

Creekside Focus Group – April 27, 2005

Tape 1

Question # 1: Increasing some schools have mostly lower income and minority students and other schools have mostly higher income and white students, why do you think this is happening? Take some time to write down some notes for yourself.

Who would like to begin?

Sumi – A couple of things. I think that we concentrate ESL programs in specific schools that I think are bound to cause socio-economic clumping. The way our boundaries are drawn seem to exacerbate that kind of clumping. I don't know if it is still on the website but I looked at the boundaries and our school's boundaries are quite peculiar. Casey Middle School would do the original germander proud. I think those two are for starters and I think our whole open enrollment policy has and again this is me—I think that it is driven by test scores and I believe that looking at the data that I've seen that there is a correlation between test scores and socio-economic status is measured by free and reduced lunch. Because I believe open enrollment is driven by test scores it clumps the higher test score kids together which naturally clumps a certain socio-economic group together.

Just so that we understand, folks chose to OE just based upon test scores and then it reinforces itself.

But I don't want to lose or take away open enrollment or practices with ESL and boundaries.

You gave some really specific examples of boundaries around Creekside and around Casey. Can you say more about the boundaries around Creekside? What would be more desirable boundaries or how could it be done differently?

Well I don't know about desirability but I look around and I see the number of students who are represented and you just see the picture and the map. But I noticed that they are these non—continuous or microscopic continuous chunks at least in the Creekside boundary. And then in the Casey boundary it just seems to take in every trailer park—it just seems to go out and remove from the Platt area any low income housing. One specific example of that is Frasier Meadows is this little island that is in the Eisenhower enrollment area and yet the apartment buildings right next door are in this enrollment area. Then north of Frasier Meadows near Baseline there is a subdivision that is in the Creekside enrollment area. So it does make no sense.

There are some lots here in the room which don't get recorded on tape but there is some pretty high awareness of those pockets that don't seem to make sense for Creekside and for Casey which is also in your experience. Is there a pretty high awareness of that—it seems like?

I don't know what you mean by awareness. I never noticed that before, but I see that having had it described, certain populations are being funneled to specific schools that it is not based strictly on where you live.

(Jenny) Yeah, I noticed that too. I was at A7 when all of this consolidation happened. The whole A7 attendance area did not come to Creekside; there were pockets—those more affluent pockets which were drawn off and sent to Eisenhower rather than coming here with the rest of Creekside.

So several of you talked about boundaries as a cause and several of you said yes I see that. Are there others that need to come forward? In response to the question?

(Marty) I do see it because I am a kindergarten teacher and kindergarten is when most people go around and make a decision of where they want to go. I would agree with Sumi that test scores are huge—many people seem to get their information from the paper about the test scores and make decisions based upon that and I think it seems to cause of the families that OE out of this school every year only an extremely small percentage of those people have ever come to look at Creekside. They OE out and they never come to look. Those people who do come to look almost always choose to come here. And I think that what is happening is that they are looking at the test scores and they are looking at the percentages and making decisions based on that. What they don't understand of course is that those test scores really do not compare apples to apples. IN our case we are putting together ESL students and native English speakers in those test scores compared to other non-minority schools where virtually everyone is an English speaker. If you pulled out everyone who was an English people separately, we would compare very favorably with those schools. But the statistics in the paper don't allow anyone to understand. I think that free and reduced lunches and the percentage of minority students are included on those tables and people assume that that is the gauge of the school.

So you are saying that there is very little visitation by some folks who this would be their neighborhood school and based on a limited data set that people have access to or look for. Is it a lack of access to that information nor is it an already preset? I am assuming because they don't come in—I would be hard pressed to have empirical evidence here. Out of the people who open enroll out of Creekside usually those people, and it has varied year to year, usually only twenty-five or forty families, probably only three of those people have ever even come and looked at Creekside to come to an information meeting. We have information meetings during the day. We have them in the evening. So I think the meetings are really accessible they have just already decided that somewhere else must be a better school and I think a lot of that has to do with test scores. And putting the test scores in the paper.

Just for the record, because I listened to a conversation with some of you here before, does someone want to summarize a report you all gave about how many people came to OE.

Forty-three families OE'd out this year.

Did any come and look?

Three.

Three bothered to take a look and forty-three OE'd out. I think that it is up from thirty-four last year was the total amount. And these aren't current attending families these are incoming kindergarten families.

So it's like you lost two rounds. Well, we were eighteen in one so more than that. I second everything Marty said ya know (hmm's of agreement heard in the background)—I think open enrollment is definitely a cause and I agree with the boundaries too but I think it is because it possible to open enroll out that the stratification is happening. And I think it is because, like she said, that parents are just looking at test scores.

Boundaries, OE, limited data points.

I have another factor. I think that there is sort of a pre-selection for people who even participate in the open enrollment that is related to having the flexibility of being able to drive your son or daughter to school, put together a car pool, be able to pick your child up and some of the schools—the charter schools have different schedules and some of the focus schools do as well so having that ability to have your schedule not coincide with the Boulder Valley School District. Which that requires a certain amount of ability and affluence—certainly an automobile. So it doesn't really provide for equal access to all the schools that are available in the district.

Well I feel like a later start in terms of flexibility for the day for the parents that are driving and car-pooling. And even the vacation schedules and the start schedules are different. I think that is a huge even pre-selecting before you start looking at scores—can I drive my kid-mmm, its not an option.

Is there anything that we didn't touch in that first general question? Marty.

