

Final Report
of the
Stratification Task Force

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Submitted by:

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to the

Boulder Valley School District Board of Education



Boulder Valley School District

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Stratification Task Force Membership

Mack Clark – Co-Chair	Rich Lopez – Co-Chair
T.J. Cole – Community Member	Mark Chavez – BVEA and Parent
Dina Demara – DAC and Parent	Richard Garcia – Community Member
Robyn Hamasaki – Principal	Judy Lawson – Parent
Stephanie Mayer – Parent	Betsy Phelan – Parent
Ginger Ramsey – Principal	Will Shafroth – Parent
Lesley K. Smith – Parent	Stan Swanson – Parent
John Zola – Teacher	

Acknowledgements

The Task Force would like to thank all the parents, community members, and staff who participated in interview, focus groups, and community forums; Matt Nathan, facilitator, who provided assistance throughout the project; the district staff members who supported the work of the Task Force, particularly Shirley Valenzuela, Jonathan Dings, and Don Orr.

The Co-Chairs would like to thank the Task Force members for their dedication, patience, hard work, and excellent thinking.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the individual authors and Task Force members, and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Boulder Valley School District.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Concerned that socioeconomic stratification in the Boulder Valley School District may be increasing, and could limit the district's ability to achieve its strategic initiatives and New Century Graduate vision, the Board of Education chartered the Stratification Task Force. The charge to the Task Force was to study the patterns and causes of stratification, including any unintended consequences of open enrollment, and recommend strategies to reduce and reverse stratification.

By issuing its recommendations, the Task Force does not seek to end debate on what will surely be an ongoing challenge for the district. Rather, the attempt is to assist the Board of Education and the Boulder Valley School District with scoping that challenge and the strategies for addressing it.

Methodology

The Task Force was formed, with Board input, to include a broad representation of the community and its range of perspectives. Mack Clark, deputy superintendent, and Rich Lopez, local attorney, were asked to serve as co-chairs. The Task Force began regular meetings on November 30, 2004, and met as a group twelve times through the end of May, 2005.

The Task Force members reviewed, analyzed, and discussed:

- background materials and national studies on stratification, choice, and achievement to help inform them on the issues involved.
- enrollment statistics and data concerning the movement of students throughout BVSD and the impact on stratification, achievement, and equity.
- research specific to BVSD on stratification, choice, achievement, equity, and the assessment of academic quality.
- approaches to addressing stratification by school districts in California, North and South Carolina, Delaware, Georgia, Florida, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin.

The Task Force planned a process to gather community perspectives, which began with interviewing seven principals in February, 2005. Six focus groups with parents were conducted during April, and two community forums were held in May, attended by approximately 100 people. Participants in the focus groups and the community forums expressed a wide range of views on causes and potential solutions, and provided responses to general areas the Task Force was exploring for possible recommended action. Task Force members attended these events to observe, listen, and report back to the full group.

Analysis of Patterns and Causes of Stratification

Patterns of Stratification

The Task Force's analysis shows that there is socioeconomic stratification in the Boulder Valley School District. To cite one example, 59% of the total population of elementary children eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) are educated in just seven of the 34 elementary schools.

There is evidence that socioeconomic stratification is increasing in the district. In the four neighborhood schools with the highest percentages of FRL students, the percentage of FRL students has steadily increased over the last eight years. Several other schools are approaching a point at which their degree of stratification could accelerate.

In BVSD, there is a very high correlation (over 95%) between socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and ESL status, i.e. the low-SES students also tend to be the Latino and ESL students. Patterns of stratification on each of these dimensions overlap quite closely with stratification on the others.

Causes of Stratification

The Task Force's analysis suggests that stratification is the result of the interplay of several main causes:

- **Housing Patterns and Attendance Area Boundaries:** the underlying patterns of housing stratification in the district combined with the way attendance area boundaries are defined would create stratified schools regardless of the impact of any of the other causal factors.
- **Centralization of Special Programs:** the center-based distribution of programs for ESL and Special Education, in particular have led to concentrations of low-SES students who require those programs and services.
- **Unintended Consequences of Open Enrollment (OE):** participation in open enrollment has been increasing, and it is disproportionately the higher-SES families who open enroll, and they disproportionately choose higher-SES schools, while there are obstacles to lower-SES families' awareness of and participation in open enrollment.
- **Lack of Accurate Information on School Quality:** parents need better information than aggregate CSAP scores and a school's informal reputation in order to assess school quality.

Implications of Stratification

The stratification in the Boulder Valley School District has a negative impact on the achievement of New Century Graduate goals and strategic initiatives regarding diversity. It also exacerbates inequities between schools and between groups of students. According to many national studies, schools with high concentrations of students of lower socioeconomic status, although they can be excellent and successful schools, are at a disadvantage in terms of closing the achievement gap for their students.

The status quo is unacceptable. Delaying action only allows stratification to continue worsening and makes reversing the trend more difficult. However, action must be based on

an understanding of causes and complexity. Because there are multiple causes, multiple and linked strategies are called for to move toward a desired state for the district.

Desired State for BVSD Relative to Diversity and Choice

In the view of the Task Force the desired state for BVSD would exemplify a balance of four key values:

- Quality
- Diversity
- Equity
- Choice

These values are all closely related to each other, and central to the agreed-upon commitments of BVSD and its community.

In keeping with these values and commitments, the district would be socioeconomically and ethnically integrated, with all families having equal access to the benefits of educational quality and to free choice in its pursuit.

Because of the well-understood quality of every school many families would choose their neighborhood school for reasons of community and convenience. Open enrollment would be designed to have the net effect of reducing stratification due to housing patterns. The student population of each school would reflect the diversity of the district population, with the proportion of students in any particular group coming within a reasonable range of the district average for that group.

This definition of success should guide the district’s efforts toward integration, and will need to be translated into measurable indicators of progress toward the goal.

Strategies

The Task Force learned of various strategies being used by other districts to address stratification. The most effective were those that included

- addressing spatial factors and barriers
- establishing guidelines and preferences around choice
- strengthening neighborhood schools
- providing good information and outreach
- providing incentives

The Task Force through its inquiry and analytical process identified a set of factors that could serve as “levers” for change. Members recognized that no single strategy would solve the problem, but reasoned that by using these levers in combination, the district could generate momentum toward the desired state. The intention was to define strategies that would directly address key causes, attract support, be cost-effective, and reinforce each other to reduce stratification, while aligning with BVSD values and commitments.

Recommendations

These strategies were debated by the Task Force, and formulated as possible recommendations. Finally, the Task Force prioritized ten recommendations and discussed specific variations of each recommendation. Through an iterative process of individual written response, debate, prioritization, voting, discussion and synthesis, the Task Force arrived at a set of ten linked recommendations. These can be organized into three clusters, based on the aspect of the situation they are designed to affect, i.e.:

- program placement and movement of students
- information and choice
- conditions that support integration and limit stratification

Improve Program Placement and Remove Barriers to Integration

1. Decentralize Programs

The Boulder Valley School District should continue and extend the decentralization of center-based programs with particular emphasis on ESL services, which would be designed and distributed based on analysis of student populations, both to provide ESL students excellent education wherever they are and to attract them to schools where they are currently under-represented.

Objective: to reduce the concentration of students with particular needs in schools with center-based programs by providing those programs and services in more schools. An added benefit of decentralization would be to drive the adoption of methodologies such as differentiated instruction and language-enriched classrooms, which improve educational quality for all students.

2. Reassess Boundaries

The Boulder Valley School District should conduct a study of school boundaries to determine a logical placement that would then be phased in over time to lessen the impact of racial and economic stratification. Criteria for redrawing boundaries would include addressing stratification due to location of affordable housing, population patterns, issues of walking distances and transportation, and school feeder systems.

Objective: to reduce the economic and racial stratification of attendance areas that do not reflect current housing patterns and that have become further stratified over time due to consolidations.

3. Provide Transportation

The Boulder Valley School District should provide transportation funded at district expense for students who meet federal FRL guidelines to schools that they have selected through the open enrollment process outside of their neighborhood school. The scope of subsidized transportation should be determined based on a study that the district shall perform.

Objective: to make open enrollment equally accessible to all BVSD families.

Improve Information to Influence Choices

4. Strengthen Communication and Outreach

The Boulder Valley School District should implement a district-wide communications campaign to provide accurate information and to influence parental perceptions and choices in the direction of greater integration. This campaign would include messages regarding the overall high quality of BVSD schools, strengths of individual schools, the academic outcomes of open enrollment for students in particular groups, and the use of alternative metrics of school performance. It would also include outreach both to low-SES families who have not participated in open enrollment previously, and to high-SES families who might choose to stay in or return to more diverse neighborhood schools.

Objective: to reduce stratification by providing parents with accurate information to help them make good choices, as well as countering inaccurate perceptions currently influencing choices in the direction of stratification.

5. Require School Visits

The Boulder Valley School District should amend its regulations concerning open enrollment to include the requirement that all families who participate in the open enrollment process must first visit and review their school of home attendance area as a precondition of participating in open enrollment. Standards for what is included in a school visit to satisfy this requirement would be defined by the district and applied equally in every school.

Objective: to help parents accurately assess the quality and fit of schools for their child or children.

6. Develop and Publicize Alternative Metrics

The Boulder Valley School District should develop and strongly publicize metrics for school quality that will provide a more accurate alternative to aggregate CSAP scores. Promising alternative metrics for consideration are year-over-year growth, the district weighted index, and disaggregated reporting of CSAP results (e.g. showing ESL students' results separately). The district is urged to develop a communication strategy and a rewards structure to promote the understanding and use of the selected alternative metric(s) for assessing school quality, along with qualitative information about the strengths of each school.

Objective: to provide parents with accurate information on which to base their assessment of school quality.

Create Conditions That Support Integration

7. Implement a Weighted Funding Formula

The Boulder Valley School District should implement a weighted funding formula for all students from low-income families, based on analysis of educational, financial, and stratification impacts such a formula would have. Under this approach, additional funds would follow FRL students with respect to full-time equivalent (FTE) allocations, without reducing Title I funds. Allocation would be on a sliding scale based on the average

percentage of FRL students for the district – schools with a lower-than-average proportion of such students would receive less funding for FTE, down to a specified minimum below-average funding level (a funding “floor”). Schools with higher percentages of such students would receive proportionately more funding, up to a maximum above-average funding level (a funding “ceiling”).

