



Balboa High School

San Francisco Unified School District

1000 Cayuga Avenue * San Francisco, California 94112 * (415) 469-4090 * Elaine T. Koury, Principal

February 9, 1999

Dear WASC Visiting Committee:

Enclosed is the Self-Study Report for Balboa High School. We look forward to meeting you on March 8, 1999. If you have any questions, feel free to call me at (415) 469-4090.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dave Duncan". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

David A. Duncan
WASC Self-Study Chairperson

WASC 24674

Letter from the Principal to the Visiting Committee

Dear Visiting Committee:

Balboa is a newly reconstituted school, transforming itself from a low-performing, big city school-in-decline into a viable educational environment that challenges inner city young people to meet high expectations and to value themselves.

Reconstitution is a dramatic intervention practiced in San Francisco to improve chronically low performing schools. It was instituted in the San Francisco Unified School District according to a Consent Decree, signed under the jurisdiction of the Federal Court in 1982 in response to a 1978 desegregation lawsuit. The Decree set two main goals for the District: desegregation and academic excellence for all students. In 1992, the parties agreed that reconstitution was one of the most successful interventions tested in the District, and that a small number of schools would be reconstituted each year until academic achievement is improved among African American and Hispanic students. The intervention includes vacating the existing staff, hiring a new staff, implementing a set of Philosophical Tenets (see Attached), concentrating on outcome based instruction, and overall building a new school culture.

Balboa's extraordinary recent history begins with its reconstitution during the summer of 1996. At that time a new principal was hired who spent the summer assembling a new staff and overseeing the transformation of the physical plant. In 1996, the physical plant mirrored the school's achievement. All five buildings were painted one color gray. Corridors were marred with graffiti or crude white patches where graffiti had been painted over. Countless holes in the plaster chronicled student anger. There were broken or boarded windows inside and out. Scorched, rusting lockers marked former fire sites. Stairways and whole sections of the building reeked of rancid urine.

During the summer of 1996, the stairs were power washed numerous times, first to clean up the urine, then to wash away the smell of the disinfectant. Gutters were cleaned and down-pipes reattached. Overgrown trees were trimmed and the lawn brought back to life. The outside of the building was painted in several warm colors to bring out the original charm of its Mission architecture. Destroyed student lockers were removed and the remaining ones were hammered out and painted. Holes in the wall plaster were filled and the corridors were painted a pleasant, cool color.

Meanwhile, the new principal was interviewing over 460 applicants to re-staff the school. Most experienced teachers shunned the school both because of the political controversy which surrounds reconstitution and because they had no desire to work at a school the district had identified as its lowest performing high school. The result was a young faculty, short on experience, but long on idealism and enthusiasm. Before the start of

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Reconstitution was a bold and perilous enterprise. It was bold in that the new, inexperienced staff set itself to do what many good people who came before had been unable to do in the face of some of society's most intractable problems. It was perilous in that idealism was the fuel and when idealism fades, disillusionment can follow.

In ways, the reconstituted Balboa was a new school. Everything had to be invented or re-invented - including all relationships in the school. However, we were not starting with the clean slate of a new school. We were starting with all the problems - and the reputation - of the most troubled high school in the District. We were, therefore, inventing ourselves while we were re-inventing a low-performing school. Using the metaphor of Deborah Meier, it is like changing the tire on a car while the car is still moving.