(Marty) I'm sorry I am probably going to have a lot of opinions because I am a kindergarten teacher and see this but I think there is also a real disincentive for the more affluent schools to attract or even retain the low income, minority students that are in their attendance area. They often have nobody in the office that speaks Spanish. Parents have come in here saying "I have called my neighborhood school, I have called and called and called and nobody returns my phone calls. I think they get the impression that they are not a valuable asset and I think that the whole test score situation. I think that sometime those schools may feel that low income or ESL parents are just going to bring down their tests scores and there is not an incentive for them to want those students at their school. But we have the reverse also going on—English speaking families who OE out, we also have Spanish speaking families who OE into Creekside because we have a reputation as a place that will care about their kids and we will work with them and we really value having them here.

So just to make sure we have a concrete example. A parent told you that they felt unwelcome when they visited their own neighborhood school. It was a person who had a kindergartener going into their neighborhood school and nobody would return their call.

Those examples are very helpful. Thank you.

How many OE'd in? Like forty-three OE'd out.

I think we ended up with ten or eleven OE'd in—but at multiple grade levels. Not so much kindergarten.

When we talk about this Karen and I should know this too when we talk about this, because I was on the consolidation commission four years ago, as far as trends in OEing out. And just speaking, I have seen a gradual trend going down and down and down. Numbers wise? Yeah, numbers wise.

I think there are some general trends. The first year we were low because now we are down to thirty-seven fifth graders, thirty-six four graders. Those both started around fifty or fifty-two. Every year we bring in about fifty-five, fifty-eight, sometimes as high as sixty kindergartners. What happens over time is many of the families move because the CU population is fairly mobile. But not a lot of people come in to fill at the same rate. So we seem to lose it in the grades over the years, that is a general trend. Ethnicity has almost stayed exactly the same for five years. Within just four or five percentage points and in fact we are at about fifty-two percent Caucasian—which is one of the higher years for Caucasian. But we are at fifty-two percent free and reduced launch which is an increase for us. We have been as low as forty-two percent so that has seemed to fluctuated—we seem to be going up every year. The trends that we are seeing if anything is a higher free and reduced launch rate but not a change in ethnicity. We are a little reliant and it's always hard you have to qualify that because we are reliant on the university for much of our population and that can change our socio-economic. That is not necessarily a poverty rate. Those people are broke not poverty stricken so there is a difference there.

And prior to the consolidation, Aurora Seven took on a lot of those characteristics also in the way it was situated. Smiley court was exclusively A7; we pulled Marine court here at Martin Park. Majestic heights did not pull anything in the consolidation so when the consolidation occurred we picked up the Smiley court which is a very large family housing unit. And the immigrant population that we get of second language learners is from that 30th Street corridor primarily. Which was A7.

I don't want to lose the ESL part and I don't expect anyone to come back, but I just want to make sure. And I do have an anecdote about that; that someone who came from another country met them at a cocktail party, and anyway they were telling a story about that. They went either to Mesa or to Bear Creek because they live up there and they were

told that you should go to Creekside because of this language issue and so again I don't know...

Did that person need ESL services and were they aware that those services weren't at those schools?

Well, I think at first they were confused they felt like they had to come to Creekside and then when they came to Creekside they found out that they didn't necessarily had to come but a lot of people were here and happy to be here but they were shocked that it was not required for them to come here.

So you are saying that the schools gave them that impression?
Yes.

I would agree with Sumi because I know two families who told me the exact same thing. They could not attend Bear Creek or Mesa because of the language. That is what they were told. I am not sure if that is what they were told but that was their perception.

I don't know maybe there was a language barrier.

I also know a family who was told that.

So it's how families are told about ESL clusters?

That there is a way to gather and get support for your child and this is where it is offered. This is where it was offered or where they perceived it or were told and this is not the school for you.

I just wanted to second what Sumi said. I think ESL—just concentrating ESL kids at a few schools seems like it is always going to be the way it is with some schools having very high test scores and some schools having low ones and people do shop the schools. I mean the Daily Camera comes out every year right at open enrollment. The schools report card—it says the school's report card. And we only got "average." Our report card was only average—I mean it is incredible. It is really presented in a way that you feel like you are a bad parent. I remember I was looking something up on the Daily Camera website and it has this flashing check out your school and you click on it and it has all the schools' CSAP scores. You know parents are really inundated with it and I think it is kind of a big question—if ESL kids are just at three elementary schools or however many, concentrated at these few schools those scores are going to be low. Parents are going to shop the test scores and those schools are going to stay low and all of the other schools are going to go high. So that is pretty big issue I think.

That is a great segue into the second question.

Question # 2: How did you decide what school your child would attend? What did you think about and how did you come to a decision? And maybe how did you ignore some information?

I have a pretty quick answer because what I can say is the district decided for me. Because I did look into OE and this is my neighborhood school (Creekside) and decided that I might want to enroll at Mesa instead of here. I checked both of them out and to me I know that test scores aren't black and white so you know I was going to check out my neighborhood school. But I liked Mesa and I did not know what I would do if I got in. If you had the offer extended to you to go there, you didn't know what you would do? Yes, I didn't know. But we didn't get in and we are here and I am happy. But you know I was torn—I liked both schools. I don't think there is anything more to say but that was my experience. But in terms of all that information, I certainly knew that I wasn't going to just base my decision on test scores.

So school rating was not going to be your decision point?

No, I can't say it wasn't one of many factors but it wasn't the only one by any means.

And you liked both schools?

I did. It was interesting. I had a similar experience in that the school district made the decision for me in that we had open enrolled. I mean that is part of the—the system gets to you. And the school that we open enrolled into was Horizon and basically it was a private school within the public school system. What the heck we put our name in and only four people got in through open enrollment. And so that was the school that we had OE'd into and didn't get into so we came to Creekside. But I didn't look at test scores either because I work with a lot of data and I knew that there was more to it and this is my neighborhood. I live a few blocks from here. I knew people who went here who were really happy here and I knew if we had gotten into Horizons we would have had a really hard decision to make—a really, really hard decision because I love being able to walk my kids to school and for them to have friends in the neighborhood is really a value. And it's a great school too.