Objective: to reduce the disparity in resources associated with meeting the needs of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, which leads to inequalities of educational opportunity and quality.

8. Establish a Desired Range of Diversity

The Boulder Valley School District should establish a desired range of diversity within all schools, using federal guidelines for FRL as the benchmark for diversity level. Under such an approach, if the FRL student population of an individual school were outside a range of plus/minus a specified percentage of district average, then preferences for admission would be adjusted to give low socioeconomic status greater weight until the FRL percentage reached the acceptable range.

Objective: to reduce stratification by placing some controls on the unintended stratification consequences of open enrollment, adjusting admission criteria in schools that do not reflect a desired level of diversity.

9. Provide Training and Professional Development

The Boulder Valley School District should offer all teachers and administrators training and professional development to improve schools’ academic quality and effectiveness in meeting the needs of a diverse student population. This would include training in differentiated and language-enriched instruction, and other pedagogical techniques shown by research to be effective in diverse classrooms. Training in cultural competency and diversity awareness should be made available not only to staff, but to parents and students, as well.

Objective: to improve the academic quality of all BVSD schools by improving instructional skills and methods, and increasing cultural competence and diversity awareness, so that families of all backgrounds and needs are welcomed equally, communicated with respectfully and effectively, and well-served.

10. Study the Options for Enrollment Caps

The Boulder Valley School District should study the options for capping enrollment at selected schools that are experiencing high inbound open enrollment and that presently use “portable classrooms” to expand capacity beyond their buildings’ actual program capacity.

Objective: to reduce stratification by limiting the expansion of availability for open enrollment of schools where it most strongly contributes to stratification as an unintended consequence.

Conclusion

The recommendations of the Task Force are not an attempt at a definitive answer. Instead, the intention is that they will provide the district and the BOE a starting point for a new phase of inquiry. The problem of stratification is complex, and time and determination will be needed to design effective solutions and build consensus to implement them.

The Task Force suggests the following next steps:

- the district performs a legal review
- the district prepares cost-benefit analyses and implementation options for the BOE
- the BOE debates those analyses and options
- further community input is gathered as needed
- the BOE chooses options for implementation by the district

II. INTRODUCTION

Concerned that socioeconomic stratification in the Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) may be increasing, and could limit the district's ability to achieve its strategic initiatives and New Century Graduate vision, the Board of Education chartered the Stratification Task Force. The charge to the Task Force was to study the patterns and causes of stratification, including any unintended consequences of open enrollment, and recommend strategies to reduce and reverse stratification.

BVSD is not unique in experiencing increasing socioeconomic stratification in its schools. Over half of the largest metropolitan school districts in the US have experienced an increase in such stratification, while only about 12% have experienced decreases. Stratification hurts: students learn less in high-poverty schools, according to numerous studies.¹

The problem is complex, and it will take time and determination to design effective solutions and build consensus to implement them. Yet, as the Board of Education stated in the Task Force Charter:

Given its historic and current commitments to both academic excellence and equity, the Boulder Valley School District may be uniquely well situated to successfully resolve this... Few communities offer the combination of talent and resolve available here to undertake and succeed in meeting this challenge.

Task Force members agree with the authors of the book *Divided We Fail* that school integration is imperative, both to promote equal opportunity and to forge social cohesion, and that eliminating the harmful effects of concentrated school poverty is the single most important step that can be taken for improving education in BVSD.

Through diligent inquiry and discussion, the Task Force members have reached substantial agreement on the patterns and causes of stratification in the district, and on strategies to help move toward a desired state for BVSD. In the view of the Task Force, success will be defined by satisfying key values of quality, diversity, equity, and choice with a balanced and pragmatic approach.

By issuing its recommendations, the Task Force does not seek to end debate on what will surely be an ongoing challenge for the district. Rather, the attempt is to assist the Board of Education and the Boulder Valley School District with scoping that challenge and the strategies for addressing it.

There are valuable perspectives to be listened to and considered, rigorous analyses to be completed, and tough choices to be made – the purpose of this report is to provide a springboard to collaboration on improving the education of all our children.

¹ Harvard's Gary Orfield is quoted as saying that the negative impact of stratified schools on low-income students 'is one of the most consistent findings in research on education.' (*Divide We Fail*, 2002, p. 13)

III. METHODOLOGY

The Task Force was formed, with Board input, to include a broad representation of the community and its range of perspectives. Mack Clark, deputy superintendent, and Rich Lopez, local attorney, were asked to serve as co-chairs. The Task Force began regular meetings on November 30, 2004, and met as a group twelve times through the end of May, 2005.

The process of inquiry and analysis for Task Force work involved a structured yet flexible approach. Meetings were led by the Co-Chairs with the assistance of Matt Nathan, facilitator. Expression and discussion of a full range of views was encouraged. The Task Force divided itself into subgroups for certain aspects of the work, with periodic reports back to the full group for review and discussion.

Task Force members read background materials and national studies on stratification, choice, and achievement to help inform them on the issues involved. They also examined research specific to BVSD on stratification, choice, achievement, equity, and the assessment of academic quality. (Attachment C)

Additionally, members analyzed enrollment statistics and data concerning the movement of students throughout BVSD. District planning staff and Dr. Kenneth Howe gave presentations and answered Task Force members' questions regarding interpretation of this data, and its implications for stratification, achievement, and equity. (Attachment D)

The Task Force also examined best practices through review of strategies used by other school districts nation-wide. For example, the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts, which faces similar challenges to BVSD, has been grappling with stratification issues for many years. Lessons learned there can guide efforts here. A summary of approaches to dealing with stratification taken by districts in California, North and South Carolina, Delaware, Georgia, Florida, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin is included as Attachment E.

The Task Force designed a process to gather community perspectives, which began with interviewing seven principals in February, 2005. Six focus groups with parents were conducted during April, and two community forums were held in May, attended by approximately 100 people. Participants in these events expressed a wide range of views on causes and potential solutions, and provided responses to general areas the Task Force was exploring for possible recommended action. A detailed summary of these outreach activities and event transcripts are included as Attachment F.

Task Force members attended these outreach events to observe and to listen to parents and community members share their opinions on why socioeconomic stratification occurs and what should be done about it. Many valuable suggestions were reported back to the full group and incorporated in the Task Force's analysis and eventual recommendations.

Outreach efforts, while not exhaustive, were sufficient for and useful in the work of identifying and refining the recommendations contained in this report. Though the views and comments of parents and other members of the public were quite varied, patterns emerged. In the analysis and recommendations, priority was given to those ideas that had been heard more frequently and consistently in different contexts. For example, the concern that "many

parents open enroll their child out of their neighborhood school without visiting that school,” and the idea of requiring school visits was mentioned repeatedly in the principal interviews, focus groups and community forums – and made it into the recommendations.

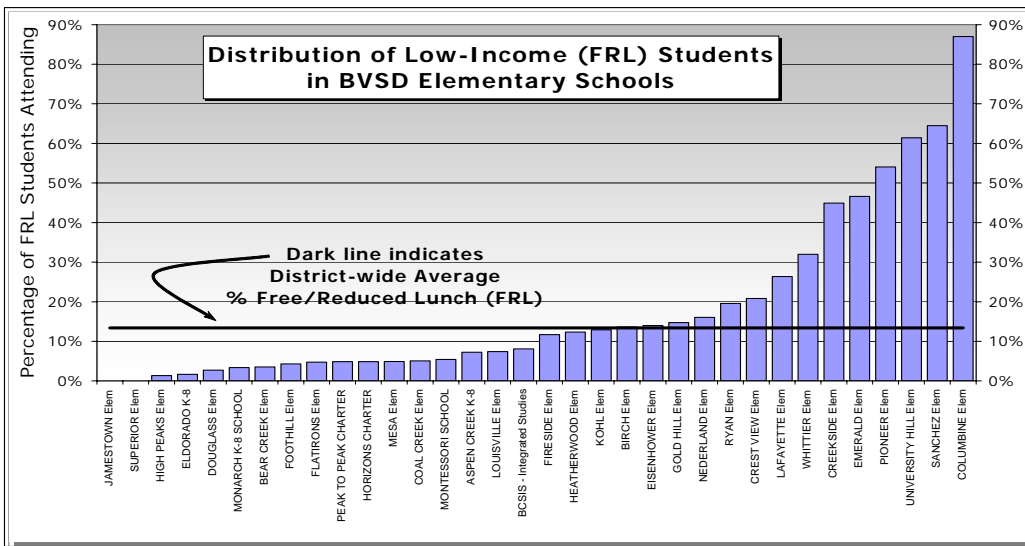
IV. ANALYSIS

Patterns of Stratification

The Task Force examined detailed data for BVSD neighborhood schools with respect to both socioeconomic status (SES) as indicated by eligibility for FRL, and ethnicity as indicated by data on ESL student populations. In BVSD, there is a very high correlation (over 95%) between socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and ESL status, i.e. the FRL students also tend to be the Latino and ESL students. Patterns of stratification on each of these dimensions overlap closely with stratification on the others.

