

STRATIFICATION FOCUS GROUP 1 LAFAYETTE 4/20/05

Tape 1

Tape 2

Jesse, Facilitator *The bad weather kept some of our participants from coming. Miriam sent out a note explaining the reason for this meeting. First of all, I would like to introduce the members of the task force from the district who are present here tonight and who will be participating. This task force is going to try to find the answers to why some of our families leave our schools and why some are deciding to stay as well as to try to figure out what problems the schools seem to have.*

I would like to introduce to you Rich Lopez, Matt Nathan and Leslie Smith who are all members of this task force. They are here only as listeners and we will tape the entire meeting so that we can subsequently study the comments made here tonight. Would you like to introduce yourselves? We can start with the District's administrator.

Jorge, Facilitator *My name is Jorge and I would like to start by explaining the purpose of this meeting. Later we can introduce ourselves. First of all I want to give you a warm welcome on this cold and wet night and I'd like to thank you once again for coming.*

While all of the schools of the district are excellent, there are a few whose student body seems to be made up primarily of minority and low-income students while the majority of students in other schools are primarily white and high income. This high concentration of groups has increased over time and the District calls these groupings "Stratification". This term means to divide or to arrange into classes, castes or social strata. This task force has been analyzing this process of separation and wants to propose a way to stop and revert the process. As Jesse said, both the task force and the representatives of the district are here tonight to hear your thoughts on the matter and to try to understand the way parents make decisions. As Jesse also said, we will be taping this discussion and it is possible that we may use some of your comments in future reports but will not disclose your names. We encourage you to speak freely and openly about your own personal experiences since these would be most helpful. Now we can move on to the introductions. Please state your name and the names of the schools your children attend. Who would like to start?

Parent *My name is Alfredo and I have four children. Israel is in 10th grade at Peak to Peak, Juan Carlos is in 8th grade also at Peak to Peak, Leonel is in 4th grade at Lafayette Elementary and Moises is in 2nd grade also at Lafayette.*

Parent *My name is Veronica and I have two children who attend Sanchez Elementary, Victor in 4th grade and Omar in 3rd grade.*

Parent *My name is Cristina and I have two daughters. Sara is a third grader at Lafayette Elementary and I have an eighth grader at Angevine.*

Jorge *My name is Jorge and my two children are already college graduates.*

Parent *My name is Eva and I have two daughters. Sarai is in 2nd grade at Pioneer and Irene is in 10th grade at Centaurus.*

Parent *My name is Lola and I have two children, a second grader at Pioneer and a 3 year old who doesn't go to school yet.*

- Parent My name is Miriam. I have a 4th grader at Pioneer and an 18 year old who attends Centaurus. I work at Ryan, Sanchez, Pioneer and Lafayette helping families.
- Jesse, Facilitator Please make yourselves comfortable. There are sandwiches and water for those of you who might be hungry.*
- Jorge, Facilitator A few suggestions during the discussions: Please speak loudly and clearly, talk about your own experiences and try not to interrupt when someone is speaking. To start, I will pose a few questions so that you can talk about them amongst yourselves. Please give them some thought before starting the discussion and, if necessary, write some notes. We have paper y pens at your disposal.*
- First question: More and more often we are finding that some schools have a great concentration of minority and low income students while others tend to have more white students with higher incomes. In your opinion, what is causing this separation?*
- Parent This is not an easy question; in fact I think it is very complex.
- Parent I think the first reason is money. Some of these schools are built in areas where housing is very expensive, \$250,000 to \$300,000 and even more for the purchase of a home . This forces the district to build schools in these neighborhoods and the low income students who can't afford to live in them become automatically excluded from attending those schools.
- Parent I've worked at Monarch High School for six years and I can tell you that there are more white students there than Latino students. There are many rich kids and you can easily pick out a low income student from the rest. Why? Because you have to remember there are many rich kids that come from Superior where housing is very expensive. These kids drive really nice cars. I couldn't afford some of the cars they drive. It's easy to pick out the low income students from the rest by the cars they drive and the clothes they wear. The rich kids wear expensive, high quality clothes. I can't afford to buy that type of clothes for my children either.
- My feeling is that money is not as important when you compare it with how the children think or how intelligent they are. To me that's what really makes a difference but not the money.
- There are very few Latino students in this school and those few are different because they are very smart and they don't care about wearing expensive clothes. They don't miss any classes either.
- This is a very good and strict school. They don't allow kids to just leave the campus unless they have a pass, which only seniors are allowed to have. I don't think there is much discrimination because I don't see the kids loitering the hallways so that other kids can show signs of discrimination. The security is tight, both inside and outside of the building, with one security guard outside and two inside; patrolling the hallways to make sure the kids don't linger instead of going to class. Kids are not allowed to leave the classroom unless they have a pass. There is a lounge (study hall?) and when kids don't have a class, they use it to study or do homework. I know there are a lot of differences because the school has a bigger population of white students and therefore it's less culturally diverse.

