

2/7/12 BOE Speech on Choice Plan

Remember on December 1, 2009 when 8 surprise items were added to the BOE agenda. One of those agenda items was “A Resolution to Save Costs and Expenses” that stated, “No later than the first meeting in February, the Superintendent shall update the Board on the on-going budget reduction process.” I was puzzled when I didn’t see this on today’s agenda. I look forward to hearing Mr. Tata’s budget cutting ideas. I also look forward to the first meeting in March when the Superintendent is to report by line item and budget code, on a spreadsheet, all cuts being recommended as part of the Superintendent’s ongoing budget reduction process.

I also look forward to hearing solutions to a growing laundry list of concerns with the assignment plan.

1. Why would the number of available 7th grade seats at West Millbrook MS drop from 44 to Less than 5 in one week while we are still in the choice process?
2. The only element in place to avoid re-segregation appears to be the magnet schools, and they cannot bear the brunt of balancing the entire county.
3. Schools like Carnage & Durant MS appear to be headed toward high-poverty in a few years. Mr. Tata, it takes 2 or 3 years for the imbalance to show up at school level.
4. Placing 79 magnet students in next year’s 7th grade at Ligon MS appears to be a problem for a school that already has shortened lunches. There were only 8 Ligon students placed in other magnets, so these numbers don’t add up.
5. The magnet/proximity seat allocations appear to be headed out of balance at some schools.
6. Feeder students are over filling 6th and 9th grade classes at some schools making it impossible for siblings or proximity students to get into those schools (Daniels and Broughton are examples)
7. There has been a lack of response from the magnet proximity students and rising K students who are not yet registered.
8. Feeder patterns are stranding some students without transportation, possibly some of our neediest students.
9. Lack of capacity will make it difficult for students from low-performing areas to attend a high-performing school.

10. There is no stated student achievement goal in this plan. Maintaining balanced schools helps recruit and keep good teachers.

11. The feeder patterns appear to be spreading the Academically Gifted students around the MS's making it impossible to provide AG services with our shrinking budget (of particular note is the lack of incoming AG students at Carnage MS – which is one of our AG Basics schools).

12. Plan document states:

- magnet students “have **highest priority** on your most proximate school’s feeder pattern”
- “incoming siblings at grades K, 6 and 9 will be guaranteed placement at their sibling’s school”
- students from lower-achieving areas have “a priority ranking for assignment to a regional school”
- “If you are in a private, charter or home school, you enjoy the same proximity priority as children in the public schools”

Wow. This plan seems to promise everyone a priority to get into their school of choice. However, what is not stated clearly is that the KING of all priorities at the MS and HS level is feeder pattern students. There are many schools that will not be able to accommodate siblings or proximity students or low-achieving students because they are already over capacity with feeder students.

Mr. Tata, this is your plan. How are you going to fix it?