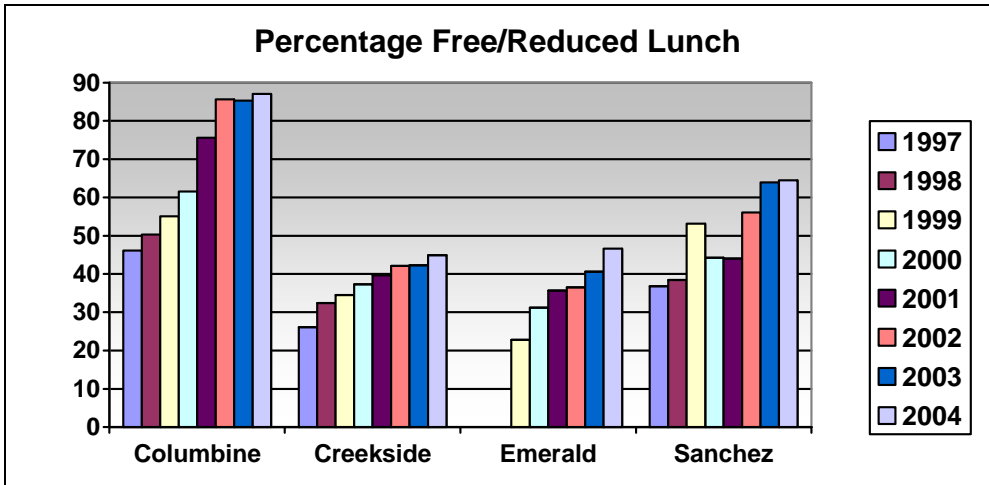
This analysis showed that BVSD schools in 2005 are indeed quite stratified on the basis of income, ethnicity, and language.

The majority of the FRL students in the district are educated in just a few schools. To cite one example, 59% of the total population of elementary low-income children is educated in just seven of the 34 total elementary schools in BVSD. Meanwhile, a large percentage of the schools in the district have only very small proportions of low-income students – far below the current district-wide average of 13.6% (see chart below).



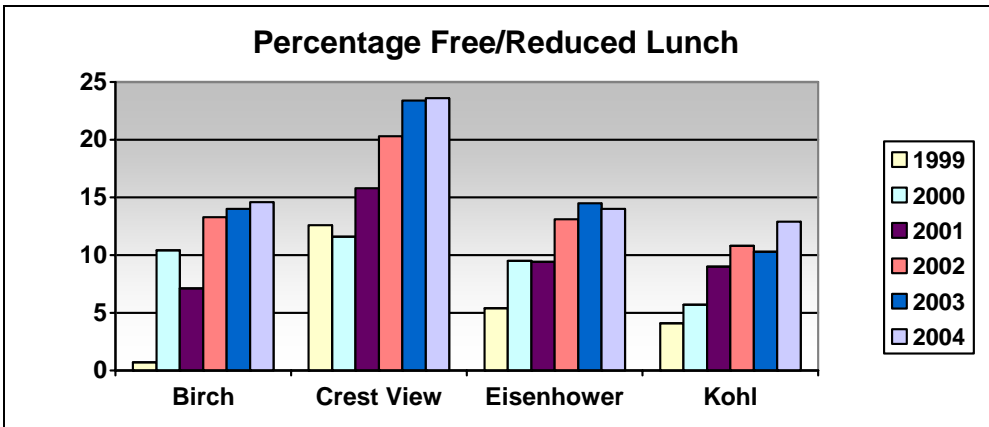
Source: BVSD, '04-'05 Special Programs by Location

Socioeconomic stratification is increasing in the district. In the four neighborhood schools with the highest percentages of FRL students, the percentage of FRL students has steadily increased over the last eight years.



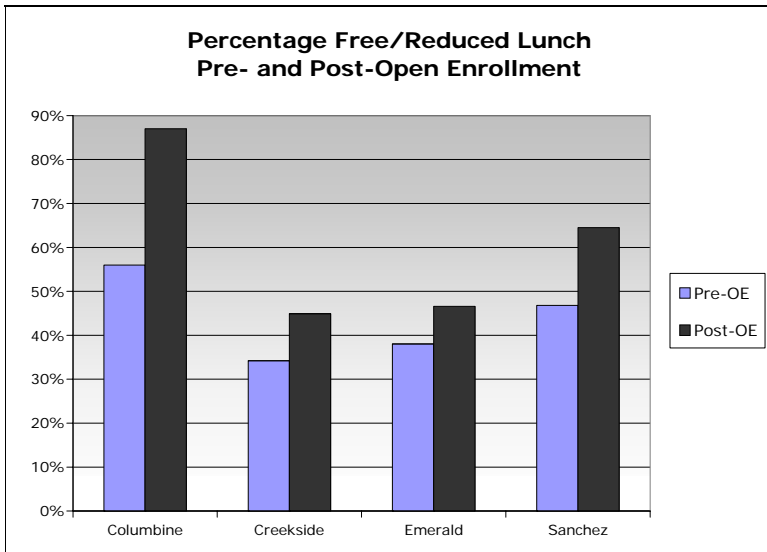
Source: Department of Planning, Engineering and Construction: 2004 BVSD School Profiles

In addition, four schools, indicated below, although they are still at less than 25% FRL students in attendance, indicate a similar pattern of increasing stratification between 1999 and 2004. The Task Force was limited in its time and ability to perform more sophisticated analyses, but members discussed the importance of determining if there is a discernable “tipping point” after which a school’s degree of stratification accelerates. These four schools might be approaching such a point – in any case, they will eventually become stratified if present trends are not reversed.



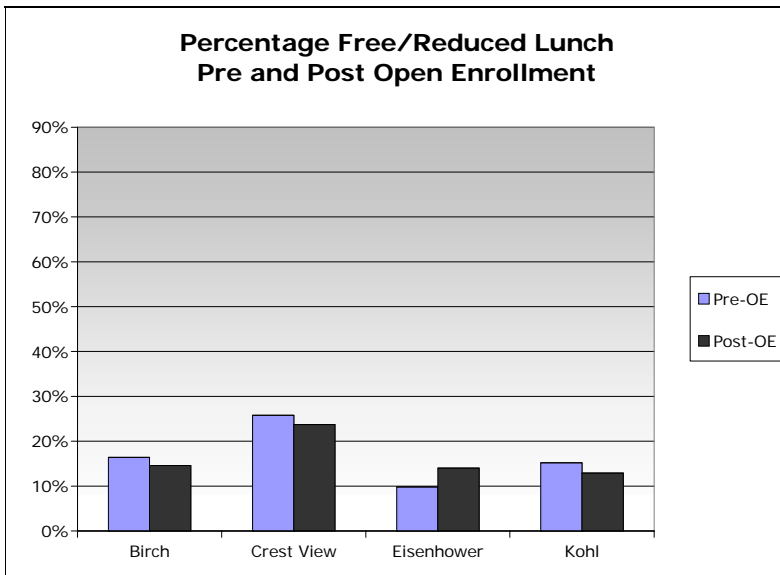
Source: Department of Planning, Engineering and Construction: 2004 BVSD School Profiles

For the four most stratified schools, the result of open enrollment is further stratification.



Source: Boulder Valley School District Stratification Study, February 2005

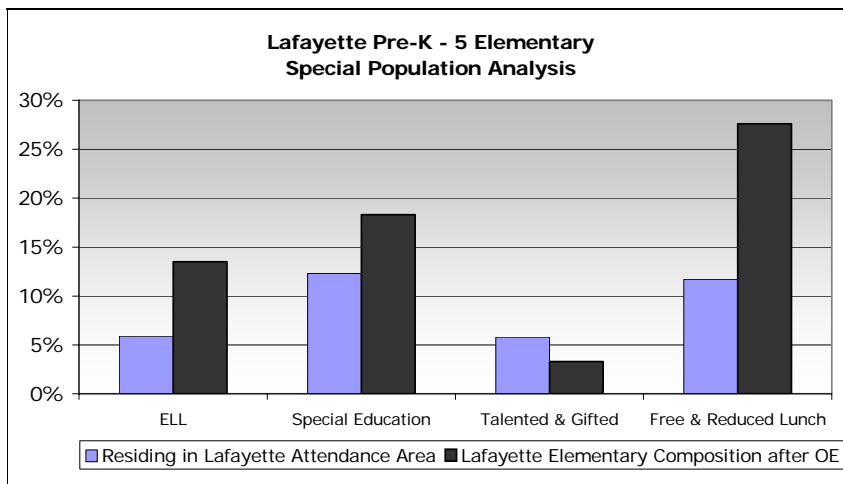
For the four schools that are presently only somewhat stratified (near current district-wide average % FRL population), OE has little effect on level of stratification.



Source: Boulder Valley School District Stratification Study, February 2005

Lafayette Elementary is an example of a school whose overall level of stratification, while still within reasonable levels (at less than 30% FRL and less than 15% ESL), shows a significant difference when looked at from a pre and post-open enrollment standpoint. Lafayette Elementary loses the largest percent of its neighborhood population to OE of any school in the district -- 72% of its neighborhood population open enrolls to other BVSD schools. The largest recipient of this OE out of Lafayette is Peak to Peak Charter school. Lafayette Elementary has been losing between 13% and 15% of its population to Peak to Peak Charter School for the last four years for which data are available. While data on the socioeconomic make-up of students open enrolling out of a school are not readily available, since Peak to Peak's FRL student population is still less than 5%, it is fair to say that the OE out of Lafayette Elementary and into Peak to Peak consists primarily of middle-class students. Coal Creek Elementary and Douglas Elementary, the next largest recipients of OE from Lafayette (at between 8% and 11% of the Lafayette Elementary neighborhood population each per year) also still have less than 5% FRL students, so they must also be receiving middle-class students from Lafayette.

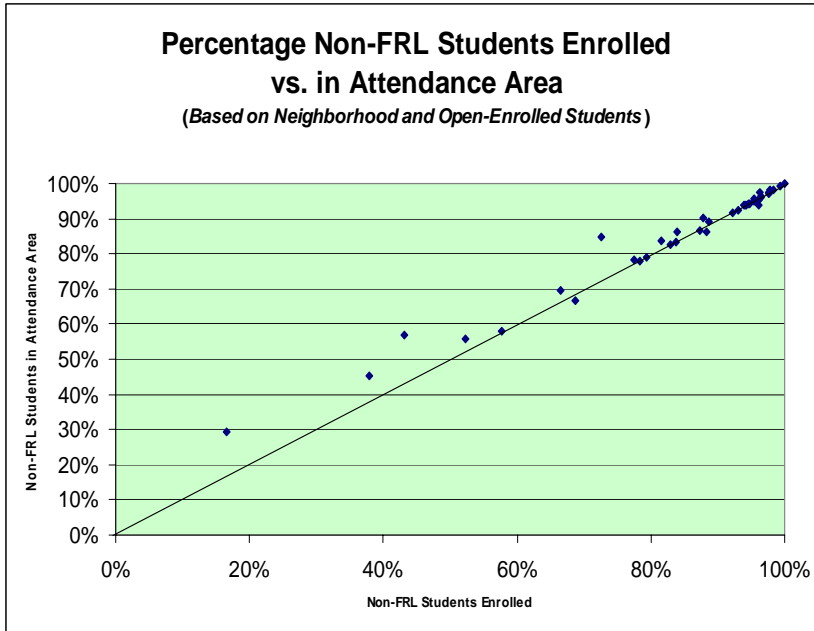
It is clear from the following graph that open enrollment is having a significant impact on Lafayette Elementary. Without OE, the proportion of Lafayette's population that would qualify for FRL would only be 11.7% in the current school year. After the effects of OE, that same figure is 27.6% – a 135% increase.