I am poor and I feel my income level is not high but, when my kids are ready to go to high school, I will choose this school because I place more importance on the level of education they will be receiving than on the money part. This school also has very rich teachers whose focus is to teach and to make sure the kids are learning. They don't allow the kids to drink or smoke although I think they do it outside of the school. It's a great school in spite of having more white students than Latino students.

What I've heard about Centaurus is that it is culturally diverse but that the kids there have all kinds of freedom. The administrators don't seem to be very responsible and don't seem to care if a student is absent in a class or at school or if they go to one class instead of another. These things don't happen at Monarch. Students have to go to all of their classes and if they have a free period, then they have to go to the study hall.

Parent

I don't agree with your comments about Centaurus. You can't talk if you are not there. My son participated in a "shadow" program there and it is a very good school. We decided to stay at Centaurus because we live just a few blocks away. I was born in Pueblo and graduated from Pueblo Central in 1980. About 40% of the students at that school were Hispanic, Mexican descendants, but there were also many other ethnic groups. The difference I see between Pueblo and Boulder County is that Pueblo did not have the "white flight" because the schools were all neighborhood schools and everyone attended the school in their neighborhood.

From what I remember since I moved here, the people of Blue Heron would go to Boulder High before Monarch was built and the schools in Lafayette were forgotten. One could see the differences between the schools and it seemed like the district had forgotten about the schools on the east side. But my kids stayed in the area because we like to support our schools. They attended since kindergarten through 5th grade. My oldest son started at Angevine and we had a lot of problems there. I have always been in touch with the teachers and with the principal, Jesse, who has always had his door open for us. I attended the PTO meetings. We have several groups here to take action and we always attend the meetings. The important thing is that the kids learn. The problem is that when they focus on something other than the children, I lose interest. My children went to Lafayette and Jesse Esparza and John Lamb always focused on the children. The teachers here are very good.

When my children started attending Angevine, my oldest one, Israel, started to have problems. We went to talk to the principal thinking it would be like at Lafayette Elementary but my wife and I were the only ones talking. The principal did not say a word. When we left and my wife and I talked about the meeting, we realized that nothing had been accomplished so we decided to go back. The principal had already left and we spoke with her assistant who did listen to us. My son had fought with another student because he had been told some racist remarks (jeering Mexican speak). A teacher, who didn't even see the incident, wrote a letter against my son, making him responsible for the problem, and the school used it to discipline him. The assistant principal explained to us what had happened and showed us the letter. I told her I wanted to speak with that teacher immediately and when she was summoned, she refused to join us and claimed that she had not seen any incident and that she had made up what she wrote in the letter. After that we decided that our children would never set foot in that school again.

Both Israel and Juan Carlos attend Peak to Peak, my other two kids are in fourth and in second grade at Lafayette. Before they used to have a program focused on the kids and now they plan on implementing another program that will focus only on 3% of the students. It seems that they have decided to forget about continuing to help our kids and instead focus on the ones called talented and gifted. In my opinion, this is a way to separate the kids and make distinctions.

I participated in the Open Enrollment process to get my younger kids into Peak to Peak. One has been accepted already and the other one is on the wait list. I've been told there is a good chance that he will get in as well. I would like that so that all four of them are in the same school.

Principal Jesse
Esparza

Let's go back to what we wanted to talk about. Why are the schools becoming segregated into schools with minority and low income students and into schools with all white and high income students?

Parent

Basically I think it has to do with the area in which they live. There are neighborhoods that are expensive and if there are schools nearby, then the kids from those neighborhoods have to go to those schools.

Parent

I think it's based on where they live. If the schools are in expensive areas where the parents can contribute more money to them, then they'll have more programs. Maybe not only regular programs but also sports programs and more clubs. That's what parents want and they take their kids to the schools with the most programs and activities.

Parent

In other words, the richest people want more things, more programs, better quality and they know they can achieve their greatest potential, right?