That was a big deal for me too. I mean I live two blocks from the school. I felt like I live in Boulder if my neighborhood school in Boulder is not a good school then we are really in trouble. So I just felt like I wanted my children to walk to school. I didn't want to be driving around. I mean I have enough to do without driving them all over the place and I wanted them to meet kids in the neighborhood because the family population in the neighborhood is so spread out. I mean we lived next-door to an original owner who was eighty years old and the next kids are maybe a block away.

I'm curious the two that OE'd to other schools and did not get in so the district made your decision. How did the schools compare in terms of the OE process and whatever information was provided to you, the marketing—let's say the marketing process? Did you consider them more or less equal? Because this is an issue that has come up a lot in a number of these focus groups—they said it at Casey. Basically the

same kind of theme that the people that show up at the door go through the open enrollment night end up coming and those that don't—don't end up coming. So you guys have the experience of going to both and how did that...?

Umm, at the Horizons open enrollment there were probably six hundred people there and it was you know a very formal kind of dog and pony show. It was standing room only. I mean it was—everyone you knew was there. For forty slots and not even forty slots for many times you lose out to siblings and to the children of staff that work there—which is something I would like to talk about. There were three openings that years and then you were allowed to tour the schools. So it was a very massive onslaught. When I visited this school for open enrollment, I was so impressed. I can't tell you it was in this library and Marty was there and Joy was there and Karen Daily was there and some parents were here and I was blown off my feet by what an incredible job and the information that we were given and the context of the school. I was just felt like wow, this is incredible. And how open the teachers were and also Karen. I had other questions and I was one of those parents who also came and visited two other times and wanted to look at other grades even though I had no idea what I was looking at. It was always open and always available so it would have been a really hard decision had we gotten into Horizons.

Do you feel the same way or...?

To me those two schools, this one and Mesa they both had good open enrollment programs but Mesa. The secretary is just like the greatest lady. Okay, I mean really. And here it was like being impressed with Karen. So I had two different kinds of people and stuff. They were both good experiences. But you said marketing and Mesa to a parent like me I guess marketed itself a little better in terms of its academics and what I have found since I have been here is that things that impressed me are our great books program—oh they have them here at this school but they just didn't hype them in the same way that they had over there. There are some differences too. But it has come up in my mind a few times—oh we have this too. I didn't realize and to make it quick is tangential or not but I called a few different—maybe five different schools in this area because I didn't want to go all over but I called Bear Creek and they were nasty and they didn't want anybody coming in early and they only wanted people at their dog and pony show. They were not nice when I tried to see if I could observe before the official open enrollment time. Why do you want to do that!? I mean literally. I don't want to open enroll into this school. But here was very different—sure why don't you come down any time—and they were very nice at Mesa—sure come down anytime. It was very interesting that juxtaposition. So that's my story.

We open enrolled Mac because he was good at math and don't we have a math, science and a music focus so we open enrolled him. We had the same experience and were very put off by it. Ultimately the district decided for our family but we also decided that we should support our neighborhood school. But what was hard for us is that we were not really in our neighborhood school. The kids would have walked out the door and through a park and been at school. So there was a lot of emotion going on at that

time. So we ended up sending the oldest boy to private kindergarten just to let everything get settled down and then we came to the neighborhood school the next year because that is what we wanted to do—we wanted to support the neighborhood school. But I believe at that time the district was not in charge of the open enrollment. Mmm it was before the centralized.

And I think that was a really good move. It was the same as Jenny said the same kind of treatment.

Mmm, yours was a recent experience because you have a kindergartner. So that first impression in terms of talking about marketing whether it was from the principal or the secretary or the lack of a return call from the main desk was very essential.

I felt like I shouldn't do it blindly I should just go visit but they had a lot more resources in terms of just parent volunteers who could help at open enrollment so that made a huge impression having all those people where as Creekside didn't have all those people.

If I can summarize, I heard you say yours was primarily because Boulder has good schools and the neighborhood will have good schools—so the reputation of the school district was important to you.

Can I? And this may be some sort of question? This whole marketing thing is huge but my impression and what I hear from other schools is essentially they have a lot more of a parent work force that goes out and markets their school. You know they have more people to drop fliers here and drop fliers there. Whereas at Creekside mostly Marty and Karen Daily and a few parents and so it is a self-fulfilling prophecy in a way because when you have a lot of people who have time to go out and distribute a lot of fliers then of course you get the impression that we are a really with it school. So when Creekside isn't in a position to do that as well. Again I think people say, "where is Creekside?" We also have name recognition for when we know that people say Creekside they say "is that in Boulder Valley?" We don't have a name that anyone recognizes so marketing is a huge piece.

Can I ask one probe and then we'll come back to it. We talk about parents believing that considering OE is being a good parent—how do you react to this. We have heard that a lot that good parents go out and look.

I think it is a perception. Except I want to talk about the last thing just real quick—what just strikes me right now is that these three women tried to open enroll and you are some of the greatest moms here and nobody would dispute that. If they had been successful there would only be three of us here –it really does pull away. So there is that maybe.

But you asked earlier why people came here—I had a very specific reason why I came here—I had a pro and con list. And I did not try to open enroll out but I live in an area that is Bear Creek and Creekside so I had two neighborhood schools and I just went and looked at those two and I had a giant pro-con list. I recall when we enrolled that there was a very low ratio of teachers to K and One students—it was eighteen to one and other schools were higher but then the very following year all the other schools were twenty and so if it had been like that when we had come here I am not sure we would have chosen Creekside but it was just overwhelming this low ratio so we went here.