Source: Boulder Valley School District, January 2005

In general, it is the higher-SES (and white) students that are choosing to utilize open enrollment in BVSD. And in general, they appear to be leaving lower-SES (and higher minority) schools for higher-SES schools, according to the Howe and Eisenhart study of open enrollment in BVSD. That conclusion is confirmed by current data compiled by

Jonathan Dings of the district’s planning office, presented in the chart below showing the percentage of non-FRL (i.e. higher-SES) students enrolled vs. in the attendance area.



Source: Department of Planning Assessment, February 2005

Note: Students who attend a school without a neighborhood attendance area have been removed from the above analyses, as have students attending Jamestown and Gold Hill.

Data on percentage of white students enrolled vs. in the attendance area show a nearly identical pattern of stratification

Jonathan Dings of the BVSD Department of Planning Assessment offers the following interpretations:

- Schools with fewer non-FRL (or white) students in their attendance area tend towards greater net losses of non-FRL (or white) students through open enrollment.
- Percentage non-FRL or white students enrolled is more highly stratified than the same statistic calculated by attendance areas only. For instance, 26% is the lowest percentage of white students in an attendance area, whereas 12% is the lowest percentage white enrollment. On a somewhat more technical note, enrollment is 0.18 standard deviation units more variable than attendance area as computed using percentage white.

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The above chart excludes students who may have been administratively transferred to a school (e.g., to receive necessary ESL services not available in their neighborhood schools).

From this analysis, it is abundantly clear that patterns of open enrollment in the district are adding to stratification.

Placement of students in schools for administrative reasons (such as availability of special programs) tends to stratify schools even further, e.g., by an additional 0.07 standard deviation units for white enrollment, according to Ding’s analysis.

There are multiple factors involved in the open enrollment “shuffle” of students. While the vast majority of movement in BVSD through open enrollment is done by white and higher-income students, lower-SES and second language students do also open enroll (typically, but not exclusively, in search of bilingual opportunities). Many factors will dictate whether a school will be a net OE-in or net OE-out school, as well as whether open enrollment will have the effect of increasing or decreasing a school’s FRL population.

The key factor affecting a school’s percentage of FRL students is proximity to even more stratified schools (from which high-SES students have a high tendency to OE-out). Proximity to certain focus schools (e.g., bilingual programs) and charter opportunities also has a strong impact on how a school’s demographics will be affected by open enrollment.

Causes of Stratification

No one factor can be pointed to as the single cause for stratification in BVSD. The Task Force’s analysis suggests that stratification is the result of the interplay of several main causes:

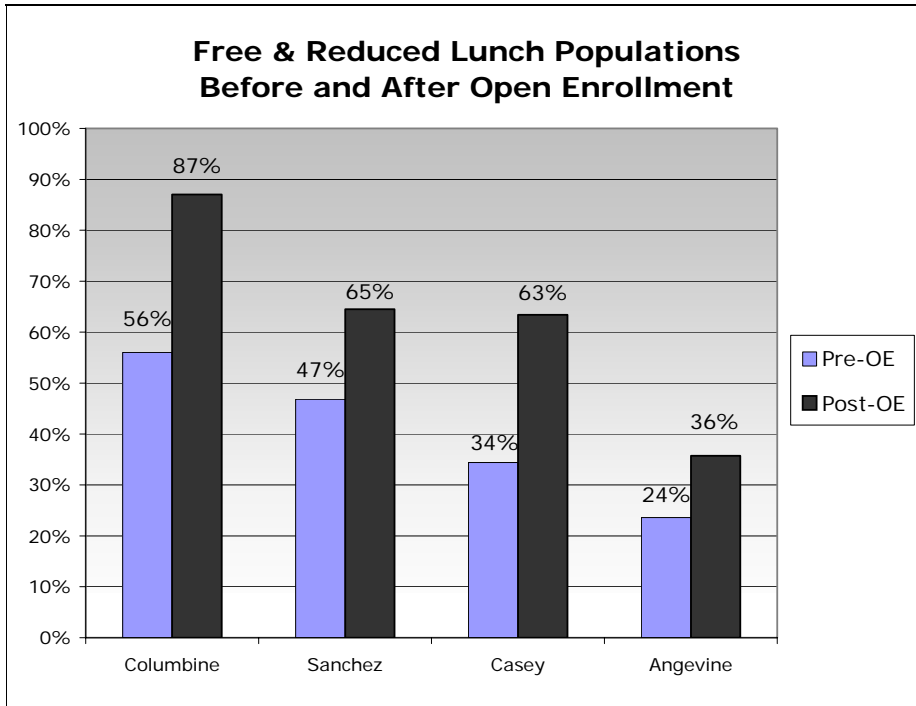
- **Housing Patterns and Attendance Area Boundaries:** the underlying patterns of housing stratification and the way attendance area boundaries are defined would create stratified schools regardless of the impact of any of the other causal factors.
- **Centralization of Special Programs:** the center-based distribution of programs for ESL and Special Education has led to concentrations of low-SES students who require those programs and services.
- **Unintended Consequences of Open Enrollment:** it is disproportionately the higher-SES families that open enroll, and they disproportionately choose higher-SES schools, while there are obstacles to lower-SES families’ awareness of and participation in open enrollment.
- **Lack of Accurate Information on School Quality:** parents need better information than aggregate CSAP scores and a school’s informal reputation in order to assess school quality.

Housing Patterns and Attendance Area Boundaries:

The underlying patterns of housing stratification and the way attendance area boundaries are defined would create stratified schools regardless of the impact of any of the other causal factors. For example, the data showing the low-income population of schools both before and after the effects of open enrollment make it clear that even if every child in BVSD attended their own neighborhood school, some stratification would still exist. The chart

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below shows the Free & Reduced Lunch populations at the two most stratified elementary and middle schools in BVSD – both before and after the effects of OE.



Source: Boulder Valley School District, February 2005

This makes it clear that even without open enrollment some schools, given the current boundaries, would house a higher proportion of the district’s minority and low-income populations. It has been decades since BVSD attendance area boundaries were last examined in a comprehensive fashion. Numerous changes – from new housing development and major demographic shifts in populations to school closures and consolidations – have occurred during this time, all of which may have had profound effects on neighborhood school populations.

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Centralization of Special Programs:

The district’s policy of centralizing the delivery of special services (such as English as a Second Language, Special Education, Title I, etc.) have led to concentrations of low-SES students who require those programs and services. This has contributed to the current state of stratification. If special services such as ESL were located in more school facilities, more low-income and minority students (who are the primary recipients of these services) would be able to attend their neighborhood schools, instead of being transported to other schools which typically already have a high proportion of low-SES students.

Unintended Consequences of Open Enrollment:

Declining enrollment in BVSD along with the advent of several new charter and focus schools over the last ten years has resulted in an excess of seating capacity, which has enabled increased open enrollment. All of the preceding charts show that this has contributed to socioeconomic stratification.

Without open enrollment, the socioeconomic composition of many schools would be significantly different. Open enrollment in BVSD is used disproportionately by higher-SES families, who tend to seek out schools that score higher on CSAP and are seen as being of higher quality. Those tend to be the schools with higher percentages of higher-income and white families, so this type of open enrollment tends to increase stratification.

Lower-SES families are generally less aware of and participate less in open enrollment. Most low-income and ESL families who do make use of OE have tended to choose dual immersion bilingual programs, which try to maintain a 50/50 ratio of native English to native Spanish speakers for programmatic reasons – therefore open enrollment of this type tends to have a neutral or contributory effect on stratification, depending on the composition of the school the family is leaving (Howe and Eisenhart, 2000).

Lack of Accurate Information on School Quality:

Publication of CSAP data on an annual basis in the Boulder *Daily Camera*, without disaggregating of scores for different subgroups (such as English Language Learners), has contributed not only to a misunderstanding of the quality of certain schools, but also ultimately to an increase in open enrollment out of these schools. Howe and Eisenhart’s 2000 study mentioned poor information and over-emphasis on basic test scores as being a concern of more than half of the 34 focus groups they conducted. Several of the Task Force’s recent focus groups (in particular at Columbine and Casey) also mentioned this as a major problem in the current open enrollment system with respect to attracting and keeping middle class, native English neighborhood students at their schools.

Howe and Eisenhart found that:

In general, an elementary school’s test scores is the factor most strongly associated with the number of parents seeking to open enroll in it as compared to racial/ethnic and free/reduced lunch percentages. (Howe and Eisenhart, 2000, p. 106)

And,

The emphasis on test scores is reflected in the pools of students requesting open enrollment. . .In general; these students have higher test scores than their BVSD cohorts and apply disproportionately to schools with higher test scores. (Howe and Eisenhart, 2000, p. 10)

Since there is a strong correlation between a school’s FRL population and performance on state mandated tests such as the CSAP, a choice based on test scores has the effect of being a choice away from more diverse schools and toward more homogenous higher-income schools. The information on which the choice is based is about the test-takers themselves, and does not necessarily reflect the effectiveness of the school.

The emphasis on aggregate CSAP scores and the lack of more accurate indicators of school quality leads parents to think that their child's academic performance will improve by open enrolling into a higher-scoring, less-diverse school. This is a disservice to parents sincerely seeking the best for their children, and it influences them to make choices that increase stratification.

