

Text of Public Testimony to DBRAC, 2016-10-26

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At last Saturday's DBRAC meeting, Judy Brennan told you that her staff would produce three scenarios for review next week, and that the last of the three would be their, quote, "sort of independent effort to replicate what some of you know about as the soft neighborhood model". Judy also said "it's an approximation, it's not a replication". In truth, it is neither. Whatever Judy and her staff are going to present to you next week, it will be very different from the Soft Neighborhood Model. I know this because Brooke Cowan and I developed the Soft Neighborhood Model, and no one on PPS staff has ever asked us how it works.

What Judy is going to present to you will be a pretty run-of-the-mill packing scheme, which the Soft Neighborhood Model very deliberately is not. I'm also addressing this to any board members present: Judy's Packing Plan is not what the board asked for in Resolution 5155. What the board wants evaluated is the actual Soft Neighborhood Model which Brooke and I presented over a year ago at the board meeting on October 5th, 2015.

If anyone here would like to know more about how the Soft Neighborhood Model works or what it does or, just as important, why it does what it does, we'd be happy to come and discuss it. In the meantime, please do not confuse it with something else. "Soft Neighborhood Model" means something very specific, with specific qualities, implemented with specific math.

Understanding the math is crucial. PPS has a habit of giving new and unexpected meanings to otherwise well-known words and phrases. Outside of this room, "over-crowded" means "too many kids per classroom", but in here it means "too many *teachers* per classroom". You avoid these misunderstandings by looking at the math behind the words. You need to review the math used by staff --- the equations in the spreadsheets, the database queries, the scribbles on napkins. If math isn't your thing, find someone outside of this room to help you work through it, and then please show it and explain it to the public.

Math is crucial here at DBRAC --- what you are tasked to work on here is, at its heart, a resource allocation problem, complicated by elements of psychology and culture and history. Every model you evaluate needs to be approached with the same care and rigor, because you won't get the right answers by accident. You'll just get it wrong, and getting it wrong at this scale causes a lot of harm.

So, to review: (1) Judy's Packing Plan is nothing like the Soft Neighborhood Model. (2) Make sure that staff shows you math, not just numbers.