each year for four years through a process of consensus. Once a variety of small schools are up and running a representative from the schools may be included on the committee. The school board will vote on these authorizations in their second meeting after the proposals have been recommended.

New School Sites

Four new sites, each containing four new autonomous schools will be constructed with the bond monies. One site will be constructed each year. The school sites will be situated in the vicinity of overcrowded, low income and high minority schools because these are the areas in most need of new schools. Each campus of four high schools will share a gymnasium, auditorium, library and outdoor recreation areas to take advantage of economies in scale. The sites will be architecturally constructed to facilitate collaborative practice. The schools may decide to collaborate on extra-curricular programs, such as music, art and sport teams. This collaboration will be on a strictly voluntary basis.

Teachers' Union

At this point the teachers union has agreed in principle to support the above policies. Waivers of affected union contract rules can be obtained with a vote of the majority of

permanent status teachers at the school. The union has agreed to allow flexibility in normal hiring and teacher review contract provisions for the new small schools. The particulars of this relationship between the union and the small schools initiative are in an ongoing process of negotiation. The teachers union will have a representative on the committees overseeing the small school proposals and evaluation.

District Costs

Additional costs for this initiative will consist primarily of the following items:

- Building of the new schools
- Funding Small Schools office
- Funds for the Small Schools Workshop (SSW)
- Start-up costs
- Public Relations

The costs of building and furnishing the new schools will come from the bond issue, as well as five-year start-up funds allocated to each school. Funding for the small school office and public relations efforts will be paid for out of regular district funds. The SSW will provide support services for development of the proposals. The development of the schools in their formative years will be paid for from a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Time-line and building to scale

Once the board adopts the policy, the first year will be spent laying the groundwork for this proposal. Meetings with teachers, students, parents and community members will take place to explain the rationale of this policy and encourage these groups to consider ideas for starting up or supporting these schools. A general public relations campaign will be developed to inform the larger community as to the purpose and advantages of this policy.

During the second year, requests for proposals will be disseminated in the fall. After proposals are submitted in the spring of that year, they will be reviewed. A selection committee made up of two district representatives and two representatives from the SSW, a community representative and a union representative will review the proposals. The committee will come to a consensus on the four strongest proposals. Those four schools will be recommended to the board for authorization to start up. The design teams whose proposals have been accepted will be given a year to plan. The year after following this planning year, the schools will begin operation. Each year for the next three years after this four new schools will be accepted and funded. The district will build a new four-school site each year for four years.

These four sites will house sixteen new small schools. Once these schools have been established, the district may want to consider developing a follow-up policy dividing some of the least successful large high schools into new autonomous small schools. This follow-up policy is beyond the scope of this current proposal, and would have to be developed at a later date.

Conditions Needed for Success

There are certain conditions needed for this policy to succeed. The school faculty and community must buy-in to and accept the rationale of the policy and agree to the creation of new small high schools. Without this support and involvement, this policy will not be effective. It is for this reason that the district has allocated funds for public relations efforts that will be used for such purposes as community forums and a general public information campaign regarding the small schools policy. This campaign will take place for the first three years after adoption of this policy.

The support of the unions is of particular importance. The structure of small high schools necessitates changes in traditional roles and decision-making processes. Traditional union

contract language can interfere with these changing roles, and without flexibility in this area, and support from union leadership, many of the planned changes may be difficult or impossible to successfully implement. Structural changes in the allocation of time and resources will also need to be implemented in these new schools. For this reason the district has established support from the union leadership from the beginning. Ongoing negotiations with and consideration of union concerns is necessary.

Teachers must have sufficient planning time to discuss the goals, philosophy and structure of these new schools. Collaborative time to plan and discuss lessons and students' needs is to be built into the structure of the new school to support teachers in creating authentic curriculum and assessment (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Professional development and training need to be integral components of each new school to enable teachers to reflect upon their practice to continue improving their pedagogy and adapt their lessons to smaller groups of students (Klein, 1985). Teachers require time to create and plan inquiry based teaching strategies and engage in reflection, discussion, and experimentation of effective lesson design and implementation. The flexible use of the school budget and flexibility in designing the school day and use of personnel should alleviate some of these difficulties. Consultation with the SSW should also be of assistance.

Costs and benefits

Creating new schools requires a significant investment of time, energy and resources. High need schools and communities may feel hard pressed to participate in this type of school restructuring. However, we feel that the added benefits of more individualized instruction and attention to students' needs will overcome these issues. Concern is also raised over the extent of extracurricular offerings available at small schools. By having four schools share a larger

campus, some of these extracurricular activities may be supported through collaboration of individual schools. Students can also meet some of those needs through after-school programs.