Implications

This analysis has several implications:

There is stratification in the Boulder Valley School District, and it has a negative impact on the achievement of New Century Graduate goals and strategic initiatives regarding diversity. It also exacerbates inequities between schools and between groups of students. According to many national studies, schools with high concentrations of students of lower socioeconomic status, although they can in certain instances be excellent and successful schools, are generally at a serious disadvantage in terms of closing the achievement gap for their students. (Piton Foundation, 2002)

The present situation of stratification has created systematic and persistent inequities among BVSD schools. This is evident from the larger numbers of parent volunteers that effectively reduce the student-teacher ratio at higher income schools to the dramatic disparities in fundraising ability between schools. Funds raised by wealthier schools create an environment flush with resources and equipment, affording these schools the ability to offer supplementary staff, elaborate field trips, and other enriching activities to their student populations. Meanwhile, at a handful of schools, there is an obvious dearth of these supplementary amenities. Add to that the fact that these less-wealthy schools are attempting to educate students with much greater educational needs, and the full depth of the inequity begins to emerge.

This status quo is unacceptable. Delaying action only allows stratification to continue worsening and makes reversing the trend more difficult. However, action must be based on an understanding of causes and complexity. Because there are multiple causes, multiple and linked strategies are called for to move toward a desired state for the district.

Desired State for BVSD Relative to Diversity and Choice

In the view of the Task Force, the desired state for BVSD would exemplify a balance of four key values:

- Quality
- Diversity
- Equity
- Choice

Educational quality is a primary value that should drive district decisions, yet a comprehensive picture of educational quality must include learning to value diversity, must be provided equitably, and must allow for free choice. These values are all closely related and central to the agreed-upon commitments of BVSD and its community, such as:

- the open enrollment system

- the Profile of the New Century Graduate
(*Personal Characteristics: Respect for Others – understands and values differences including: cultural, religious, ethnic, gender, age and ability*)
- the strategic initiative “valuing diversity and promoting understanding”
- the strategic initiative “maximizing learning and achievement”
- the strategic priority of closing the “achievement gap”

In keeping with these commitments, the desired state for the district would be one of socioeconomic and ethnic integration, with all families having equal access to the benefits of educational quality and to free choice in its pursuit.

Because of the well-understood quality of every school many families would choose their neighborhood school for reasons of community and convenience. Open enrollment would be designed to have the net effect of reducing stratification due to housing patterns. The student population of each school would reflect the diversity of the district population, with the proportion of students in any particular group coming within a reasonable range of the district average for that group.

Academic quality would be enhanced by diversity and by removing the negative impact of highly stratified schools on low-SES students’ learning. As a result, all children in BVSD would have equal opportunity to achieve and grow.

This definition of success as the balanced satisfaction of key values should guide the district’s efforts toward integration, and will need to be translated into measurable indicators of progress toward the goal.

Strategies

The Task Force examined various strategies being used by school districts in Colorado and around the country to reduce and reverse socioeconomic stratification, identified those with promising results. In districts with open enrollment policies, the most effective strategies made use of the following elements in combination:

- address spatial factors and barriers: e.g. rezoning for economic integration (Coweta County, GA), providing transportation under some circumstances (Eugene, OR).
- establish guidelines and preferences regarding choice: e.g. the percentage of students in poverty in each school must be within x% of the district mean (e.g. Cambridge, MA; Brandywine, DE), preference given to low-income students (e.g. Mecklenberg, NC).
- strengthen neighborhood schools: e.g. provide additional staff, resources, and redistribute programs (Eugene, OR)
- provide good information and outreach: e.g. help schools promote their strengths (Guilford County, NC), provide staff to help parents choose (Cambridge, MA).

- provide incentives: e.g. have additional money follow the low-SES students (Seattle, WA)

In general, in assessing strategies, those given the most attention and consideration by the Task Force were those that:

- directly addressed the key causes of stratification
- aligned with BVSD values and commitments
- had the clearest and strongest support (as evidenced by Task Force discussion, members' knowledge of and communication with their constituencies, and by comments from the focus groups and forums)
- would be mutually reinforcing in combination with other strategies
- had the potential to be cost-effectively implemented within 2 years.

In May, the Task Force began to focus on and prioritize a set of strategies or “levers” that had been discussed at various meetings, focus groups and forums. Members recognized that no single strategy would solve the problem, but that a combination of strategies applied comprehensively could reduce stratification and encourage integration, while preserving or enhancing educational quality, equity, and choice.

These strategies were debated by the Task Force, and formulated as possible recommendations.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

From a larger set of possible strategies, the Task Force prioritized a set of proposed recommendations and discussed specific variations of each recommendation. Through an iterative process of individual written response, debate, prioritization, voting, further discussion and synthesis, this set of ten linked recommendations was finalized.

The recommendations have been organized into three clusters, based on the aspect of the current situation they are designed to affect, i.e.:

- program placement and movement of students
- information and choice
- conditions that support integration and limit stratification.

Each recommendation is described below, along with its objective, rationale, and other factors to consider in implementation.

Improve Program Placement and Remove Barriers to Integration

Stratification is a problem of place. It is a function of the mismatch between where students live and attend school, where schools and programs are, and where all these would be located under optimal conditions. Ideally, open enrollment frees students from constraints of place, allowing them to flow to where they can best be served. It therefore has the potential to be a force for reducing stratification. In practical terms, however, it is difficult to provide educational services with such fluidity. The district must commit its staff and resources across many locations to serve students well wherever they end up. Program placement is a key decision in this task, and a major factor influencing stratification. Thus it is a key lever for change.

Additionally, there are barriers to participation in open enrollment, and to the rational assignment of students, that must be removed to gain the full benefits of choice, and to prevent unintended consequences of stratification and inequity.

Recommendation 1: Decentralize Programs

The Stratification Task Force recommends to the Boulder Valley School District that it continue and extend the decentralization of center-based programs with particular emphasis on ESL services. Such programs and services should be designed and distributed based on analysis of student populations, both to provide ESL students excellent education wherever they are and to attract them to schools where they are currently under-represented.

Objective

This recommendation aims to reduce the concentration of students with particular needs in schools with center-based programs by providing those programs and services in more schools.

Rationale

The Task Force has heard testimony and reviewed analyses indicating that because of the high correlation of ESL status and special needs with socioeconomic status, centralization of programs is a major cause of stratification. Decentralizing programs would, over time, lead to more integrated schools. An added benefit of decentralization would be to drive the adoption of methodologies such as differentiated instruction and language-enriched classrooms, which would improve educational quality for all students.

Other Considerations

- The impact of decentralization on current programs and students in low-SES schools would need careful consideration.
- Since some economies of scale might be lost through decentralization, this recommendation requires thorough analysis of benefits and costs.
- Additionally, this recommendation would be affected by possible changes in school boundaries (see Recommendation 2).

Recommendation 2: Reassess Boundaries

The Stratification Task Force recommends to the Boulder Valley School District that it conduct a study of school boundaries to determine a logical placement that would then be phased in over time to lessen the impact of racial and economic stratification. Criteria for redrawing boundaries would include addressing stratification due to location of affordable housing, population patterns, issues of walking distances and transportation, and school feeder systems.

Objective

This recommendation aims to reduce the socioeconomic and ethnic stratification of attendance areas that do not reflect current housing patterns, and that have become further stratified over time due to consolidations.

Rationale

Some schools have a disproportionate amount of low-income housing within their attendance boundaries. The Task Force has heard testimony and reviewed analyses indicating that when a school and its attendance area have a high proportion of low-SES families, various factors make it difficult to shift back toward a more balanced school population. While boundary change is an imperfect tool for reducing stratification in a system with open enrollment, in combination with other recommendations (especially 3-Transportation) it could provide a means of directly countering the effects of stratified housing patterns.

Other Considerations

- Studying school boundaries may prove a complex task, and could take considerable time to accomplish.
- The process of conducting such a study would need to be protected from any political controversy it might spark.
- If boundaries were eventually redrawn, they certainly would require phasing in (so that no students would have to open enroll to their current schools) and public outreach to inform families.
- Boundary changes would also need to be implemented in a way that minimizes any adverse impact on the effectiveness of schools to serve their current student populations.

Recommendation 3: Provide Transportation

The Stratification Task Force recommends to the Boulder Valley School District that it provide transportation funded at district expense for students who meet federal FRL guidelines to schools that they have selected through the open enrollment process outside of their neighborhood school. The scope of subsidized transportation should be determined based on a study that the district shall perform.

Objective

This recommendation aims to make open enrollment equally accessible to all BVSD families.

Rationale

The Task Force has heard testimony and the Howe Report has confirmed that a lack of resources for transportation has been an obstacle to participation in open enrollment by low-SES families. The expected result of providing transportation – in combination with recommendations 1 (Program Decentralization) and 4 (Communication and Outreach) in particular – would be an increase in open enrollment by these families into schools where they are less well represented, thereby reducing stratification.

Other Considerations

- To implement this recommendation, the district would need to determine whether to provide transportation comprehensively or more selectively (only for certain routes, certain schools, or certain sub-sets of low-SES students).
- A decision would also need to be made between providing transportation on BVSD vehicles or with RTD bus passes.
- The budget implications and cost-effectiveness of each option would need to be determined by the district, relative to the objective.

Improve Information to Influence Choices

In order for OE and the concern for academic quality to produce equity and diversity rather than stratification, accurate information must be communicated and different groups of families assisted and influenced toward well-informed choices and actions.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen Communication and Outreach

The Stratification Task Force recommends to the Boulder Valley School District that it implement a district-wide communications campaign to provide accurate information to influence parental perceptions and choices in the direction of greater integration. This communications campaign would include messages regarding the overall high quality of BVSD schools, strengths of individual schools, the academic outcomes of OE for students in particular groups, and the use of alternative metrics of school performance. It would also include outreach both to low-SES families who have not participated in open enrollment previously, and to high-SES families who might choose to stay in or return to more diverse neighborhood schools.

Objective

This recommendation aims to reduce stratification by providing parents with accurate information to help them make good choices, as well as persuasive messages to counter inaccurate perceptions currently influencing choices in the direction of stratification.