One of the things I have heard parents repeat and only when we pressed them to tell us the truth why they don't come here—it is because you have rough children there. When pressed more there is a lot around ethnicity and racism and that I think is so hard for people in Boulder to say that out loud. But I have to say in your factors, you mentioned it tonight, but that is certainly something that Marty and I have heard. Is it from rumors in the neighborhood or do you think they are just looking at the demographics and thinking—oh there must be a problem; or do you think they are just looking at the demographics?

I think both. I think all schools—I mean my child in the Eisenhower area had lots of opportunities to be bullied and to bully that is what children do I think because we have children of different cultures and different backgrounds and different languages and different religions and all that people make assumptions that there are problems which are all attributed to those kids—
To the diversity.

Who would agree with that the perception where you must have a lot of drug problems at that school?

Aren't your kids on Ritalin as those other schools?

There is someone who brought a cough drop once but this person confiscated it.

That is people assuming that because we have children of other races that we have a drug problem. And I said it is an elementary school and I don't know any elementary school that has a drug problem but that was her assumption because we had minority children and low-income children so there must be a drug problem here. So I think that these parents are right that people in Boulder I don't think are very open-minded and they would usually be hesitant to say that this is somebody who knew me well. Well, I guess she thought she could be honest with me which is good. This is really a very caring kind of person I was shocked.

That she thought—based on her perceptions of race and ethnicity?

Yeah, I know we don't have to confess but yeah those things went through my mind and I know these things are racist and I will say to myself well you are not racist it is more of an association—its more of being a classist, low economics and you know that word crossed my mind. Is that true? Are kids from lower incomes rougher? I don't

know. That is as far as I got with it. I don't know. And probably—is bullying at Mesa not there—no I don't believe that. You know and I don't but it all went through my mind. So again, it didn't make me say oh I'm not going to Creekside but— So you questioned your own knowledge base around cultural differences and have had opportunities to talk about it and see here in this school

It's okay. You know this is good and I like where we went but I lost your question.

Parents believing that considering OE makes them a good parent, good parents, bad parents what does that mean?

I want to make decisions based on information and there is so much information and it comes so steadily pretty much from the end of summer through when the OE closes that you just want to gather information.

You would describe yourself as good at collecting data so you do want to—and you want to advocate for your child and make sure that it is a good fit for your child and you want to look at the school because kids have different needs. But I don't want to negate anything about the racism but I think there is a fear that the kids who are second language learners will take up more time and resources and their child may not be able to get exactly what they need because there is this population that has greater needs—I think that is greater issue.

I do think there is frenzy you know about sending your child to the right school. We sent our kids to a preschool that apparently is a feeder school for high peaks and just from the comments of those parents one tongue and cheek—so you know that those parents would report us to social services because they perceived our son as being very bright and yet why would we send him to an average school.

Those are the situations where by word of mouth people have made their decisions even before OE and kindergarten and I think that there is a lot of that. Into the marketing we need to be out there and we need help getting out there before people are even looking at kindergarten.

And we are also going to be judged. One, I am worried about being judged as a good parent because I may be receiving judgments, overt judgments. Sumi is not the only one to have that comment one of our teachers here who is a tag teacher had several parents, neighborhood parent say to her “oh my gosh how could you send your child there, you have such talented children—aren't you doing them a terrible disservice!?” And they have really portrayed her as a bad parent going to the neighborhood school. That combines a little with what Leslie was saying about the fear of not being able to access everything and all the opportunities for your child and getting some overt messages back that that is a wrong decision to make.

I think one of the opportunities that this school offers is a diverse student body and before we went through open enrollment—I looked at Mesa and we didn't OE there

because it just gave me the creeps. I am serious to be surrounded by all white or Asian adopted children, to be honest; it really made me feel uncomfortable. I grew up in the city with people and I thought how am I going to expose my children to the diversity of the world if they are going there.

So you came with a value that this is what I want for my child?

Right. Well, again the district decided. That was one of the positives of this school—was the diversity.

But you know what Liz and I think and more power to you for having that in the mix, but I wonder how many parents, when they are looking at the test scores and listening to what their friends are saying, will think you know added into this is that I want my child to be in a diverse school -you know I don't know.

Well, I don't think many do. I think you are exactly right. I think the stratification or whatever word you want to use I think that is just keeps perpetuating itself. I saw it again when I went to visit or just was visiting the middle schools and we're in Southern Hills but it was pretty obvious there that they were the best and they knew it and it was just really—I just thought geesh how can I go here. And you know those are the kind of things that they teach the kids. It is not that we are all in this together but what can we get for ourselves and I don't think those are the values that we want to be teaching our kids. But it really comes through loud and clear—we are going to Southern Hills because it is right across the street from where we live and we wouldn't think of going anywhere else. It may be silly but I think elementary school is hard because we may have gone to Bear Creek. The two girls that my boys grew up with are going to Bear Creek. So you've got a neighborhood of kids going to schools all over the place—there is a disconnect.

Can we move to the next piece?

Question # 3: What should the district do in the following areas? Discuss each in turn. For schools to have economically and ethnically mixed student populations without sacrificing quality what should the district do in terms of open enrollment should the rules of open enrollment or the steps involved for parents or anything else about OE be changed and if so how?

You are talking about the actual process?

Yes, what about open enrollment should be changed.

I want to reiterate that moving it all to the district was key.

Keep it centralized.

I think there are some additional pieces of that that need to be centralized and made consistent and I think a lot of that has to do with marketing. Again everyone is out there putting out their own brochures—some schools have lots of you know moms who stay at home who have all kinds of time to be out there posting and dropping fliers, etc. You know one year we had Bear Creek who actually papered our neighborhood school with fliers saying come. So you know consistency in the marketing rather than us all coming up with our own little thing rather than having schools with the resources and time to go implement this aggressive marketing and money campaign that it needs to be much more consistent. We all have a little booklet that covers our school and people who want those booklets can go to the district and pick them up but we are not going to be papering preschools and grocery stores and door-to-door and all the rest. Cause that creates equity in that marketing process.