Parent

Well, sometimes money doesn't mean anything and those kids are the ones that get into trouble. Sometimes the poor kids are the ones who strive to succeed. It also depends on whether the people who live in the apartments, or rather in the trailer park, have money for gas to be able to transport their kids to other schools.

Parent

I am very happy with Centaurus.

Parent

These are good schools but the problem I see when I've attended Boulder Valley meetings is that they put more emphasis on spending \$3M on computers than on good teachers. I would much rather invest my money in a highly qualified teacher who is familiar with our culture than spending \$10,000 in computers. The teacher will teach our kids much more than a computer. The teacher can teach many, many kids as opposed to a computer that eventually will break down. And that is one of the main things we have lost. I'm not talking about programs like the ESL program; I'm talking about the quality of general education in the classroom.

Parent

I feel that the main reason for the separation of the schools is the area in which they are located and the economic status of that area.

Parent

We have very good teachers but I bet that if we compare them with the ones at Monarch, there are big differences. I'm sure the teachers at Monarch earn much more than the ones in Lafayette.

- Parent Mr. Administrator, do you work with the people at Monarch? You should know. Are we right?
- Parent It's not only Monarch. Boulder High and Fairview have a lot of problems too. They segregate the Hispanic students from the rest because sports are very expensive. Participation in sports would be very beneficial for our kids but at \$300, who can participate? It's too expensive. Like I said before, the main problem is money since a parent earns \$300 per week. In Lafayette Elementary the problem is that they focus more on the park than on the students.
- Parent I work with Pioneer's PTA and the money raised goes to the students. They paint a lot of murals and participate in folk dances.
- Jorge, Facilitator* *Second question: How did you go about deciding which schools your children would attend? What did you think about?*
- Parent I used to live in Louisville before moving to Lafayette and found out that Pioneer had a dual language program. I didn't want my daughter to forget her Spanish so I decided to drive to Lafayette every day to take her to that school.
- Parent When we pulled our kids out of Angevine to go to Peak to Peak, our idea was to have them attend Centaurus during high school. But my kids were comfortable with their teachers and friends and we decided to leave them there. My oldest one is in a Centaurus team and I've told him he can attend that school if he prefers. What I like about Peak to Peak is that they have a college prep program where they get kids ready to go to the university. I know that Centaurus and Fairview also have a program like that but at Peak to Peak they focus on each individual child.
- Jorge, Facilitator* *What you mean to say is that you had problems with your school and that's what prompted you to move your kids to another school. You and your kids liked the program at the new school and had an easy time establishing relationships with the teachers and making new friends.*
- Parent What I'm saying is that at Peak to Peak, since the class size is smaller, the teachers can give more attention to the kids. If they have problems, they can stay half hour after class to solve them. I talked to my children's teachers and they all congratulated me for having such good kids who always turned in their homework on time. I felt very proud of them and praised them afterwards. However, I remember one time at the other school when a teacher made me wait for 20 minutes during a conference. If the system is the same in all the schools, then the kids should be OK. Boulder Valley should take a look at all of its schools to make sure they are all on the same level.
- Parent They should follow Pioneer's example and have 50% whites and 50% Hispanics. They should implement something like that so that there is a good mixture of ethnic groups.
- Parent I see that as trying to force segregation. In Pueblo we account for half of the population but not in Boulder. If we check the numbers at the schools, we'll see that we don't make up 50% of the population. To me this is just a fantasy. I know what they are trying to do. It's a balance of opportunities but in reality it's not. As an example, check the police force in Lafayette. How many Hispanics do we see there? You can count them with the fingers of one hand.