Rationale

The Task Force has heard testimony and the Howe Report survey data confirm that parents' assessments of school quality are influenced by hearsay and over-reliance on aggregate CSAP scores. Lower-income families are less aware of the process and potential benefits of OE, and of schools outside their neighborhood. They also face barriers to participation, some of which have a perceptual component. As the authors of one study put it "given the importance of good information to school choice, and given its unequal distribution, special efforts must clearly be made to increase the flow of information to [lower-SES] parents."² With better information and effective communication of appropriate messages, the expected result in combination with other Task Force recommendations would be more high-SES families choosing to stay in or return to diverse neighborhood schools, and more low-SES families taking advantage of open enrollment. The overall effect would be to reduce stratification and improve access to choice, while maintaining or enhancing educational quality.

Other Considerations

- Such a communications campaign would need to be conducted centrally by the district in a way that would not exacerbate competition between schools.
- As part of this approach, the Task Force has discussed the benefits of creating an open enrollment caseworker role to provide consultation (in English and Spanish) to families during the OE process. The caseworker would have current accurate information on all BVSD schools, including programs and availability for open enrollment, and would help parents choose schools to best meet their children's needs
- In particular, given the greater resources and expertise currently available to higher-SES schools, there may be a need to provide extra communications emphasis and support to schools with a higher proportion of low-SES students and lower average CSAP scores.

Recommendation 5: Require School Visits

The Stratification Task Force recommends that the Boulder Valley School District amend its regulations concerning open enrollment to include the requirement that all families who participate in the OE process must first visit and review their school of home attendance area as a precondition of participating in open enrollment.

Standards for what is included in a school visit to satisfy this requirement would be defined by the district and applied equally in every school.

Objective

This recommendation aims to help parents accurately assess the quality and fit of schools for their child or children.

² Schneider and Buckley, "What Do Parents Want From Schools?" (National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University: 2002), p. 17

Rationale

School visits are an important factor in parents' school choices, yet the Task Force has learned that many parents who choose to open enroll do so without ever visiting their neighborhood schools. Some parents have stated that they have open enrolled their child to another school because they felt that the school of their choice better met their child's needs. In an effort to ensure that a child's needs are met through OE, it will be helpful if parents describe and discuss those needs with school administrators during their decision-making process.

Other Considerations

- What constitutes a school "visit" should be articulated. A checklist of topics to be discussed with visiting parents by the principal or other designated person should be developed.
- The Task Force considered the possibility that visits by parents might be burdensome to the principal and staff in some way. Handling some aspects of the visit in small groups could be a format to consider, as long as private dialogue between parents and staff about a child's needs is included.
- An open enrollment caseworker (mentioned above under 4-Communication and Outreach) could also play a role in relation to school visits.
- In addition, the Task Force considered that it could also be helpful to require parents to visit the school into which they seek to open enroll their child.

Recommendation 6: Develop and Publicize Alternative Metrics

The Stratification Task Force recommends to the Boulder Valley School District that it develop and strongly publicize metrics for school quality that will provide a more accurate alternative to aggregate CSAP scores. Promising alternative metrics for consideration are year-over-year growth, the district weighted index, and disaggregated reporting of CSAP results (e.g. showing ESL and SPED students' results separately). The district is urged to develop a communication strategy and a rewards structure (e.g. a well-publicized annual award to schools that perform best on the particular measure) to promote the understanding and use of the selected alternative metric(s) for assessing school quality, along with qualitative information about the strengths of each school.

Objective

This recommendation aims to provide parents with accurate information on which to base their assessment of school quality.

Rationale

The Task Force has encountered many arguments that the ranking of CSAP data by "proficient and above" percentage is an inaccurate and inadequately descriptive measure of school quality. Such metrics as year-over-year growth, the district weighted index, and disaggregated reporting of CSAP test scores (to enable comparison of the scores of similar groups of students across schools) are widely considered to be more accurate.

Many educators suggest that aggregate CSAP scores would likely fade in importance if parents knew about and understood these alternative and more accurate measures.

The expected result of more accurate assessments of school quality is that, over time, fewer high-SES families would open enroll out of neighborhood schools, and stratification would therefore be reduced.

Other Considerations

- The district needs to make the *Daily Camera* a partner and district advocate in this process, lest historic reporting methods undermine the district’s message.
- Additionally, reward structures need to be designed to ensure that the behaviors rewarded are in fact the desired practices.

Create Conditions That Support Integration

The status quo is a trend toward increased stratification. Unless changes are made that shift multiple factors toward integration, the force of current arrangements, systems, socioeconomic factors and attitudes will continue to “tilt” the field of choices (for the district and for families) toward stratified schools. The following recommendations would use various levers for change to set conditions that support integration and limit stratification.

Recommendation 7: Implement a Weighted Funding Formula

The Stratification Task Force recommends to the Boulder Valley School District that it implement a weighted funding formula for all students from low-income families, based on analysis of educational, financial, and stratification impacts such a formula would have. Under this approach, additional funds would follow FRL students with respect to full-time equivalent (FTE) allocations, without reducing Title I funds.

Allocation of funds would be on a sliding scale based on the average percentage of FRL students for the district – schools with a lower-than-average proportion of such students would receive less funding for FTE, down to a specified minimum below-average funding level (a funding “floor”). Schools with higher percentages of such students would receive proportionately more funding, up to a maximum above-average funding level (a funding “ceiling”).

Objective

This recommendation aims to reduce the disparity in resources associated with meeting the needs of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, which leads to inequalities of educational opportunity and quality.

Rationale

The Task Force’s research suggests that cost-per-student of serving low-SES students is considerably higher than for high-SES students. High-SES schools therefore experience an economic disincentive to attracting and serving low-income families. Low-SES

schools experience an additional cost burden. Some low SES schools may receive more money through Title I funding, however, use of this money is both inflexible and inadequate to address the multiple and diverse needs of the school population.

Currently, given the differences in student populations at various schools, the district's relatively equal allocation of funds fosters continued inequity. The effects of private fundraising and parental resources in high-SES schools exacerbate these inequities. A weighted funding formula would provide both a financial incentive for schools to attract and retain low-SES students, and additional support for schools with disproportionately needy student populations. Without this incentive, it is likely that few high-SES schools will focus much attention on attracting low-SES students. Without this additional support, it is likely that few low-SES schools will be able to attract high-SES families.

Other Considerations

- Cost-benefit analysis should be done to assess the effect such an approach would have on certain current economies of scale, and to evaluate different scenarios, including applying the funding formula selectively (e.g., exempting certain schools) or phasing it in over time.
- The district should also find ways to neutralize disparities created by private fundraising.

Recommendation 8: Establish a Desired Range of Diversity

The Stratification Task Force recommends to the Boulder Valley School District that it establish a desired range of diversity within all schools, using federal guidelines for FRL as the benchmark for diversity level. Under such an approach, if the FRL student population of an individual school were outside a range of plus/minus a specified percentage of district average, then preferences for admission would be adjusted to give low socioeconomic status greater weight until the FRL percentage reached the acceptable range.

Objective

This recommendation aims to reduce stratification by mitigating the unintended stratification consequences of open enrollment, adjusting admission criteria in schools that do not reflect a desired level of diversity.

Rationale

This type of policy is being applied successfully in many school districts around the country that are addressing stratification while encouraging choice. As with any market-oriented system, open enrollment can benefit from specifically targeted rules that help ensure equity and achievement of agreed-upon goals.³

(For a summary of strategies used by other districts, see Appendix 5.)

³ Schneider and Buckley, *ibid.*, p.18

Other Considerations

- Such an approach would need to exempt or apply differently to selected schools that are already highly stratified, such as Columbine, or to schools in certain geographically limited attendance areas, like mountain schools. In general, Title 1 school populations would need to be taken into consideration when determining the specific range of diversity.
- The question of which schools to include under this approach is an important one. While the policy could be limited to neighborhood schools, focus and charter schools also benefit from greater diversity, and a specified range of diversity with associated adjustments to admission criteria could help.
- Dual-immersion bilingual schools (and any school that requires a certain mix of students for programmatic reasons) would be exempted.
- For this approach to work constructively, it would be crucial to reach agreement on goals with principals of affected schools and involve them in implementation from the start.
- Additionally, this recommendation would be affected by possible changes in school boundaries (see Recommendation 2).

Recommendation 9: Provide Training and Professional Development

The Stratification Task Force recommends to the Boulder Valley School District that it offer all teachers and administrators training and professional development to improve schools' academic quality and effectiveness in meeting the needs of a diverse student population. This would include training in differentiated and language-enriched instruction, and other pedagogical techniques shown by research to be effective in diverse classrooms. Training in cultural competency and diversity awareness should be made available not only to staff, but to parents and students, as well.

Objective

This recommendation aims to improve the academic quality of all BVSD schools by improving instructional skills and methods, and increasing cultural competence and diversity awareness, so that families of all backgrounds and needs are welcomed equally, communicated with respectfully and effectively, and well-served.

Rationale

The Task Force has heard testimony and weighed evidence that academic quality is a key concern driving parents' school choices. Many parents would prefer neighborhood schools if they were convinced that those schools were of sufficiently high academic quality. The techniques of differentiated and language-enriched instruction improve academic quality for all students. Diverse classrooms also provide many educational benefits to children beyond test scores. Improving quality through training and professional development will make every school more attractive to low-SES and high-SES families, thereby addressing actual and perceptual obstacles to choice, and reducing stratification.

Other Considerations

- Considerations of budget and timing may require prioritizing certain schools for training and professional development.
- The district should prioritize improving educational quality in lower-SES schools, which will help attract higher-SES families.
- The district should prioritize improving the capacity of higher-SES schools to attract, welcome, and serve lower-SES students.

Recommendation 10: Study the Options for Enrollment Caps

The Stratification Task Force recommends to the Boulder Valley School District that it study the options for capping enrollment at selected schools that are experiencing high inbound open enrollment and that presently use “portable classrooms” to expand capacity beyond their buildings’ actual program capacity.

