

Jefferson PTA Meeting
April 15, 2015

BUSD Assistant District Superintendent, Pasquale Scuderi

Class Size at Jefferson regarding 4th and 5th grade classes:

The numbers as we know them now: 144 was a number initially loaded in for projections at Jefferson, that number is now down to 136 and the projection is 131.

The options those numbers give us:

That gives us about 5 classes with either too high class numbers with one grade and too low at the other, or a combo class. We cannot have more than 30 per class.

There is a big transition between 3rd & 4th grade because of the change in allowed class size. A combo class is difficult. If that ends up being our solution, we will have to talk through how to support that class in that situation to make it work well. There are things we can do to make it work.

Some of what we could do is add staffing—an instructional assistant in the classroom, giving some extra planning time to a teacher in the summer, using student teachers in the classroom, Making sure the class is loaded to the fullest at the beginning of the year to ensure that there is the least amount of transience during the year.

Questions

Why not just add another section? That would lower the ratio to too low of a ratio and would have an impact using resources at other places in the district.

Adding another section would open spaces for other kids to join. Bring in 12 more kids from other places.

Doesn't solve the problem across the district. When kids enroll in the district. Kids who enroll later in the year tend to be kids with more transience and more challenges. We don't want to put all those kids at one place

Concern: Aids come and go, curriculum is so strict that it can't possibly be taught well in a combo class.

Would Principal Martin also have the flexibility to decide who the children are who would be best for that class? And who the teacher would be? Yes with some reservations. First year teachers cannot be assigned to a combo class. We would hope that a teacher would volunteer for it. But yes, the principle would have the say over which students get assigned to that class. Is there a possibility for 2 full time teachers to co-teach? Probably not, but we would like to bring someone else to support the teaching. Maybe "swing teachers" who rotate from site to site.

What criteria do other sites use in selecting the kids for combo classes? Unknown. He would have to check in with those places and get back to us.

In terms of making this decision, working with the number of 131, can the decision be put on hold until we have a firmer number? Yes, we'll be watching it through May but once we get into June, we would like to have things set. If there are significant changes, we'll let you know.

What's the actual enrollment number that would require 6 classes instead of 5? We would have to be pushing up against 30 kids per class to open a new class.

How we got to this point?

The added TK class is embedded in this decision.

If the additional TK class had not come here, would we be in a better position? We still would not have enough kids to open a new class for those kids.

How many additional kids will Jefferson have next year? 17—one TK class. Those who are coming next year, though, may not remain here. They could be assigned to a different kindergarten site.

Concerned about the numbers, right now we have 141 3rd & 4th graders, then we got 3 new kids, that's where the number 144 came from. So the number 131 seems to set us up. We don't seem to be losing families, how can it get down to 131?

Students attending Jefferson right now, there are 141, some of those students are leaving at the end of the year.

In October and November, we usually bring in 15 kids from Harrison House. Is that being considered?

In a combo class, the teacher is always juggling two curriculums. That's why we would look into providing the extra resources for that class to allow the teacher to focus where needed.

There are other schools that have dealt with this and have done it for a long time and so we have some places where we can look at what is needed to make this happen. There are options to explore. Additional teacher planning time, etc.

Do you think it is a good idea to have the combo class be the same size as other classes?

There is an argument that having the class be smaller is better, but there is also an argument to be made for not leaving space in that class for other kids to be put in there at the last minute or during the year.

Criteria for choosing kids? The local staff and principal are best suited to answer who should be in that class.

The district has a great 2020 vision for equity. Worried about our most vulnerable kids.

Class size really matters for low-income kids. Story of Units has been great as well as the reading and writing curriculum. Worried that the most vulnerable kids will end up in bigger classes with teachers trying to teach these curriculums to them.

If I was only going to focus on class size, is that kid necessarily better off in a grade level pure class? There are other factors at play. Agree in general terms, but there are other factors to take into consideration. If there's a feeling that particular kids at this site would absolutely not do well in these classrooms, that's when we need to tailor the additional resources to make the situation work.