Major changes of the first years of reconstitution have included:

- o Changed schedule to a 4x4 block in order to allow more in-depth work during a single class period;
- o Rewired classrooms; opened two new computer labs; implementing Digital High School Grant;
- o Doubled the time spent in English and math classes for 9th and 10th grade EDY and other low performing students;
- o Established a study skills program for students with a 0. Grade Point Average;
- o Offered minimum proficiency classes for students who need help passing the proficiency exams;
- o Held after school study groups to help students with homework;
- o Encouraged art: students commissioned to do Pier 39 mural; set up students art gallery in main hallway; started mural corridor in art wing;
- o Expanded school to career options for Special Education students;
- o Bought \$17,000 in new library books;
- o Moved formerly isolated Severely Impaired students' classrooms to the first floor around the quad, putting them at the center of the school;
- o Established expectations of civility: saying good morning, speaking (not yelling) around disagreements with adults;

- o Following up on truants;
- o Positive discipline with clear follow-through;
- o More lunch options to provide students a variety of food choices;
- o Vastly improved custodial services;
- o On-going improvements to the facility;
- o Trained security staff in safety techniques;
- o Maintained school spirit traditions across the transition;
- o Improved school climate so significantly as to re-institute regular school dances;
- o Planned for summer school to include entering 9th graders;
- o Group process, including parents, teachers, administration, to define school mission and goals;
- o Parent/student orientation before opening of school;
- o Increased parent contact (more calls home);
- o Recruited parents for stronger SSC;
- o Integrated bilingual teachers into regular departments to bring curricula into sync.

In addition, we have vastly improved financial controls and greatly improved coordination with health services.

Since Balboa is the largest school and the first high school to be reconstituted by this model, we have been simultaneously inventing the reform process and reinventing the school. Early in the first year, many of us questioned whether there would be progress, but since then our progress has been characterized by leaps forward, followed by plateaus of adjustment.

Last year we set ourselves the priority to graduate more students. For many years before reconstitution, it was typical to graduate only about half of the students who had attended for four years. Instead, students would realize that they did not have the credits to graduate and would drop out of school in their 11th and 12th years. Starting last year we began to catch these students early, help them plan how to graduate on or near time, put in place classes which would help them pass the proficiency exams, and encourage them to continue. The result was the largest graduating class from Balboa in a decade, with an

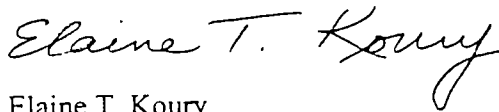
increase in the number graduating from 193 in 1996 before reconstitution to 292 last year (1998) for students graduating in June. (An additional 30 students graduated in July of 1998 after completing summer school.)

Other changes are visible walking our corridors. Students are where they belong, the hallways are clean and basically graffiti free. (When graffiti does appear, it is painted over with an appropriate color paint.)

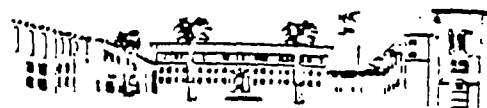
In addition, significantly more students are going to college after graduating. According to City College of San Francisco, 121% more students attended CCSF from Balboa this school year as compared to 1994, an increase from 47 students to 104.

However, there is still much improvement needed. We have been in an experimentation mode for the last two and a half years. We are now using the WASC Self-Study to assess where we are and move towards a more comprehensive, schoolwide process for meeting the ESLR's. In classic reconstituted Balboa style, we have been very hard on ourselves in this Self-Study, playing down our accomplishments and trumpeting our shortcomings in an attempt to focus ourselves on continued improvement. We will use the visit as a way to see ourselves through others' eyes in order to further improve our school.

Sincerely,



Elaine T. Koury
Principal



The Eleven Philosophical Tenets

1. All individuals should learn to live and to work in a world that is characterized by interdependence and cultural diversity.
2. All individuals are entitled to be treated with respect and dignity.
3. All individuals want to learn and to be recognized for their achievements.
4. All individuals can learn.
5. All individuals learn in many different ways and at varying rates.
6. Each individual learns best in a particular way.
7. All individuals are both potential learners and potential teachers.
8. If individuals do not learn, then those assigned to be their teachers will accept responsibility for this failure and will take appropriate action to ensure success.
9. Learning has both cognitive and affective dimensions.
10. Learning can be subdivided into a number of specific, concrete competencies that can be used as a focus for teaching.
11. Parents want their children to attain their fullest potential as learners and to succeed academically.