Are there also different guidelines for focus versus neighborhood schools—that seems really odd to me? It seems to me like it should be the same across the board—here are the guidelines of what you can do for your neighborhood school.

There are actually different, I don't know what we call them, working agreements at the elementary, middle and the high school level—there are the agreements that we have that have been crafted and re-crafted on an annual basis with the principals' group. And um, I think what I hear more in the threads here is that to raise the standard of expectation and I think we have tried so hard to limit it and maintain it and curtail it and we have not been able to do that as leaders because there is a need and a hunger for quality marketing. So maybe it is because and we can come back to this—it is having enough resources so that the resources are similar in terms of providing opportunities for print media coverage. But maybe it is a standard. Am I hearing you right or am I putting words in your mouth to raise that standard?

I think you are right but I think that maybe the operative word for me is information not marketing. Information for me means you have this genesetic writ that says which of these programs does your school offer like junior grade books and after school programs so that you have a grid that you can look at and compare schools with—factual information versus I think what often happens at—documents that people publish or through OE meetings. Parents get the impression that we offer this program as though nobody else does and there is not an easy way to get the information versus just marketing and again having a centralized control and consistency so that some groups don't have this program this big where as other schools have a program this big because that is all the money and resources that they have to go do. A standard of information where parents could say—you know what I can open up the books to page three where I can see what they offer in terms of after school programs. I can open up page three and see the five schools and see what they do. It is going to be real easy for me to compare. I think test scores are in the same category—we definitely need to compare apples to apples as opposed to apples to oranges. For instance to break out test scores for ESL students and be able to compare those but if my child is an English speaker I want to know what test scores in different schools look like just for the English speakers.

Lumping this big group of people together parents have no idea what they are looking at and parents find it hard to believe that we would average in zeros for ESL students who can't take the test. Well that doesn't make any sense. And I said well I know it doesn't make any sense. I think we need it to be better so people can compare apples to apples.

Or even if you are not in a cluster school you don't know what the expectations are.

What is a cluster school?

A neighborhood school.

But lots of focus don't know what it takes to get from not English proficiency to limited to full English—what is their expectation what is their track record here. Those are points of pride that don't necessarily get communicated—the growth scores that you have which are outstanding.

I think if the district began to record growth scores—cohort growth scores over time that is where the meaning is. How will my child do in the school? And then you can show growth scores and compare schools.

My child in the second language. My child in...

Don't report proficiency exams. That doesn't mean anything except other than tied to socio-economic.

Let's talk about growth because that's my child.

So if information that is more meaningful information, consistent information--

You know the prime place I went was not to the Boulder Valley School District but to the Daily Camera and their inserts and I don't know if the district prepares them for them but I think it can't just come from the district I think you have to get them into the inserts of the Camera.

Absolutely because the Camera does not dig very deep at all into what those test scores mean. If we want to show that individual kids at all these schools can grow just at much. And it is the number one resource—oh absolutely—of information.

This is kind of contrary and blasphemous—you know I want to move more towards information and away from the sorority rush or that it seems to be. You know Karen you are tremendous and I have heard that from so many people—wow you have such a great principal there. Well, Karen, I mean somebody is going to lure you away. I am not saying that in a negative that is the reality of—and I don't want our school well gosh this dynamic person is leaving. And that is why I think we need to move towards information (she previously said that the reason she decided to come to Creekside was because of the people she met and the attention she received—namely her interaction with Karen) and you guys the same thing we came and you guys were so calming—you

talked about the reading program and all that. The kids they are going to be great here and hopefully you all get to sail off into the sunset too. And I am not saying that the people who don't replace you aren't great also but I am worried if it is dependent upon a person. The marketing piece is that when the people don't have good factual information that they can compare from school to school they get hooked into kind of like this image thing and they can probably can't even necessarily put a word into what looks more appealing. They just put in a phrase that makes it sound like we have extra programs and you know sometimes the things that people have said when they come back later is it does seem kind of silly—you know I didn't know that you had instrumental music at Creekside. Everyone has instrumental music. But the way people say it—it sounds as if we have *that*.

As a parent coming in with your first child you don't know. I mean just remembering it. I didn't realize that I was hearing about the art program—sounds great—I am sure it is great. And the teachers won awards and I bet its really great but it's the curriculum—they are telling about how they learn about different artists—I was like that is so cool cause it was not that way when I grew up but that is the same way it is here because it is the BVSD curriculum.

Tape 2

So you said some things that really answered this next question about what we do inside our schools that—I have some specific questions about open enrollment that we need to consider. I think we shouldn't have legacies. I think there should not be worker children. I think there should not be any sweat equity agreements—I think you may have done away with that after the Howe report. You know those that you have after you do certain kinds of volunteering requirements. That is pre-me so I don't know about that. What if you like opened a charter school?

If you come to our school then we expect you to help out and contribute like the janitors. We can't have that. That affects all of that. I know it is impossible but I just wanted to throw some of those out there. I believe they should have to open enroll back to the percentages of the demographic that are present in the Boulder population. So if we have fourteen percent of our population on free and reduced launch then that school needs to have fourteen percent of their population on free and reduced launch and I'll think of others. Those are just some kinds of those throw-it-out-there ideas. Some control so that all schools have some more proportion of free and reduced launch and special ed.—all the sub groups.

Any proposals on how we are going to do that?

You have to do it centrally and through the district.

What is our financial incentives you know schools are very motivated by money in terms of that Boulder is eleven percent ESL students and you have one percent and that means that your school gets less money trust me some of these schools will be out there trying to get ESL students-- you know money talks. It really does.