- Parent Sometimes it's not the programs but ourselves. We don't get involved but I think there are many opportunities at the schools and Hispanics just don't take advantage of them.
- Parent The opportunities are there but sometimes our life situations keep our kids from being able to graduate. I have two friends whose kids have graduated and I tell them to stay in school. One is now 20 years old. I think he'll end up joining the army because he lacks education. This is what I always point out in other meetings. Why don't we have more Hispanics/Mexicans in the police force? Some people say it's because there is racism but I say they're wrong. First, our kids need to go to college and graduate so that they can have access to those jobs. It all starts in these meetings. This is where we have to make sure that our kids get all the opportunities that will allow them to learn. Mr. Jesse is an example.
- Jorge, Facilitator* *What you are saying is that if the district did something to make sure that all schools are the same that would be a way to measure if they really are which leads to the next question. What should the District do to measure the schools' performance? Some are stronger in one area and others are stronger in a different one. What should the District do to make sure everyone knows that? Do you have any ideas?*
- Parent I think the students should be given the chance to spend a semester taking a class in a different school, for example, Math. Supposedly if the curriculum is the same in all schools, then a kid from Centaurus should be able to learn at the same level in another school and vice versa if the system (curriculum) is truly the same.
- Parent Develop a certain type of test for every grade level that kids in all schools would take. It could be for math or for science. That's what they do in Mexico and they can see which schools are best.
- Jorge, Facilitator* *Here we have a similar type of test called "ACT", but to do that would be to add more stress to the students. As far as I'm concerned, those tests don't prove what the students really know. These tests are too standard and don't work for us.*
- Parent Why? Tests should demonstrate what the students have learned and accomplished. For example, they would show that all third graders know their multiplication facts that all fourth graders know how to divide. They would show what the kids need to know at each grade level.
- Parent Then what you could do is give them a basic entrance test for their particular grade level. Middle schoolers should have intervention or prevention so that we don't lose some of them since they are not all the same. They all learn at different levels and there is something called "Individual Learning Process (ILP).
- Parent I work at Monarch and I have asked many teachers where they came from and they all said they came from Centaurus. That leads me to believe that Centaurus is not a bad school and that its teachers are not bad because they left the school to go to Monarch. Even the former principal, Bill Johnson, came from Centaurus. I asked a female teacher that if they came from Centaurus and everyone thinks that Centaurus was or is a bad school, then what is the difference? She said to me, "As a mother, what do you think is the difference?" I said that the difference was the students, our children, and the support we give them at school. A lot of parents attend Monarch's meetings. For example, if the school did not support a child, the parents get together and ask the reason for the lack of support. Even the students have meetings and apply for scholarships and seek help.

You are asking here tonight what the district should do to measure the differences between the schools. I think that the teachers who came from Centaurus furthered their education by specializing in something to be able to teach at Monarch. They say that if our kids are not graduating it's not only because of the lack of support from the teachers or from the schools but also from the lack of support from the parents. The support has to start at home, with the parents. This father here supports his kids just like me and our wish is to see them graduate. I think that regardless of how many different schools I send my kids to, if their mind is set and they don't want to graduate, our support is not going to mean anything. We can't force them to continue studying. Since I know the teachers at Monarch, I can say that the problem doesn't lie on the schools but on us and on how we raise our kids. We should know what they are learning. I think the teachers are teaching the same things here that are being taught in the other school.

Parent For instance, now Centaurus is having track and basketball and kids come from all over. You should set up some tests to see which teachers are really working. Mr. Jorge should be taking notes of what we are telling him.

Jorge, Facilitator We are taping this meeting.

Parent Peak to Peak uses a system by which parents can evaluate their children's teachers and that allows us to see if there are any problems with any of them or between a teacher and a student. We can tell if our kids are learning properly or if there is a problem with any given teacher. This is why there is such a high turn-over rate at Peak to Peak.

Parent Then I can see that there are differences between the Boulder Valley schools because I have never been given an evaluation form to assess the competence of my teachers. I know my son had problems with a certain teacher. I know this teacher is good in science but she doesn't know how to deal with the students. I think that if parents were given a chance to evaluate their kids' teachers, things would change. Parents would tell the truth. This one teacher got mad at my son and made him cry. The children also have rights and they deserve respect. The district needs to know how competent our kids' teachers are. I teach my children to respect the teachers but the teachers must also show respect for our children. There are teachers that yell at the kids or snap their fingers to make them rush. They should not do that. They scare the kids. If they want the children to love their class, then they have to teach them to love it. When I was going to school, I hated history because the teacher was horrible and didn't like me.

Parent I think there should be assessments, not only for kids but also for teachers. I also think that the kids whose parents are illiterate don't go very far because kids rely on their parents. They ask the parents questions that they can't answer and they don't have the money to pay for private tutoring. I think it's very difficult for all students to be on the same level because it all depends on whether the parents can help their kids.

Parent I think that is very true. The people here tonight have a decent level of education. I finished high school and I can help my kids but, unfortunately, some parents work in the fields and never had the chance to go to school. These parents are giving their kids the opportunity to go to school. It's different than Mexico. My mom never went to school but she did send me and expected good grades. I feel very proud that I got good grades. I tell my kids that I was a good student and that they must be good students too and make their best effort. I can't force them. My mother used to say, "go to school and the

teachers will teach you and then you'll have to take tests. If you don't pass the grade then you won't move forward." Like the lady says, in Mexico if you don't pass the tests you have to remain in the same grade level.