Long term solution? Agreement with Realm Charter school is being re-negotiated. May need to have them serve more kids who are Berkeley residents. Maybe moving Realm into a smaller facility, moving the adult school into where Realm is, opening a school at Franklin.

Discussion around class-size going to 24:1 for K-3. This is only a discussion in process.

Another thing we're doing is being more stringent about admissions & documentation required, asking families to re-register for middle school and high school.

The board is hosting a town hall in May to continue the discussion.

Does the combo 4/5 set a precedent for coming years? Yes, for at least a few years.

What schools have done this? Can we talk to the parents and teachers who have done this? Muir, Emerson, then the TWI sites (Rosa Parks and Cragmonte, LeConte). Muir has had a combo class for 4-5 years. Are they happy with it?

This was not discussed when we went through the construction.

Feels like this decision has been made.

What is policy and where is there discretion? What are the criteria for putting kids in this class?

The district is perpetuating a system that doesn't work.

Need a solution that is maybe out of the box, more holistic?

The problem is not going away. More housing is being built, more kids are coming.

There isn't a policy about how we do the combo classes. We would work in tandem with the principal and teachers.

We've been over the average in k-3 classes and below average in the 4-6 classes. It has always worked for us. Why is this now a problem? This year is different from all other years. We don't have the classrooms available that we've had.

The reason we can't have an extra 4th and extra 5th class for next year is that we don't have enough students to fill another class per grade. 22 kids per class is too small.

The conversation needs to be about how to make the combo class work, not what other options there are.

Concerned to hear that you aren't sure what kind of support the teachers will get. The district has a number of options at their disposal to support teachers. We will provide the support that a teacher and principal ask for, within bounds. Mr. Scuderi can't prescribe what the resources are.

Sonya and the teachers are now having that discussion, deciding who will be best to teach that class and what resources they will need.

Where we need to improve as a district is to have a set of minimums—what we need for every school site. Some systematic ways we need to address these issues long term.

Kids placed in the combo class, what if it doesn't work for them.

Is there data/research around this? Not sure off hand but will take a look at it.

Why is saying 22 kids is too small of a class or that it is a worse situation than a combo class? The decision to go to 22:1 impacts the rest of the district.

It's the current curriculum that makes the mixed class really difficult. But there are great things that can happen in mixed classes.

Need to ask what sorts of supports make it work.

There isn't data because common core is so new to us.

Maybe there needs to be a reserve to support the implementation of the new curriculum.

Budget priorities will go before the board on April 22

Last year we had 3 4th grade classes go into 2 5th grade classes, why can't we do that again?

If we have enough attrition as we watch it through May, we might be able to do that.

What about the kids who are struggling, who won't get picked for the combo class and then won't get the additional resources that are given to that class?

This isn't a facilities issue. We have the space for 6 classes.

How is having 22 kids in a class going to adversely affect other places?

We don't have teachers to do that. If there was an extra teacher or so in the district, we would use them to relieve some of the pressure in the first grade.

Our K-2 classes are bigger, not 20:1 and where are the schools that have less than 20?

The North zone is more impacted than the other zones in the district because we have fewer schools. Schools with smaller averages tend to be in the southeast zone.

Additional questions can be compiled by the PTA and sent to Mr. Scuderi's office.

Send them to Jefferson PTA email, Valerie will compile the questions and send them on.

Nominating Committee Report

Open Positions:

Co-Chair

Co-Treasurer

Volunteer Outreach Coordinator

Communications Officer

Auditor

Mayfair

Need volunteers to sell raffle tickets. Email Mara if you want

Need someone to do the food coordinating

Earth Day Assembly—Tuesday

Mr. Mopps Sale May 3-9

15% of sales to Jefferson

Budget

See the budget document for details.

We've raised a bit more money, so we'll raise the budget a bit, but we still keep it conservative.

\$116,000 total income

Can we bump up the teacher support funds to support the new 4/5 combo class?