Isn't that going on right now in fact? Yeah, community Montessori.
So should we go over the percentage and get even more money.
There you go.

Those are just some ideas, incentives, attractors to make that kind of thing happen.

Or "disattractors."

Would bussing come under this, transportation? Well, if your goal is to provide equity and diverse populations you need to provide bussing to all schools to all children and I am not saying that that is a good solution. I think you would spend a fortune—an hour on the bus every day but that seems really the way to do it and not to pick certain schools for it and certain economic classes to do it but across the board you choose your school and we provide transportation. That is really the only way to do it. But it is not realistic.

We have heard frequently from some of our parents that get together and make attempts at marketing for the requirements that parents visit their neighborhood school that that if they are going to OE that they must come visit.

Boy, I would have a really hard time with that. We are talking about changes to the system.

Why would you have a hard time with that?

Because it's public education and a public choice and to be told that you have to go visit a school—it just rubs me of losing my choice. You know I have a right of choosing which school my child goes to whether I visit it or not.

What if there was not open enrollment?

Would that be okay?

If there wasn't open enrollment, I think I would feel the same way. There are parents I know who say I'm not going to this school no matter what it is like. I mean I just think it is a bizarre requirement. You would hope that people would visit but...

Hoping isn't always enough.

People don't really like to be forced to look at something.

Right.

I understand the goal of it and I understand the reason for doing it.

I think in the long term and would hope in the long term that somehow the open enrollment process would be such that parents would want to come look and would want

to come get information and would want to have enough consistent information to be available that they would be more likely to come and have a look at their neighborhood school regardless of where that is. It is a pretty scared process right now. As you say when you go and there is four hundred parents at Horizons I think many parents think, wow this must be the school. Look there are three hundred and ninety-eight other parents who have decided to do this. And look there is everyone I know in Boulder just for a child going into kindergarten.

It all comes back to the issue how do we get parents to visit because I have friends in the neighborhood who did not even visit this school. They really wanted their children to go to Bear Creek. She didn't get in there so they sent here to Mesa. And I visited Southern Hills and Manhattan just as a preview for a fourth grader. There were maybe a hundred people or less, probably fifty to seventy at Manhattan. There were hundreds at Southern Hills and I saw people from the Manhattan enrollment area at the Southern Hills open house and I saw people at the Southern Hills open house who were not at the Manhattan open house. So they are not even visiting. There has to be a way. I thought of a related one. We should cap enrollment. I mean really cap enrollment to the optimum cause I think Southern Hills—now this could be so wrong but I think Southern Hills is overenrolled for the facility I am not sure but there are schools like Boulder High. I know these are all things that would be really hard to do but if we could just cap enrollment to an optimum size in schools then that helps a little bit too. I am intrigued about your idea about requiring the distribution of economics if you could do it for the district for all of Boulder but if you could do it for the enrollment area because you would have to have an average for all of Boulder Valley which really isn't representative of any neighborhood. That is the problem with it. But we don't have neighborhood schools now.

We call it a neighborhood but I don't know why we couldn't roll with it.
You are thinking more each school would have a common—

You know why it all comes back to where we started I think the district with a few exceptions just walked over to the neighborhood schools we would be fine. If you looked at the distribution and test scores it would be remarkably similar—there are some pockets where it would not be. And so in a way my ideas are kind of hoping to force the test scores back to where they would be normally. What is wrong with that? You can't run from the students that we love and add so much to this school but affect our test scores. And there is not this perception of better. This is the better school and this is not. So all high achieving and all economically and ethnically diverse. That is the goal. The value.

Back to reality.

Parents of those who are learning English as a second language, they should be allowed to go to their neighborhood school for some reason they think that they are not allowed to go to their neighborhood school but they should be able to do so. Whatever

they were told they have the perception that they should not go to Bear Creek or Mesa because they don't have those programs.

Kids should be able to access services from the school that is in their neighborhood.

That is exactly right.

Actually I heard you say something different—different before. They may not be kids who need the service but the perception is that because they have second language development –

The two families that I spoke to thought that they could not go to Bear Creek or were supposed to come to Creekside because they don't have services for them in that area. They couldn't go there.

They can't they would have to wait for services to be developed there. But we know that it is better for students to have ESL. Sherrie calls us a cluster school. I think you should be able to stay in the neighborhood if you need to have ESL services. Let me summarize some of the things you said because it answered some of the task force questions. You talked about academic programs and academic rigor—we don't need to be shy about it because we have it here. We need to have consistent information and support programs that yes we have music and PE and artwork is on the wall of the same grade quality that we can see in lots of schools, high percents of competitive marketing that doesn't have tricks to it or that is bothersome. We need to have a standard of information and a presentation that is representative of the quality that is in all of the schools—I heard that so many times already tonight. And then on the piece of transportation recognizing the cost of it and the time and that kids would have to be on busses it is one thing that you have all mentioned. One thing that you have not talked about is the location of schools so thinking about the same stem:

Question #4: For schools to have more economically and ethnically mixed students populations without sacrificing quality what should the district do in terms of the location of those schools?

This is South Boulder campus—you are asking the wrong crew.
Why is that?

Well, it is a problem that most of the folks at the elementary schools are dealing with—it is all nutty.

With like focus and charter. Yeah I am in the Majestic Heights neighborhood but that is a middle school now. A charter middle school. Just one parent—to me it is just nutty—this charter and focus stuff. I don't know if a focus school is a neighborhood school.

There are neighborhood focus schools and focus schools. Well, can you throw down a few more just neighborhood schools. But that doesn't make any sense.

Turn back the clock-make neighborhood schools.

