

Keep the 4 period day at WSHS

We are parents, students and concerned citizens who seek a more complete process regarding the Seattle Public School District's decision mandating that West Seattle High School change from a 4 period day to a 6 period day for the 2008-2009 school year. We understand that this is a complicated issue, and it is in consideration of that fact that we seek to engage all the invested parties in a process that we view as heretofore fatally flawed. It is our intent to provide all such parties with facts, not manipulations, and access to a forum for rational process on this issue. Our position is the decision to change the schedule should be reversed. It is not in the best interests of most of the students, parents and community of West Seattle High School. Both the district's judgment and methodology should be rejected or mitigated.

On September 14, 2007 SPS Chief Academic Officer Carla Santorno convened the staff of WSHS after school on a Friday afternoon ¹ to announce her decision. She subsequently issued a statement dated the same day laying out her decision and her reasoning. ²

Seattle Public Schools face all the challenges of any large urban district. They are considerable and formidable, as all schools are essentially self contained ecosystems operating within our city. At the beginning of our analysis here, we ask that given the array of challenges, why would the CAO choose to mess with the ecosystem **of a fully functioning and successful high school? Are there not higher priorities?**

We site three main areas of concern when a district noted for struggling central management takes it upon itself to tamper with a successful high school ecosystem.

1) A considerable majority of West Seattle High School parents and students and community support a 4 period day. There is no doubt an overwhelming number of WSHS staff support the existing 4 period day. Why the considerable effort to ignore or gloss over these facts?

Why do we view WSHS as a successfully functioning high school? Here are up-to-date facts about the school's performance:

- 81% of our graduates in June of 2007 reported plans to attend post high school programs.
 - Of those, 54% would be attending 4 year schools (36 different ones)
 - 42% community colleges (8 different ones).
 - 3% technical programs, (6 different ones)
 - 1 going into the Armed Services.

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- 68 different students earned one or more scholarships. Over \$100,000 in scholarships was awarded overall.

In 2007, alum Mr. Barney Brush introduced through his estate a \$17,000 first year award, an amount that will increase over time. His gift brings to over \$60,000 per year available to WSHS graduates on a sustained basis.³

- WSHS has the best attendance rate in the district, by a considerable margin.⁴
- Hard data on primary national, state and district goals such as closing the achievement gap and improvement in standardized testing (WASL) indicate that WSHS is indeed a successful school. This data shows that standing on its own, or relative to other district high schools, WSHS is a successful high school.⁵ This, despite well known missteps by the district in assigning the right fit in administrators to the school over the past several years.

2) While we do not rule out the possibility there may an agenda at play here of which we are unaware, we have serious concerns about Ms Santorno's decision and the reasons expressed by her for them. Put bluntly, point by point they read at best fatuous tending toward the preposterous.⁶ There will be considerable analysis of this within the pages of the SDP website, but a decision to move any high school toward more transitions per day for students and less project based learning time defy nearly all the current best practices in education. We submit that the district would be better served *using WSHS as a model to move other high schools toward, rather than the opposite*. As a community, we have the right to demand more coherent and logical reasons than what we have been told in her 9/14/07 letter and her few subsequent public forums.

3) Thirdly, as a community we should take a look at how this all came about. For many reasons the steering committee process alluded to by the CAO in her 9/14/07 position paper is viewed as unacceptable. Witnesses to the steering committee process describe the smallest group of one agenda crusaders approaching this committee work with accusations both unfounded and steeped in negativity. WSHS was repeatedly accused of "stacking" its committee membership with pro four period day individuals. No amount of reasoning could convey to these members that this was the case because the professional educators that populate the WSHS faculty are nearly uniformly in support of the 4 period day. It is stated here without fear of contradiction that the faculty representatives who represented at these meetings were as gifted and mindful educators as to be found anywhere.

Additionally, there was a repeated and continuous undercurrent of a wagging, "you people" finger and the notion that the teachers at West Seattle High School were getting away with something having a four period day. . The so-called steering committee generally characterized all dissent from their high school vision as the self serving

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ravings of an idle teaching cult. There was little civility. This pattern continues today with veiled threats and intimidations from a small coterie of parents exulting in their victory over the mindful practices of the professional educators of WSHS.

In September of 2006, when Ramona Pearson, representing the John Stanford Center for Educational Excellence (JSCEE) first addressed the WSHS Instructional Council (IC) about the steering committee concept, the IC specifically requested an experienced scheduler to assist in the process. One was promised, but not provided through the entire process. Also, records or accurate minutes from some of the meetings became inexplicably unavailable to interested parties.

It is pointed out that the proponents of the change to a 6 period day are a mere handful of parents, some with no students in the school and each of whom has engaged in conduct that at best could be deemed uncivil and curiously antagonistic. We demand that all the notes from all of these meetings, and all recordings of the proceedings of any kind, be released to the concerned community of WSHS.

Finally, how WSHS came to 4 period day in a process started in 1988 is a question worth studying.⁷ We invite a full airing of this history but wish to point out that the *process of that conversion took the better part of four years*. We strongly question any decision considered and made in the context that defines this particular process. Why the rush? As citizens we are especially wary of any process that pushes one agenda ideals, obscures and limits full disclosure, then rushes our students or *anyone else* to a course that is not in their best interests.

The decision by Ms. Santorno is a decision that flies in the face of current best education practices; that serves an undefined lurch toward a centralized control of neighborhood schools policy; that undermines the district's professed mandate of site based school management; if nothing else, it is a decision that violates the de facto contract WSHS parents made with the district when they chose WSHS for their student. It is a decision made in a context of near vigilantism and dissembling by a handful of parents who have resisted every mitigating approach to what they alone view as a 4 period day problem. We think our community is better and deserves better. Ms. Santorno has repeatedly stated she will not revisit this issue. We will ask the superintendent, the school board and the courts to take a closer look at her position.

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