

INTEROFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
Los Angeles Unified School District
Office of the Superintendent

INFORMATIVE

DATE: May 26, 2015

TO: Members, Board of Education
Members, Bond Citizens' Oversight Committee

FROM: Ramon C. Cortines, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: RECOMMENDED PLAN FOR THE MANDARIN FOREIGN LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAM AT BROADWAY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND THE CONSTRUCTION PROJECT AT MARK TWAIN MIDDLE SCHOOL

PURPOSE

I have spent the last several weeks looking at the issues surrounding the Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Program offered at Broadway Elementary School (Broadway), and the plan to construct new buildings at Mark Twain Middle School (Mark Twain) to support the growth and relocation of this program. I have spoken with the Broadway Principal at length, walked both school sites, and discussed the issues with the District's Office of Environmental Health and Safety, Facilities Services Division, Educational Service Center West, and the Multilingual and Multicultural Education Department. After much thought, I have made a decision about how I would like us to move forward. I believe Broadway should continue to offer a Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Program for the long-term, it should not be relocated, and the construction project at Mark Twain should not move forward. This Informative provides details on my recommended plan.

BACKGROUND

In 2009, we were in discussions regarding the potential closure of Broadway due to low enrollment. At that time, every student at Broadway received Mandarin lessons for 30 minutes a day, four days a week, under the Foreign Language in Elementary Schools model (FLES). Board Member Zimmer and Principal Susan Wang invited me to see firsthand a Mandarin lesson and the energy and enthusiasm of the students and faculty. I was impressed by what I observed and decided that we should expand the instructional model into a full-fledged Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Program starting in 2010, to attract and retain students and keep the school open. Establishing the Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Program at Broadway five years ago was absolutely the right thing to do for this District and the students and families in West Los Angeles.

In April 2014, six months prior to returning as Superintendent for the third time, the Board of Education approved a design-build project to construct new buildings at Mark Twain for the Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Program offered to elementary aged students. Upon my return, the Facilities staff was already deeply engaged in the development of the project, and the Office of Environmental Health and Safety was developing the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR). As per the process, staff completed the procurement of a design-build contractor, and in January 2015, the Board of Education awarded a design-build contract for the project.

The Draft EIR was made available for public comment in late March. Very soon after the draft report was released, the Superintendent's Office was inundated with calls, emails and letters from concerned community members, stakeholders, parents and teachers. I have visited Broadway and Mark Twain numerous times and met with the principals, staff, parents and community members. At the request of the community, I also extended the Draft EIR comment period by one week. Despite the numerous conversations regarding the project, community concern has persisted. I had intended on allowing the project to proceed through its normal course, however the attention the project has been receiving made this impossible and after a conversation with Board Member Zimmer, I decided I needed to intervene to bring calm and stability to the situation, the community, and this District.

To better understand the instruction and operation of dual language and foreign language immersion programs, I recently met with Ms. Hilda Maldonado, the Executive Director of the District's Multilingual and Multicultural Education Department. I have long believed that dual language and foreign language immersion programs are essential to the work we are doing to prepare our children for the world they will live in as adults, and my conversation with Ms. Maldonado further strengthened my belief. Our conversation helped me to understand the dynamics and structure of the Mandarin

Foreign Language Immersion Program at Broadway. The Program was originally conceived as a dual language program (two-way immersion), however due to a lack of English learners (Mandarin speakers), the dual immersion model could not be fully implemented as originally envisioned in 2010. Given that more than 90 percent of the students enrolled are Mandarin learners (English speakers), the school has been unable to create an instructional model where English-speaking students and Mandarin-speaking students serve as each other's language models. As such, the school has essentially been offering a one-way, foreign language immersion program since its inception. Similarly, the Spanish Foreign Language Immersion Program, although envisioned as a dual language program (two-way immersion), is currently operating with the student population of a foreign language immersion program. Ms. Maldonado shared a document with me to better understand the differences between a dual language program (two-way) and a foreign language immersion program (one-way), which I have attached for your reference.