Objective

This recommendation aims to reduce stratification by limiting the expansion of availability for open enrollment of schools where it most strongly contributes to stratification as an unintended consequence.

Rationale

The Task Force has heard testimony and the Howe Report has confirmed that higher-income families from certain lower-SES attendance areas disproportionately utilize open enrollment into non-diverse higher-SES schools (where program capacities have been artificially expanded with portables to accommodate them), leaving their lower-SES neighborhood schools with increasing concentration of low-SES students. Enrollment caps would limit the availability of empty seats (capacity) to buildings’ actual program capacity. The result would be that over time more high-SES families would stay in their neighborhood schools. Such an approach could be phased in gradually to ease any actual or perceived disruption.

Other Considerations

- Enrollment caps would result in some families not getting their first-choice school in the open enrollment process.
- Enrollment caps could be limited to neighborhood schools.
- Additionally, this recommendation would be affected by implementation of a desired range of diversity that triggers adjustments in admission criteria (see Recommendation 8).

VI. CONCLUSION

The Task Force has addressed its charge by identifying patterns and causes of stratification in the district, and clarifying the scope of strategies that can help BVSD progress toward successful fulfillment of its values and commitments.

The recommendations of the Task Force are not an attempt at a definitive answer. Instead, the intention is that they will provide the district and the BOE a starting point for a new phase of inquiry. The problem of stratification is complex, and time and determination will be needed to design effective solutions and build consensus to implement them.

The Task Force suggests the following next steps:

- the district performs a legal review
- the district prepares cost-benefit analyses and implementation options for the BOE
- the BOE debates those analyses and options
- further community input is gathered as needed
- the BOE chooses options for implementation by the district

As the Board of Education stated in the Task Force Charter:

Given its historic and current commitments to both academic excellence and equity, the Boulder Valley School District may be uniquely well situated... Few communities offer the combination of talent and resolve available here to undertake and succeed in meeting this challenge.

VII. ATTACHMENTS

A – Stratification Task Force Charter Document

B – Timeline of Task Force Activities

C – Resources Reviewed by the Task Force

D – BVSD Enrollment Data

E – Strategies Other Districts Use to Address Stratification

F – Outreach Activities

G – Strategies

H – Focus Groups (Transcripts)

I – Community Forums (Transcripts)

A – Stratification Task Force Charter Document

Task Force on Stratification Issues Charter

Background and Problem Statement

The Boulder Valley School District through its adoption of a Vision of a New Century Graduate, mission statement, and strategic priorities has established a set of core values and beliefs. These include maximizing academic achievement, valuing diversity and promoting understanding, building partnerships and collaborating with our community. The district seeks to have these values drive our decision making and frame our purpose in an environment where open enrollment and school choice have been a fact of life for many years. Choice has resulted in 30% of our students participating in the open enrollment process.

The consequences of choice have been both positive and negative, as reported by Dr. Kenneth Howe and Dr. Margaret A Eisenhart, professors with the University of Colorado at Boulder, who were commissioned by the district to review the impacts of choice and open enrollment. Their study, which was completed in 2000, detailed several issues associated with open enrollment, one of which was the stratification of the district by socioeconomic factors and by race/ethnicity.

The white and middle class migration out of low SES and high minority schools has continued since the study was concluded. These trends, should they continue, will further concentrate our poor and minority students in a handful of district schools. The school district needs to ask itself if this is a trend it wishes to see continue or if there should be some alternative strategies to reduce this pattern.

Boulder Valley School District is certainly not alone in encountering these issues. School districts across the country who have embraced choice are experiencing issues of socioeconomic and/or racial stratification. Given its historic and current commitments to both academic excellence and equity, the Boulder Valley School District may be uniquely well situated to successfully resolve this emerging national challenge. Few communities offer the combination of talent and resolve available here to undertake and succeed in meeting this challenge.

Task Force Charge

The stratification task force is charged to study the impacts of open enrollment on socioeconomic stratification and propose solutions which will give the Boulder Valley School District the capacity to realize its strategic initiatives.

Specifically the task force is asked to issue findings and recommendations on the following questions:

- What are the patterns of socioeconomic stratification within the Boulder Valley School District today?
- What are the significant causes of the socioeconomic stratification identified above?
- What impact, if any, does open enrollment have on socioeconomic stratification and the level of diversity of our schools?
- What is the desired state for Boulder Valley School District relative to diversity and choice?
- What are the specific strategies that should be adopted, and actions to be taken by the District to move us from our current state to the desired state described above?
- What are the specific strategies that should be adopted, and actions to be taken by the district to ensure broad-based community support for our values involving diversity and choice, and commitment to the actions necessary to achieve our desired state?
- What is the impact upon stratification when there is a concentration of second language learners in a program?

Membership

The task force will be representative of constituencies within the Boulder Valley School District. The task force will be comprised of 15 members. Membership will be by invitation and selected from a list nominated by the Board of Education, district staff and self-nomination. District and Education Center staff will serve in an advisory role to the task force and provide data, information and impact assessment. The task force will have access to a facilitator who will help move the work forward and will be lead by two co-chairs, one of which will be the Deputy Superintendent and the other appointed by the Superintendent. District Legal Counsel, Dr. Kenneth Howe from the University of Colorado and the superintendent will serve in an ex-officio capacity.

Scope of Work

The task force is authorized to request data, review policies and reports, including the Howe/Eisenhart study, interview staff, and conduct research. The task force has the capacity to ask for clerical and research support as well as ask district staff to complete

major work assignments. The committee will conduct its work as a whole and will cause a final report to be drafted and presented to the Board of Education. Task force membership will determine norms, operating agreement and methodology for decision making. Co-chairs will determine meeting schedule, agendas, and will serve as the conduit for staff work requests. The final report will be approved by the task force prior to presentation to the Board of Education.

Timelines/Expected Products

The task force will convene in November of 2004. Findings and recommendations will be presented to the Board of Education in May 2005.

B – Timeline of Task Force Activities

November 30, 2004	Stratification Task Force Meeting #1
December 13, 2004	Stratification Task Force Meeting #2
January 10, 2005	Stratification Task Force Meeting #3
January 24, 2005	Stratification Task Force Meeting #4
February 3, 2005	Outreach Subgroup Interviews: 1. Sue Suggs, Pioneer Bilingual Elementary 2. Isobel Stevenson, Angevine Middle School
February 4, 2005	Outreach Subgroup Interviews: 3. Karen Daly, Creekside Elementary School
February 7, 2005	Stratification Task Force Meeting #5
February 8, 2005	Outreach Subgroup Interviews: 4. Alison Boggs, Casey Middle School
February 10, 2005	Outreach Subgroup Interviews: 5. Kathy Salaz, Sanchez Elementary
February 16, 2005	Outreach Subgroup Interviews: 6. Lynn Widger, Columbine Elementary
February 22, 2005	Update Presentation to Board of Education
February 28, 2005	Stratification Task Force Meeting #6
March 7, 2005	Stratification Task Force Meeting #7
March 8, 2005	Outreach Subgroup Interviews: 7. Jesse Esparza, Lafayette Elementary
March 17, 2005	Outreach Subgroup Meeting to Design Focus Groups
March 28, 2005	Stratification Task Force Meeting #8
April 4, 2005	Stratification Task Force Meeting #9
April 19, 2005	Focus Group, Casey Middle School
April 20, 2005	Focus Group, Lafayette Elementary School
April 21, 2005	Focus Group, Columbine Elementary School
April 25, 2005	Stratification Task Force Meeting #10
April 26, 2005	Focus Group, Louisville Elementary School
April 27, 2005	Focus Group, Creekside Elementary School
April 28, 2005	Focus Group, Centaurus High School
May 2, 2005	Stratification Task Force Working Session
May 9, 2005	Stratification Task Force Meeting #11
May 12, 2005	<i>Daily Camera</i> Interview to promote Community Forums
May 16, 2005	Community Forum, Boulder High School
May 19, 2005	Community Forum, Angevine Middle School
May 23, 2005	Stratification Task Force Meeting #12
May 24, 2005	Writers Subgroup Meeting

C – Selected Resources Reviewed by the Task Force

The following is a partial list of resources reviewed by the Task Force and its subgroups.

Books and Papers

Betebner, D., Howe, K. and Foster, S. (2004). “On School Choice and Test-Based Accountability.”

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Web Sites

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<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/>

The Council of the Great City Schools
<http://www.cgcs.org>

The Education Trust
<http://www.edtrust.org>

National Education Association, Priority Schools
<http://www.nea.org/priorityschools/>

D – BVSD Enrollment Data

E – Strategies Other Districts Use to Address Stratification

The following summary is adapted from Richard D. Kahlenberg, “Economic School Integration: An Update,” *The Century Foundation Issue Brief Series* (The Century Foundation, 2002).

Boulder Valley School District is not unique in experiencing increasing socioeconomic stratification in its schools. Over half of the largest metropolitan school districts in the US have experienced an increase in economic segregation, while only about 12% have experienced decreases. According to the U.S. Department of Education, all children, poor and middle class, perform substantially worse in schools with concentrations of poverty.

