

May 4, 2010

VIA E-MAIL TRANSMISSION
AND FIRST CLASS MAIL

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CSD Board of Education
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Dear Dr. Edwards and CSD Board of Education:

We represent a group of Decatur parents who share concerns about CSD's recently-announced decision to install a second trailer at Clairemont Elementary ("Clairemont"). CSD intends to install the second trailer to accommodate 60 pre-K students who are being relocated from Decatur High School ("DHS") and Oakhurst Elementary ("Oakhurst"). Forty of these pre-K students were displaced by CSD's decision to construct a new Career Academy at DHS; according to Dr. Van Soelen, the remaining 20 are being moved from Oakhurst, in part, so they and their teachers no longer will be isolated from their peers.

From our perspective, CSD's decision also is driven by its electing to construct the 4/5 Academy at Fifth Avenue ("4/5 Academy"). The 4/5 Academy will not resolve overcrowding of K-3 schools. As you may recall, constructing the 4/5 Academy represented only part of Reconfiguration Option #13: based on CSD's enrollment projections through 2012, CSD was directed to add to Glennwood Elementary and Winnona Park Elementary ("Winnona Park") a total of 7 new K-3 classrooms. CSD has not yet announced plans to add these 7 classrooms. This shortage of classrooms was compounded by CSD's enrolling 60 pre-K students without space to accommodate them at the Early Childhood Learning Center (ECLC). CSD now must confront the problem of creating 10 new classrooms for pre-K and K-3 students within the next

1-2 years, *notwithstanding its constructing the new 4/5 Academy*. CSD's plans for Clairemont seem portentous: Is CSD moving to solve its 10-classroom deficit by increasing classroom sizes (as proposed for Clairemont's rising third-graders) and deploying trailers for a longer time-frame than it has acknowledged publicly?

Please note that these concerns are neither rhetorical nor hyperbolic, and that we have the utmost respect for CSD's and the Board's serious commitment to solving long-term problems associated with displaced pre-K students and overcrowded K-3 schools. We would like to be part of solving CSD's problems. In our view, now is the perfect time for CSD to engage the broader community in a meaningful, open and frank review of options for solving the 10-classroom deficit in an effective and equitable manner. We currently find ourselves in the unfortunate position of contesting CSD's plans for Clairemont, in large part, because the community was not consulted before the plans were made.

We are asking CSD and the Board to do the following: (1) reconsider the decision to install a second trailer at Clairemont; (2) clarify plans, if any, for removing existing trailers from Glennwood Academy and K-3 elementary schools when the new 4/5 Academy is operational; and (3) engage the community in a meaningful, open and frank review of long-term solutions to overcrowded schools. We acknowledge CSD's thoughtful efforts to alleviate overcrowding while maintaining the quality of its educational services; from our perspective, however, CSD no longer can rely on stop-gap measures to address long-term problems. CSD's ongoing reliance on top-down decision-making, furthermore, is fomenting a great deal of confusion and frustration among those who saw CSD's charter-status as a vehicle for openness, transparency and community engagement.

CSD's plans for Clairemont raise serious concerns of feasibility and equity, including the following:

- I. **Before adding more trailers to Clairemont or other K-3 schools, CSD should exhaust all reasonable options for adding trailers to the ECLC, DHS and Westchester sites.**

As Dr. Van Soelen noted during Clairemont's SLT meeting, the ECLC is the ideal location for displaced pre-K students. CSD apparently determined that inadequate space existed for additional trailers at the ECLC. Recently, however, Deanna Ozio reviewed the ECLC's site plan and inspected its property. Deanna discovered that substantial space existed behind the ECLC: she found considerable space inside the rear property line, and a particularly intriguing space that extended a bit outside the line (to McCoy Park). Deanna asked CSD to consider entering into a land-share or -swap arrangement with the City, insofar as McCoy Park includes a basketball court within the ECLC property line, and the ECLC has a seemingly unused, handicap-accessible playground space which extends into McCoy Park.

We sincerely appreciate CSD's agreeing to meet with Deanna to review ECLC's site plan and property lines. It appears Dr. Van Soelen and Suzanne Kennedy will be meeting Deanna this week. An invitation also has been extended to John Ahmann, and we hope that he and/or another board-member will attend the meeting.

In addition to the ECLC, other alternatives may exist at the DHS and Westchester sites. We understand two pre-K classrooms were displaced by construction of the Career Academy at DHS; however, it is unclear whether these classes will return to DHS when construction is completed. The pre-K classes historically have been staffed by DHS students interested in careers involving child development. Such students remain at DHS, presumably, and their career goals are compelling reasons for pre-K classes to return and/or remain on the DHS campus. What options exist at DHS for installing trailers to accommodate all displaced pre-K students?

The Westchester site, of course, previously has been deployed to meet CSD's short-term needs for classroom space, and it could meet those needs now. Dr. Van Soelen explained that Westchester's kitchen currently is not functional; however, this does not appear to be an insurmountable problem. Meals could be catered. If 3-4 classrooms at Westchester could be allocated for the displaced pre-K students, perhaps some funds that otherwise would be spent acquiring and installing trailers could be spent renting kitchen equipment for cooling and heating catered meals?