In terms of neighborhood schools, you can't just move buildings—I mean the fact of the matter is there are a lot of elementary schools that are appropriate for people in south boulder. I think there are decisions that the district makes about how those schools are used and how they use those buildings that for our school make it harder and harder after a major consolidation and saying that we want this school to survive. They make it harder. And I think that Montessori should be in our enrollment area and then on top of that for bussing—I don't even know what is going on with that. So really I felt like it was really an inappropriate move for that school for this neighborhood. I don't know what the actual numbers are for how that affected our enrollment.

But why is that?

Dropping another program in this dense of an area and we only—

Three people from this area OE'd into Community Montessori for next year. But whatever is set up—that students had to meet a socio-economic for the first draw and then geographic they had to be north of Baseline—that still has an affect. I don't think three is insignificant either. And when you think about what Janet said because the three that you are talking about are probably critical (mentioned earlier that three of the moms in the room are the outstanding moms who make Creekside as great as it is and that as a result of not having their bids for open enrollment being endorsed/accepted). It is not significant. Three for five how many times focus schools we've lost.

I don't even know how this fits into the equation if it does at all but bussing students all over for equity reasons but who wants their kids on the bus. We have students by definition who come from areas defined as North Boulder who come to Community Montessori –to a place in South Boulder. It almost seems absurd in a town like ours which is allegedly so focused on the environment.

See Sumi there is the solution they don't have a school building they just ride the bus for six hours and have presentations on the bus and that would take care of the location issue.

You used a word that I've heard before—you described your something of schools. This where all the elementary schools are. We have a south boulder campus of schools that are so close together.

How many choices do you need and are the choices actually different? How many choices do you need and are the choices actually different and how does the district decide which are the focus schools are okay and which aren't. Why is there a building

with two different programs if there is not enough of a program in one building should there be a choice of which one of those programs should exist. There are so many choices and I don't see any clear criteria about how the decision is made about which focus schools get the okay to exist. Oh you guys should market yourselves as an IB school. It is insane to ask parents of the survival of a school because we are here for six years that is long term planning that should come from the district not from the parents. So the vision of choice district wide and the criteria for consistent criteria for bringing on choices and focus choices is in question?

To what end?

People make decisions on where to live and where to buy houses based upon. It would be nice to have some long term information. Is the school going to be here for a year?

Question # 5: Another segue, thinking of that and the choices of different schools, for schools to have more economically and ethnically mixed student populations what should the district do in terms of how the strengths of different schools are measured and communicated? Definition of program choices, quality of those program choices, vision to what end? Is there anything that we have not touched on that you want to add to that?

Personally, I feel like we talked about everything. Consistency in information and apples to apples. And a year's growth. That we would like to see scores broken out in better detail. English speakers at this school tend to make this much progress and English speakers at this school tend to make this much progress. And frankly that ESL parents can do the same thing because they should have the opportunity to do so. This is the kind of information that applies to them but they have no way of breaking it away from the information that is currently being provided.

I think too, and I've been here since the eighties so I've seen the evolution of all of the choices of programming, I think that our district's strategic priority is to narrow the achievement gap, get children who are not scoring at proficient levels to become proficient, what percentage of focus in charter schools are meeting those needs. I would love to see more programming just as high as Boulder Prep programs that is why we have focus schools and charter schools—that is why it started originally so children could get something that they were not receiving. I include myself in the failure. Our focus schools have only been used to meet the needs of high achievement children. And that is the statute.

Oh my gosh, so how can all these schools exist. I mean they have no legal standing.

Well you know this Phyllis is really skeptical because I teach out at Centaurus High School. I teach at an average school. I sent my children to an average school. But a second grader was talking about aerodynamics possibly related to the word aero. You know we are about to bring IB into Centaurus. I believe that not because it is an

excellent program which in many regards it is but because it is thought that it will stem the tide of people open enrolling out of there and it is not going to work. We have to come up with something dramatic. I am beseeching the district about how we look at this because I think people will not get beyond numbers.

So you don't think this IB program will have a positive affect?

I really want it to work.

But you said that you want something that is more dramatic? Do you have anything?

No, no I don't. I am just lamenting. We have to as a district make some very career ending kind of decisions about this because our parents are not doing the right thing. This was predicted by Ken Howe what would happen—it has happened all of the country not just Boulder and all over the world—New Zealand—they have had exactly the same experience that we have had here. It is not new this is what happens because I don't think we can get parents to act on a public interest. The district has to step in. We don't even look at it as public schools anymore we look at it as publicly funded schools and it is just an essential little thing—just a twist in ideology that the district that to step in. The district and the policy makers need to act in the public interest and to the end that Karen was talking about—that there are neighborhood schools again all schools of high quality.

With choice.

Gets back to that again.

Did they get their charter based on their academic excellence?

It is a rigorous middle school program.

Well, how does that happen we are all concerned about academics? At the core, I believe that Casey—I'll use Casey because it is open enrolled out of in droves and they want academic rigor there as well. And they have it. They absolutely have it. Exactly so I think we have to—y'all have to just go back in and say we have to revisit some of these things. But OE is here to stay; I realize it is a state thing but... It is a big challenge—be bold.

One last question to give a summarizing opportunity, what other thoughts do you have on any aspect tonight that might be important for the task force to consider, who sit here and see if they can get anything more to prompt their thinking?