Strategies being used by various districts to address this problem include:

- Wake County (Raleigh), North Carolina. In January 2000, the Wake County school board adopted a plan to replace a system under which each school would have between 15% and 45% minority populations with an economic integration plan, under which no school should have more than 40% of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch and no school should have more than 25% of students below grade level. The district has 101,000 students.
- Coweta County, Georgia. In February 2000, the Coweta County school board voted to rezone seven of the district’s 15 elementary schools in order to achieve a greater balance of low income children. The Atlanta Constitution-Journal lauded the “moral courage” of the move, which was based “on research that shows low income students fare much better when mixed with wealthier, higher-achieving students.” The district has 18,000 students.
- St. Lucie County, Florida. In January 2001, the St. Lucie School Board modified its controlled choice plan of student assignment to emphasize socioeconomic diversity over diversity by race. Under the new system, parents are asked whether the family qualifies for food stamps and whether the children qualify for free and reduced price lunch. The district has 31,000 students.
- San Francisco, California. In April 2001, the San Francisco school board adopted a new student assignment plan that replaced a racial desegregation scheme with one that seeks socioeconomic diversity. The district now uses a seven-part definition, including Socioeconomic Status (has the student participated in free/reduced lunch; Calworks, or public housing?); Academic Achievement (has student scored below 30th percentile on Stanford 9?); Mothers Educational Background (post high school education?); Student’s Language Status (limited or non-English proficient?); Quality of Student’s Prior School (lowest ranking in CA Academic Performance Index?); Student’s Home Language (other than English?); and Residence in Different Geographic Area. The system has 60,000 students.
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina. In August, 2001, the Charlotte board of education, under legal pressure, voted to drop a longstanding racial desegregation plan, and implemented a controlled choice plan which allows parents to rank preferences among schools, and gives a preference to students who are eligible for free and reduced price lunch whose home school free and reduced lunch numbers are 30 percentage points above

the district average. A priority is also given for low income students “where their choice would enhance the FRL status but not create a concentration of free-reduced lunch status above 50 percent in the receiving school.” Beginning in 2004-2005, a priority is also given where the student reads below grade level and the home school performs 10 percentage points below the district average for reading. The goal is to ensure that “schools don’t have a concentration of low-income students or students who perform below grade level.”

Charlotte-Mecklenburg has 108,000 students.

– Greenville, South Carolina. In late 2001, the Greenville school board voted to adopt a new student assignment scheme which eliminated the use of race but sought to reduce the “concentration of low-income students” and the “concentration of low-achieving students.” The board rejected, however, a more aggressive plan to ensure that no school has more than 50% of its students eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Greenville has 61,000 students.

– Brandywine, Delaware. In November, 2001, the school district backed a flexible student assignment plan which would keep all schools between 16% and 47% low income, as opposed to a neighborhood assignment plan which would have increased ranges from 6%-73% low income. The district cited extensive research that students would have suffered under the neighborhood school plan that would have elevated levels of concentrated poverty. In March 2002, the Delaware State Board of Education approved Brandywine’s non-neighborhood assignment plan as a justified exception to a state law generally favoring neighborhood schools. Brandywine has 10,000 students.

– Cambridge, Massachusetts. In December 2001, the Cambridge school committee voted to amend its public school choice program to require that all public schools fall within a plus or minus 15 percentage point range of the district wide percentage of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch (40%). In the second year of the plan, the range will be reduced to 10 percentage points and in the third year, to five percentage points. Cambridge has 7300 students.

Early results suggest that economic school integration can be very successful. For example, in La Crosse, Wisconsin, which has the longest running plan, test scores have risen, and the district has a very low dropout rate, despite having a relatively high poverty rate. In Wake County, nearly 90% of students performed at or above grade level on the most recent set of state tests. In a study of 8th graders in Montgomery County, Maryland, lower-income students performed their worst at schools where the student population was overwhelmingly poor. But when lower-income students attended schools where most of the students were more affluent, they achieved higher scores -- matching or exceeding the county average.”

There is some evidence that high-poverty schools can have high student achievement rates, but the evidence is stronger that high-poverty schools tend to do poorer than middle class schools. The Education Trust recently published a report that found that just 1% of high poverty schools are consistently high performing, compared to 24% of low poverty schools; that is, high poverty schools are twenty four times less likely to be consistently successful than low poverty schools.

There is also evidence that demonstrates that low-income students can improve when placed in middle-class schools. In a study of fourth grade students in Madison-Dane County, Wisconsin, the difference between attending a school with a 45% middle class student body and one with 85% middle class classmates on average meant “a 20 to 32 percentage point improvement in that low-income pupil’s test scores.” In Denver, Colorado, 53-54% of low income students attending schools where less than 50% of the classmates were low income had proficient or advanced reading scores on the Colorado Student Assessment Program, while only 33% had such scores in high poverty schools (those with 75% or more of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch.)

Why do students do better in middle-class schools? Evidence points to three advantages of a middle class school:

Peers: A study of Texas students found that being surrounded by peers who score one point higher raises an individual student’s score by between .10 and .55 points. Black students were more affected by peers than white students.

Parents: Most studies find that poor children are more expensive to educate on average than middle class children, but students in high poverty schools get less, not more resources.

Parents are an important part of the larger school community because they can volunteer in class, push for high expectations, and ensure adequate resources.

Teachers: Teachers leave high poverty schools at much higher rates than they do middle class schools. Teachers in high-poverty school teach in their area of expertise less often than teachers in low-poverty schools.

F – Outreach Activities

The Stratification Task Force recognized that its 15 members, while somewhat diverse, were not fully representative of the community. As one task force member stated, “we need to hear from the single mom who is working two or three jobs so that her kids can go to school.” Accordingly, the members authorized a subgroup to plan outreach activities to gather community perspectives. The goal was to find a way to bring to the Task Force the voices of parents that might not otherwise be heard. The outreach subgroup decided to conduct principal interviews, focus groups, and community forums.

Principal Interviews

The subgroup reasoned that conducting a series of “focus groups” throughout the district might facilitate a discussion of open enrollment and parents’ decision-making process. Principals were interviewed, both to get their perspectives, and to identify potential focus group participants. Seven schools were selected and interviews with the principals conducted:

Feb 3, 2005

Sue Suggs, Pioneer Bilingual Elementary
Isobel Stevenson, Angevine Middle School

Feb 4, 2005

Karen Daly, Creekside Elementary School

Feb 8, 2005

Alison Boggs, Casey Middle School

Feb 10, 2005

Kathy Salaz, Sanchez Elementary

Feb 16, 2005

Lynn Widger, Columbine Elementary

Mar 8, 2005

Jesse Esparza, Lafayette Elementary

The interviews were conducted with at least two of the three subgroup members participating. A series of questions were prepared to guide the interviews of each principal. The responses to the questions were insightful and stimulated many follow-up questions. At the conclusion of each interview, principals were asked to identify potential participants for subsequent focus groups. The subgroup recognized that the insights and views of the principals were valuable, and two principals were invited to the February 28, 2005 Task Force meeting to provide their perspectives on open enrollment and stratification.

Focus Groups

Once the principal interviews were completed, the subgroup recommended that six focus groups be conducted. Two focus groups were designed to serve Spanish-speaking parents and the facilitators were bilingual. Questions were developed to guide the focus group

sessions, beginning with general questions about stratification and parents' decision-making process, then exploring areas for possible action and eliciting suggestions.

The following focus groups were conducted:

- April 19, 2005 Focus Group, Casey Middle School, Boulder
- April 20, 2005 Focus Group, Lafayette Elementary School, Lafayette (Spanish)
- April 21, 2005 Focus Group, Columbine Elementary School, Boulder (Spanish)
- April 26, 2005 Focus Group Louisville Elementary School, Louisville
- April 27, 2005 Focus Group, Creekside Elementary School, Boulder
- April 28, 2005 Focus Group, Centaurus High School, Lafayette

The focus groups were tape recorded and transcripts of these meetings are included in below. In addition, several task force members attended each focus group.

Community Forums

The third outreach technique was to hold community public meetings where anyone could present their views. One public meeting was held at Boulder High School and the second at Angevine Middle School. By the time these public meetings were conducted, the task force had begun to explore areas for possible action that might impact stratification. Task Force members concluded that these public meetings would be a timely opportunity to receive feedback on these action areas. A presentation was prepared for the two public hearings. The May 16, 2005 meeting at Boulder High attracted nearly 60 people while the May 19, 2005 community forum attracted approximately 40 people.

The Task Force outreach efforts, while not exhaustive, were sufficient for and useful in the work of identifying and refining the recommendations contained in this report. Though the views and comments of parents and other members of the public were quite varied, patterns emerged. In the analysis and recommendations, priority was given to those ideas that had been heard more frequently and consistently in different contexts. For example, the concern that “many parents decide to open enroll their child out of their neighborhood school without visiting the neighborhood school,” and the idea of encouraging or requiring school visits was mentioned repeatedly in the principal interviews, focus groups and community forums.

G – Strategies

Prepared by Stephanie Mayer, Stratification Task Force member,
March 6, 2005

Based on notes from interviews with principals.

Schools that have implemented the following strategies are indicated. It is possible that other schools not listed also implement these strategies, but they were not a part of Task Force interviews with principals. E.g. hiring ESL-trained teachers was mentioned by the Creekside and Columbine principals, but is probably also a practice at other BVSD schools with a high proportion of Latino students.

School key:

A=Angevine Co=Columbine P=Pioneer
Ca=Casey C=Creekside

Strategies (schools that have implemented):

Dual language program attracts some Caucasian families (P, A, Ca, Co)
Small classes (P, Co)
On-site literacy and computer programs for English Language Learner (ELL) families (P)
Staff diversity training (P, C)
Buddy program for all first grade families with cross-cultural training, mixed SES and language, talk very explicitly about racial issues (P)
ELL kids make at least one year's progress within a year (P, Ca, Co)
Schedule all of math classes at same time so that students don't get tracked (A)
Mixed-grade language arts classes include students at different levels so that classes are less socially stratified (A)
High volunteerism, which reduces the ratio of adults to kids (A)
Advertise diversity because it appeals to certain families (i.e. those with kids adopted from another country, biracial kids, families who appreciate diversity) (P, C, Ca)
Hire ESL-trained teachers; in addition to being valuable pedagogically this practice enhances communication between the school and the Latino parents who do not speak English well (C, Co)
Report scale score growth per year as a metric (suggested by most principals).
Disaggregate CSAP data for non-ELL, non FRL kids (a.k.a. middle-class white kids): they have scores that are as good as those of their peers at almost all-white schools (Ca)
Mix advanced ESL and regular Language Arts in the same classroom, co-taught by two teachers (Ca)
Practice differentiated instruction in the classroom (facilitated by large Title VII grant) (Co)
Articulate program to the neighborhood (requires a tremendous amount of time spent in outreach) (Co)
Require parents to tour the school (almost all schools)

H – Focus Groups (Transcripts)

Access Focus Group transcripts on the BVSD web site - www.bvsd.org

I – Community Forums (Transcripts)

Access Community Forum transcripts on the BVSD web site – www.bvsd.org