We acknowledge that installing a trailer on Clairemont's playground may seem easier and less expensive than some alternatives; nevertheless, we encourage you to focus more on long-term planning than simple expediency. Any investment that increases classroom capacity at the ECLC, for example, will yield obvious, long-term benefits: all pre-K students will be on the same campus, all teachers will have opportunities to collaborate, and there will be no need to bus students to the ECLC for after-care. Adding another trailer to Clairemont is only a stop-gap measure, and there are many compelling reasons not to do so.

Installing a second trailer and moving 60 pre-K students to Clairemont will exacerbate the school's present capacity-related problems. Enrollment projections indicate Clairemont will add 20 students in 2010-11. Adding 60 pre-K students, too, means that Clairemont's student population will increase by roughly 25%, from 320 to 400 children. Clairemont never before has served 400 students, and its playground space already is inadequate. Glennwood Academy provides a useful comparison: it has had significant problems providing recess and physical education for its 397 students on a playground twice as large as Clairemont's (without trailers). Due to setbacks and spacing required by fire codes, moreover, two trailers will occupy approximately 50% of Clairemont's small playground.

The limited capacity of Clairemont's cafeteria also is problematic: currently, there are 320 students at Clairemont, which requires lunch service to begin at 10:50 a.m. When and where will an additional 80 students eat lunch? How many students, inevitably, will go hungry at the beginning or end of their school day?

II. A second trailer at Clairemont likely represents a permanent subtraction from the school's inadequate playground space.

Clairemont lost a substantial amount of its small playground when its trailer was installed, and the school-community accepted this burden based on CSD's assertions that the trailer would remain only until the new 4/5 Academy was operational. Now, however, it seems CSD regards the trailer's two classrooms as permanent. According to Dr. Van Soelen, CSD determined that Clairemont had one 'extra' classroom that could be used for pre-K students during 2010-11. Enrollment trends suggest this 'extra' classroom may be needed to relieve overcrowding for the foreseeable future. Many in Decatur find these facts very disturbing.

Here, more particularly, is how CSD created the 'extra' classroom at Clairemont: (1) CSD presumed that Clairemont's trailer would remain in place for the foreseeable future; and (2) CSD reduced from five classrooms to four the space available for Clairemont's rising third-graders. (*We note that GG Howard's hand-delivered letter/petition to CSD specified the strain and inequity of squeezing Clairemont's third-graders into fewer classrooms: the average size of Clairemont's third-grade classes will rise from 19 to 23-24 students, for instance, while Winnona Park's and Oakhurst's will remain at 21 and 19-20, respectively.*) Do CSD's plans for Clairemont signify a policy choice to resolve long-term K-3 overcrowding with trailers and increased class sizes?

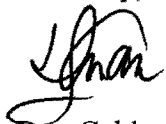
Based on present and projected overcrowding of K-3 elementary schools, as well as CSD's using Clairemont's trailer to conjure long-term 'extra' space, we are convinced that a second trailer at Clairemont likely will be regarded as permanent after it is installed. What assurances can CSD provide that this will not be the case? Will CSD clarify its plans, if any, for removing existing trailers from Glennwood Academy and K-3 elementary schools when the new 4/5 Academy is operational? These questions deserve candid responses, because we cannot escape the conclusion that a second trailer at Clairemont represents another permanent subtraction from the school's inadequate playground space.

III. Now is the time for CSD to begin a meaningful, open and frank review of options for solving the long-term problem of overcrowded schools, and to resolve confounding issues associated with CSD's charter-status and school governing bodies (SLTs).

It is fair to say that CSD's top-down decision to add a second trailer (and 60 pre-K students) to Clairemont has caused a great deal of consternation and frustration. CSD, presumably, was aware that a decision of this magnitude would attract the attention and scrutiny of the community. We wonder: why didn't CSD's deliberations involve any consultations with the SCLT, Clairemont's SLT, or the broader community? The community has understood for years that CSD is confronting serious problems with overcrowded schools. Many parents, understandably, are concerned and confused about how CSD intends to resolve overcrowding while providing the best educational experiences for students. Now is the time to engage the community in a meaningful, open and frank review of options for resolving overcrowding in the long-term: stop-gap measures established and imposed in a top-down manner are ineffective, inefficient and costly approaches to long-term problems. Now is also the time to define and distinguish the roles of CSD's several governing bodies: its Superintendent, its Board, its SCLT and its six school governing bodies (SLTs). Acting with and through the SCLT and SLTs, in particular, the community has a reasonable expectation that it will play an active role in addressing CSD's long-term problems and challenges.

We look forward to your response, and request that you direct it to Don Calder (ddolcalder@yahoo.com) at your earliest convenience on or before May 11. We also would appreciate an opportunity to meet with CSD's community relations specialist, Bruce Roaden. Time is of the essence. It appears CSD must act quickly to make arrangements for the 60 pre-K students who presently lack classroom space.

Sincerely,



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