

September 26, 2007

Dear Shoreline Staff, Parents and Community,

Most of you are aware by now, that Shoreline teachers, other certificated educators, and classified support staff (SEA and SESPA) are not working at our schools Thursday, Sept. 27. We are protesting the District's decision to overload classrooms and disrupt our students' school lives.

We are working instead, tomorrow, to raise community awareness about how frustrated and disheartened we feel about the District's latest misguided actions.

While the District is sharing a lot of figures to try to justify their latest mismanagement of funds, our concern is the educational and emotional harm their actions have on our students and our teachers and other school employees.

Last Friday, the district told seven fourth graders at Meridian Park Elementary to report to a new 4/5 split class the following Monday. With 18 fifth graders and seven fourth graders, the younger children are outnumbered more than two to one. Courtney Kesselring's daughter, Careena is greatly impacted. Her three best friends were moved in one fell swoop.

Careena is devastated, Kesselring says, because the move means her friends have a separate class, a separate lunch and a separate recess. Kesselring is also concerned that some of the students moved are not mature enough to be immersed into a fifth and sixth grade culture. "I just wish the District would support the kids where they are and keep the classes whole," Kesselring says.

We agree with Courtney Kesselring. The District ought to support the kids.

The impact is also felt by teachers and other school employees. Staff members normally have a few months to prepare for a split class. They have to learn two separate curriculums and prepare lessons to meet the needs of two separate grades. Giving teachers 48 hours to make this change is unreasonable and educationally irresponsible.

The District has created very few new classes with the additional teaching staff provided across the district. Instead, they shuffled students like chairs, with complete and utter lack of regard for how this impacts the balanced classroom communities created by teachers last spring. Where once there were three first grade classes with 24, 25 and 25 students, now we have 23, 23 and 28. And what kind of assistance is the district offering the first grade teacher who has 28 first graders all day long? About one hour per day. That means for 80% of the school day, the teacher and the first graders have no assistance. The other classes receive no assistance at all.

So these new teachers hired are not getting new classrooms. They are traveling around the school providing about one hour of assistance in an overloaded classroom per day. In

addition, the overloaded classes could continue to get new students as they come to school, so an elementary class may end up with more than 30 students and still have only one hour of assistance per day.

At the secondary level, close to 200 students' schedules were changed Monday morning. Teachers were told they had to change sections, basically having to start over with students they did not know nearly a month into the school year.

The District says it "appreciates" our frustration with their changes. We are looking for more than an appreciation. We are looking for an understanding of the situation and how it impacts those of us who work with our students every day. We are seeking action that shows instructional integrity and respect for the classroom.

Shoreline budgeted more than half a million dollars to assist with overcrowded classrooms. We expect them to use that money wisely and to do it in a way that doesn't tear apart already-established classrooms.

When asked where that money, already budgeted for overloaded classrooms, District administrators told us they would use the money to "fill a hole" in the budget. They knowingly adopted a deficit budget and then took instructional money away from the students to "fill the hole."

What is "the hole?" Was it created by the millions of dollars spent on consultants, no-bid contracts, and superintendent buyouts? What matters to us is that our students receive the highest instructional quality possible. Splitting and isolating students, putting 28 or more students into one class and offering an hour of help a day, moving secondary school students to new sections with different teachers nearly a month into school – those are harmful to students, not helpful. These students have one chance for their basic education. Why would the District try to "fill a hole" on our students' backs?

We are taking a stand against the School Board's lack of regard for students, staff and families. We ask you to support us by contacting Supt. Sue Walker as well as our five board members to demand they refocus their priorities on Shoreline students.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Beck
Co-president
Shoreline Education Association

Barbara Cruz
Co-president
Shoreline Educational Support
Professionals Association