After reviewing the Draft EIR, I sat with Mr. Robert Laughton, the District's Office of Environmental Health and Safety Director, to better understand the impacts of the project on the community surrounding Mark Twain. The Draft EIR identified four environmental issues with the potential for significant impacts -- cultural resources, noise, pedestrian safety, and transportation and traffic. It also recommended certain project design features and mitigation measures that would reduce the impacts related to cultural resources, noise, and pedestrian safety to a less than significant impact. The Draft EIR determined that if the project was constructed, it would result in significant and unavoidable impacts to transportation and traffic at six intersections.

I also met with the Facilities Services Division team and Educational Service Center West leadership to better understand the history of the construction project at Mark Twain, and the facilities constraints at Broadway. They reminded me that the project was developed to align the world language instructional pathways initiative in the Venice High School Complex and to enable the Spanish and Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Programs to grow. Another goal of the project was to continue to offer a mainstream English program at Broadway for the long-term. Due to the limited capacity at Broadway, the rate of Kindergarten enrollment, and the natural matriculation of the three programs, these goals could not be accomplished within the capacity at Broadway. However, they could be accomplished at Mark Twain with the construction of new buildings and the utilization of some available classroom space.

DECISION POINTS AND PROPOSAL

I have reflected on what I learned from our District technical experts, as well as the concerns I have heard from community and school stakeholders. It is important that this established Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Program continue to be offered at Broadway for the long-term. I am supportive of expanding the District's Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Program and other Foreign Language Immersion Programs; however, the construction project at Mark Twain is not the avenue to do so, and it will not move forward.

In order to accommodate the Mandarin and Spanish Foreign Language Immersion Programs at Broadway, the Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Program will be right-sized to balance enrollment and provide equal enrollment opportunities for the Mandarin and Spanish Foreign Language Immersion Programs. Starting in the 2016-2017 school year, the Spanish and Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Programs at Broadway will each accept two new incoming kindergarten classes and will operate with some split grade/combination classes, similar to most dual language and foreign language immersion programs throughout the District. The delivery of the instructional model for both the Spanish and Mandarin programs will also be adjusted to reflect the foreign language immersion program model. Under this model, more time will be provided for language development, which our younger students need to successfully master the foreign language as they progress in school. This instructional model will also provide flexibility in the way content can be delivered.

Four relocatable classrooms will be added to Broadway for the 2015-2016 school year to accommodate the programs' current enrollment. With the addition of these relocatable classrooms, Broadway will be able to sustain the Spanish and Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Programs within 29 classrooms and accommodate a mainstream English program in the near future (the exact timing will be dependent on class configurations). Furthermore, if the Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Program remains in high demand with a waiting list, or if in the future, a waiting list is generated for

the Spanish Foreign Language Immersion Program, we will look to initiate new Foreign Language Immersion Programs at other area schools with available capacity.

In order to achieve the goal of aligning the world language instructional pathways initiative in the Venice High School Complex, I have asked Ms. Maldonado and Ms. Hildreth to work together to expand the Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Program into area middle school(s). It is important that our students and families have a bridge from Broadway Elementary School to Venice High School.

NEXT STEPS

The following steps will be taken to implement the proposal described above:

1. Today, I met with Principal Susan Wang of Broadway to share the proposal for the school and the Spanish and Mandarin Foreign Language Immersion Programs. I have asked her to share this Informative with her parents and staff.
2. This week I will meet with our Office of Environmental Health to ask them to halt all work on the finalizing of the EIR. A Final EIR will not be presented to the Board of Education for certification.
3. This week I will meet with the Facilities Services Division team and ask them to:
 - Take the necessary steps to discontinue the construction project at Mark Twain. Actions to formally cancel the project and the design-build contract will be presented to the Board of Education at a later date.
 - Initiate the placement of the four relocatable classroom buildings at Broadway. I have walked the campus with Facilities and we have agreed upon the location of the portable classroom buildings.
 - Share this Informative with community members and stakeholders interested in the construction project.

SUMMARY

This District must constantly be looking for opportunities to expand its language pathways from elementary through high school. These types of language programs are important for our students' future, and will also help keep our children, parents, and families in District schools. I will continue to encourage the development of dual and foreign language immersion programs all over the District at school sites that have the space, and where there's a need and desire for such a program.

Attachment

c: Michelle King
David Holmquist
Dr. Ruth Perez
Kenneth Bramlett
Mark Hovatter

Susan Wang
Robert Laughton
Hilda Maldonado
Cheryl Hildreth