I think another issue that has come up because of open enrollment is the amount of money that different schools can raise and I think that is a big issue that we have not discussed yet. That the schools that have the higher achieving students and the wealthier

parents the kinds of money that they are fundraising is phenomenal and I think there is the policy issue that it cannot be spent on hiring staff but even without that piece of it the inequity of it. An example of this is at Mesa where they do a field trip where they go out to Canyon for a week the kind of opportunity that those students have are by order of magnitude different from the kinds of the opportunities that we offer. It is not to say that they are learning more or less but boy if you have opportunity out of a sixty-five thousand dollar French drain for your building that is also a playground maybe we get seventeen volumes of books in our library and those are huge differences that the district needs to address that inequity. I know the impact of it on education—we got a significant amount of money for us thirty-five hundred dollars but that is nothing compared to what other schools are getting in an evening and I think that is an ineffective open enrollment is that inequity. Funds for a climbing wall, a computer lab—people come in and they look at all of that and the decision they are going to make is that the school that offers all of that is the one to be at. So we need equitable/equal resources.

If we want to promote diversity, those high achieving schools need to offer the same services that we offer. They need to offer ESL services that is ridiculous. I didn't realize that—I guess I kind of heard it but it did not sink in until tonight. That is not equity and that is perpetuating the white flight. And that is ridiculous. Is that basically an economic decision?

It is not right to have an ESL person for three students at eighteen different schools. You got it—efficiency. Well maybe we should just have it at Bear Creek and Horizons. Those are established. We have some that are centralized and regionalized. When we probably have five percent of the student population. When there are more distributed elsewhere so you are asking a very legitimate question. It is even going to get worse cause of the census. So it needs to be addressed now.

Another thing about the amount of money that each school raises. I know I have tried to get information from you and the kind of information you get is really incomplete. And I think that if schools are raising money and using it that should be public information. You should be able to know and say that this school has raised this much this year and this is how much this school and on and on for each school. I think that this is a good point too.

So ensure complete information so that when the policy makers and the people who influence the policy makers get into a conversation you all have access to that. There is a lesson from CU there and the ability to use flash funds—be careful with that. Or I am going to go to the school that has the most public resources. I am going to go to the school that raises the most so that could exacerbate the problem. Well, the district at least needs to have that information and I don't think that they do.

But I agree there are ways of getting around that too. Because in some schools the teacher has a wish list and parents go out and purchase things and it goes directly back to the teacher. When I worked at High Peaks I was forced to come up with a wish

list, I said I don't need anything my room is full, but it was no you must have a wish list parents want to buy you stuff. So I went to Pad logs and dreamt up stuff.

This year in kindergarten we were going to have a speaker and not have a speaker and it was this two hundred dollar thing and it seemed really good and I said Marty. I will write a check and she said you can't do that. I am not living a life of shame anymore.

This is hard for me to be a facilitator. Thank you for making me listen well. There is a lot for the decision makers to do and the task force has an incredible job to sort through all of this and make sense of this and to make good recommendations. What other schools have you done this at?

There are six focus groups; Casey, Columbine, Creekside, Louisville, Centaurus and Lafayette. So you have not done any at the focus or the charter school. Louisville was invited to all of the schools. Our focus groups are to open up the receptors if you will to identify. They are not scientific although you folks literally have talked about every topic that we have identified from our research and themes that we have talked about and what we have talked about to be able to do this. You have also talked about the things that we will run up against in terms of public opinion. You talked a bit about—if they make me go to my neighborhood school before I participate then I lose my choice and that is what I want. The flip of that is you have forty-families who have never darkened a door here and you have testimony that families when they go into a school they see and they stay. So there are a tremendous number of issues that are financial and political—that bump up against some people who want to have a choice to do exactly what they want. There are issues of talking about the greater public good. It is not just an issue in Boulder but it is an issue across the country and we couldn't have designed a system anymore complex if you got people to sit down got some PhD's to work on it—I mean you backed into the cactus and you backed into the cactus by declining enrollment by a combination of public policy and people who were in power in public policy and how they wrote public policy and so we are going to have two public forums-one public forum will be on May the 16th and that will be at Boulder High and the other will be at May 19th at Angemine Middle School and what we hope to do at those is give you a sneak peak—a short presentation this is what we have found, this is what we are thinking about, tell us what you think about that. And my ability and my knowledge about this community is that they will certainly tell us what they think about that. We are presenting to the board our results on June the 14th. We will come back probably on the 18th for questions and clarification. The board will have some very substantial recommendations with which to deal with—they are not going to meet in one week and pull this out.

My assumption is that they will debate this and talk this out that they will adjourn and come back in August have a retreat and start talking about what is real, what is possible, what we do immediately, what is phased, what does it look like over time. But this will be an issue for public policy conversation that will engage the school district for the next year or so because the issues are the issues and they are not going to get any

different and if anything they will only become more dear because we as a community are declining in students. Some of you were saying well why are all the choices in south boulder well that is where the decline started to happen first. So rather than close schools they said lets use them to attract schools. So let's talk about all the choice down here to pull people in. I will share with you that Fairview is a high school of about nineteen hundred kids but Fairview in its attendance area has about fourteen hundred kids. So what do you do, well you take kids out of East County. There are fifteen hundred kids who are pulled out of East County. So yeah we put attractors in and we put a number of things in because we believed in the vitality of the Lafayette schools and the vitality of what those people are trying to do so we had to try and fight fire with fire. It is very complex.

I guess what I want to leave you with is that sometimes when I walk into this library I break into a cold sweat-I've be scoured here. I had a full head of hair before when I was in this room, people have had their way with me in this room and we have had some very hard conversations over race and how people treat people and what privileged is and what particular rights. It was kind of a reconfirmation for me—what a great intelligent, bright, and intimate conversation you all have had. What a great way to discuss all of these difficult issues and what great insights you all had. I know on behalf of the district and the task force we are very, very appreciative of this and as we move this conversation along we need to have your voices in the room. So bring them in. In public education, public means politics and things are just as political as they are financial and vice versa, they are legal as much as they are educational. And we get a number of rationales who all come to play at those things. But we all well-meaning people need to have their voices at the table in these conversations.