Parent I only went to school until sixth grade but I want my children to learn. You are saying that you went to school to be able to teach your kids. In my case, my kids are teaching me and that makes me very proud.

Parent My parents, who only went to school until the third or fourth grade, taught me a great lesson. One weekend, they woke my siblings and me around 5 a.m. and took us to a field to harvest onions and tomatoes. We worked all day and when the sun went down, my father sat us down and told us: "This is a lesson I wanted to teach you. Now you have the opportunity to make the choice between going to school and using your head or using your back to work for the rest of your lives." I don't think it has to do with how much education our parents have but with the example they give us. My parents don't have the same level of education we have. One of my sisters is a teacher, my brother is a pharmacist. Another brother has a master's degree and I have a BS and work as an engineer at the university. My parents taught us well without having an education.

Jorge, Facilitator *You have the opportunity to give the district and this task force your suggestions. I have already given you specific questions about certain topics. Do you want to add anything else? Any other suggestions or anything you want to tell this group so that they can make their recommendations to the district and to the Board of Directors?*

Parent We want the parents to stay involved. In Mexico the school's PTA had meetings that every parent had to attend and, if they didn't, their son or daughter would get an absence on his/her record. Unfortunately sometimes we have to force the Latino parents to attend the meetings. Those parents say that the PTA doesn't value their comments and don't do anything and that's why they don't bother attending the meetings. The district or the principal should take attendance to make sure that everyone shows up and, if they don't, the absence should go on their student's record. I know that not all white parents attend the meetings either. During the PTA meetings only five people attend: three teachers and two parents (one of them me). PTA meetings are very important because that's where we decide where the money goes. During our last meeting we had to decide between using \$300 for a trip or for materials for one teacher. I said the money should go to the teacher to be able to buy the materials to teach the kids. Everyone except me voted to spend the money in other things and I was the only one in favor of buying the materials for the teacher. We need to give more support to our kids and to our schools.

Parents Something strange is happening in Lafayette. They call it critical mass and it came from Boulder. Everyone here wants to make changes and I don't agree with what they say about money being what changes things. The government thinks that money is the solution. I don't think money is the solution since it all depends on how it is managed and where they apply it. I say that to support our schools we need to allow our teachers to be teachers, our parents to be parents and our kids to be students. Something has made us lose this. Administrators need to manage the funds better. For example, they buy computers for their friends without thinking that the students are the main concern. They need to make sure that all students from any BVSD school, whether in Lafayette, Boulder, Netherland or Superior, have the same opportunities. When we can say that all students have access to the same opportunities, then we can say our job is done.

Parent Every school has a program that stands out from all the others. If Pioneer has a good math program but its science program for example is not so good, then they should adopt and implement a good science program from another school. All schools should do that.

Parent I don't like to say this but schools know about profiling. They know when a student is taking the wrong path and is not going to be successful at school. Can you talk about that, Jesse?

Jesse, Facilitator I believe so.

Parent I think the schools should know if a student is not going to have many opportunities to graduate and should have him focus on something else so that he can graduate.

Parent In that regard, the parents at the Latino Parents class at Pioneer learned that if a child is good at painting or drawing, then maybe he could be a painter. If he shows talent in math, then maybe he could be an engineer. I believe we know our children's talents and can guide them. My son goes to Sanchez Elementary and the school has an engineering program. They say my son is very good in math and in painting and that he might be heading towards an engineering career. I believe that our children are born with a special talent and we need to discover what that is. I think many teachers have difficulties discovering our children's talents because they have thousands of kids to work with. I tell my son, who goes to Centaurus, that since he has good grades, he needs to focus on continuing to get good grades. If he likes basketball, he'll want to go to college on a scholarship. He is a good player but he also wants to be a dentist.

I have problems with my kids. My third grader says that if I can't put him through medical school, then he'll join the army because he wants to graduate. I register him in different programs where they help him follow his dream. He's very focused and says that maybe he'll be a good engineer.

As parents we must help our children to achieve their greatest potential.

Parent As parents we want the best for our children. This reminds me that when I went to college I didn't know what field I wanted to get into until the second year.

Jesse, Facilitator We'll stop the meeting here. We want to thank you for your participation. The task force will study your ideas and thoughts and make recommendations at a later date. They really appreciate the information you have provided. I also want to thank Jorge Garcia.

End of the meeting.