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I am Ronnie Rossman, a parent of a child at Belle Benchley Primary Magnet School. I would like to thank Mr. Kolender and Mrs. McDonald for the opportunity to share my concerns about the closure of Benchley with you.

I wish to urge the Integration Task Force to investigate the closure/relocation of Benchley and report your findings to Judge Welsh. Both you and the Judge need to be aware of the concerns of parents of Benchley students in order to better assess the success or failure of the voluntary plan for integration. I hope you will find my comments and concerns of value and will take action to evaluate the closure of Benchley.

The relocation of Belle Benchley symbolizes to me and other magnet school parents a lack of commitment to voluntary integration by the Board of Education. We see the move as a rejection of a successful magnet school in the guise of fiscal economy. We were told the Board's priority this year was voluntary integration. Why then, itsn't it willing to pay the price to keep Benchley open? The Board has voted to close Benchley in order to save a mere $60,000 a year or 1/50th of 1% of this year's budget. In my most cynical moments I think the motivation to close Benchley is to deliberately undermine voluntary integration, to thumb their noses at the court order, and to sabotage their own programs. In a more rational frame of mind I actually believe the Board is attempting to appear fiscally conservative by closing down sites. Let me emphasize the appearance of frugal is very weak when this same year we opened four new elementary schools on the periphery and when we started the year with a $29 million surplus. Why the urgency to save $60,000 and jeopardize a successfull magnet program? My estimation of their attempting to appear frugal is further endorsed by the fact that the remaining three cluser closures has been postponed until after the election (rumor). Why was it so urgent to close down a magnet school and not the others? All clusters worked frantically to meet the Board set deadlines (March 1) and now they have conveniently postponed the other hearings.

Let me go back a step and mention the Benchley community's objections to the closure. I am here speaking for an active disenfranchised group of magent parents from Benchley. I would like to refute some of the District's arguments:

1. Relocation to Grantville is objectionable to the current Benchley parents and the teaching staff, PTA and SSC.

2. Relocation is the same as closure. Anytime the Board has closed a school it had to relocate students. The terms are interchangeable.

3. The Benchley program was strong and fully enrolled. It was fully utilized and racially balanced 34/66 ratio this year.

4. It appeared the Grantville site was fully utilized according to integragation capacity figures.

5. The Benchley "portable classrooms" are not portable, but semi-permanent on concrete bases and stuccoed. It is not feasible to move them successfully. It was estimated they would last 50 years, the same as a permanent facility.

6. The Benchley humasistic/individualized instruction philosophy with an emphasis on ECE going only to third grade will be compromised and jeopardized by sharing the site with the Grantville Learning Center. The programs are too different to comingle successfully.

7. If we can afford to open new elementary schools on the periphery and to authorize construction/staffing of UC High School, we can afford to maintain Benchley on its own campus.

8. The movement of bungalows to the Grantville site to accomodate the additional program is unnecessary and undesireable.

9. The limitations of other magnet schools have not been found at Benchley but will apply to a combined campus:

a. It is now a "total" magnet. It will become a school-within-a-school.

b. It does not now exhibit "elitism" since the whole school operates under the same philosophy and equipment. On a shared site, there will be different equipment provided to the Learning Center students, but not to the Benchley students. It may develop elitism.

c. Benchley now attracts students from both majority and minority isolated schools. There is two-way busing from over 50 different elementary schools. It attracts majority parents to leave their neighborhoods. I fear few will do so next year to go to the combined site.

d. Parent participation remains good this year. Both minority

and majority parents volunteer in the classroom and in school-wide activities. This angry group will not be around to participate next year.

e. Recruitment for students to come to Benchley has been dismal. Parents who requested magent information were not sent Benchley's flyer. A father had to wait 40 minutes at the Education Center while some Benchley flyers were found. Prospective students are given erroneous information. How can we trust the district to maintain the integrity of the program?

f. Disposition of the Benchley site has been made easier by the interest of the San Diego Police Department to establish a substation on that site.

Let me close by admitting by anger and frustration at the Board's decision to close down Belle Benchley against the wishes of the current Benchley community. I hardly think the Board is in the position to disenfranchise this group of magnet school parents in the guise of saving a few dollars. We all know that desegregation is an expensive process. Why isn't our Board of Education willing to allocate its resources toward that end. Isn't integration worth $60,000? I urge this Task Force to take the closure of Benchley under consideration. I believe you will find the Baard to be recalcitrant to voluntary integragation.