While there will be additional start-up costs to this process, only small long-term additional costs are anticipated. The creation of a small schools office will be a real cost, but the benefits in terms of increased academic achievement, increased attendance, and decreased crime, vandalism and violence should easily outweigh those costs. One way of measuring costs is the amount spent per pupil. Another way to measure costs is through the number of pupils who graduate. Past studies have shown that the increase in student graduation rates more than make up for any additional costs of running a smaller scale school (Felter, 1989). Other cost savings should come in the form of reduced maintenance due to reduced vandalism and crime in these schools. There is also a reduced need for police, guards and other forms of security in small schools. Costs are also reduced because small schools do not typically have a plethora of targeted programs because these issues are integrated into the school structure. The social benefits of higher academic achievement, more satisfied students and parents, and a community with a reputation of high quality schools is difficult or impossible to measure monetarily.

Possible Opposition

Any change in the status quo is threatening to many people. Opposition to this proposal is likely to come from a variety of fronts. Teachers, administrators, students, parents, unions and community members may initially be hesitant about, or even form in opposition to, this policy. This proposal represents a challenge to the way schools have traditionally operated, and therefore is likely to confront resistance. We will divide this section into different issues and examine what this opposition is likely to be based on. There will naturally be a fair amount of overlap between these categories.

There are some students who do well in larger schools. However, this policy is targeted at low SES students whom research has shown will benefit the most from smaller schools. As this policy is based on parental and student choice, families who feel better served in larger schools continue to have that option.

Support for “Tradition”

Parents, students and other community members may hesitate to support new small high schools because they break with the traditions of the comprehensive high school. Parents may have fond memories of their school experiences and want their children to attend schools similar to those they attended. They may also be concerned about the decreased variety of courses offered in small schools. Parents may be nervous about sending their children to schools that look different than what they are used to or what seemed to be the norm of the general population (Cuban, 1995; Meier, 1995). Minority parents, in particular, may perceive the route to success for their children to be in schools that appear like schools that high SES children attend (Meier, 1995). Sports teams and athletics are traditionally one of the most important aspects of a high school. Small schools cannot support the kind of sport teams, facilities and extracurricular activities that large schools can. Housing four separate schools on one campus to share resources for these programs will address this concern.

Effect on Local Housing Market

Some members of low SES and high minority communities may see these small schools as a harbinger of an attempt to gentrify their neighborhoods (Meier, interview). They may perceive that the purpose of these schools is to attract more well to do Caucasian families into these neighborhoods. While some may dismiss this as a self-defeating attitude, the possibility of resistance based on this perception must be considered real.

Special Programs

Major opposition may also come from those who have a stake in specialty programs. As small schools cannot support the wide variety of different specialty programs, and rely on teachers to teach more than one subject, teachers who see themselves as instructors of one particular specialty may see these schools as a threat. Small schools are also predicated on a belief in heterogeneous teaching techniques, and those who feel that they benefit from tracked programs may also see small schools as a threat. Opposition could be from teachers of those high tracked programs, the parents of the students in those programs (and the students themselves) who see their children having an edge over other children by being in high tracks. Other large comprehensive high schools will still be in place throughout the district, providing choice for parents, students and teachers.

District and School Bureaucracies

Many people in bureaucratic positions may be threatened by the change in the school hierarchy. They may see their position and power as threatened by the change in hierarchical structures and decision-making processes that go along with small schools. As the small schools contain a larger percentage of the student body, the role of the central district office may be lessened, or at least drastically altered. Personnel may not be ready for this change and can directly or indirectly sabotage the small schools. The small schools office will work closely with the district office to help change the district office culture. Through continued discussion about the purposes of education, and the reinvention of bureaucratic responsibilities, it is hopeful that this resistance can be overcome.

Unions and Faculty

Many teachers may be threatened by the change in their traditional roles. In return for the increased autonomy, teachers in small schools will be asked to take on new responsibilities. Roles may change for other personnel such as from custodians, secretaries and teaching assistants. Each union has a contract and a set of rules based on a certain set of relationships with the district that assume a hierarchical and adversarial assumptions. Small schools attempt to change those relationships, requiring changes in the roles of the union and contract provisions.

Equity

Some parents may perceive small schools that serve only a certain portion of the population as unfair because not all students benefit. Others may view the fact that different schools will have different goals, visions and standards as inequitable, and oppose small schools on grounds that all schools should follow a one-best-system model (Tyack, 1974). However, different types of schools are required to meet the needs of our diverse population. Another way to define equity is the equal distribution of resources and over time, we hope this policy will be offered to all interested students.

In summary, it is our hope that the public relations and community building campaign, along with the expected positive record of these schools will address these concerns and change opponents of small schools into advocates.

Conclusion

Smaller learning environments will bring together children of various backgrounds, which will improve students' sense of competence and connection with the school community. They will benefit from learning environments that reduce racial and social isolation by bringing students together in natural, task-oriented situations. This will sharpen students' instincts for

justice and equality by nurturing mutual respect. Through participating in smaller schools and classes, students begin to understand the responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society. As a result, students' academic achievement will improve and incidents of school violence will decrease because students will be more connected to their schools. Children will feel safe by belonging to a community where adults know them well. The district will then have a reputation of excellent schools that are truly open to the public and meet the challenging needs of a diverse student population in the 21st century.

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