

Representing Leadership For Social Justice
Integrated Service Delivery

A letter of the group of Hmong and Lao parents
who opposed the school restructuring in 1998

June 5, 1998

Dear Mr.

We are a group of Hmong and Lao parents who have children attending Franklin Elementary School. We have deep concerns about our children's education because of the changes that Franklin wants to undergo. We understand that Franklin wants to modify the English as a Second Language (ESL) program and other programs so it can reach students' potential and reduce class size.

We can assure you that we want the best education for our children and our main goal is to have our children to be completely fluent in English as soon as they can. However, at this time, we see that our children need the ESL program support to make a better transition.

The ESL program is good for our children because it is a well structured program that is designed to help support students with low English language skills. It is a program that helps to teach and reinforce the language, culture, and survival skills. In order to bridge the gap, both ESL teachers and bilingual resource specialists are needed. The first group is needed to teach literacy skills to prepare ESL students to smooth the transition and the second group is needed to do translations, give tutorial sessions, and deal with home/school communication.

As we see the new proposal, it is a good program. Unfortunately it is mainly targeted to serve white students or the successful and good students who are to move forward. Also, it is only designed for students who receive additional help and instruction at home. Our students, who are already disadvantaged with the language and cultural barriers, will have to struggle in an environment where they have to keep up with curriculum and their classmates. We know that our children are lacking academic skills but we are unable to give them assistance at home because many of us are not literate or have limited English proficiency. So how will our children do without the ESL program? And who can we turn to as parents who mostly rely on those ESL teachers because they are our advocates for both our children and ourselves?

The ESL program has its own funding and its own specific goals. If we are talking about educational equal opportunity, the ESL program provides an equal opportunity for our children. It gives them the opportunity to learn English in a safe and warm environment where it is OK to make mistakes, to take time to access and process new concepts and instructional information. It is also a program that allows our children to learn at their own pace. So please, don't take the ESL program away. We oppose Franklin's plans to adopt a new program because we want the ESL program to remain

as it is now. Our children are entitled to receive that program, so please, let's keep it that way.

Also, for such a big change that will affect the entire student body and staff at Franklin for the next school 1998-99, we feel that our parents' rights are being violated and that we were left out from sharing important information and having input into the decision making process. Franklin has gone against its own mission by omitting parental involvement. We feel that Franklin should have had the courtesy to inform us, parents of ESL students, and let the whole community know about those changes. Why did Franklin wait until the end of the school year to inform us while the new program must have been planned for a while since it is supposed to be effective next school year? As far as we know, we, Hmong and Lao parents, were only informed on Thursday night, May 28, 1998.

We are writing to let you know that we are not happy about the proposed changes. We feel that our children will be deprived of their rights to an equal education.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

The Hmong and Lao parents of ESL students at Franklin Elementary School