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LOS ANGELES SCHOOL MONITORING COMMITTEE

established by the superior court of the county of los angeles

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SCHOOL MONITORING COMMITTEE
RELEASES COMPREHENSIVE
REPORT ON MAGNET PROGRAMS

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The Los Angeles School Monitoring Committee today released a lengthy study of the role of magnet programs in the Los Angeles desegregation plan. The principal conclusion of the Monitoring Committee report is that however effective educationally these magnets may be, as presently constituted, they have not played an important role in desegregation in the Los Angeles School District.

The Monitoring Committee, created last May by Superior Court Judge Paul Egly to observe and report on the implementation of the Los Angeles Unified School District desegregation plan, based this conclusion on a detailed study of enrollment patterns in the magnet programs.

The Monitoring Committee identifies two criteria for evaluating magnets: the quality of their educational programs and their role in contributing to desegregation of the children of the LAUSD. The first criterion will be the subject of a later report. The second, which is the subject of the current report, is taken from the set of objectives for magnets that was established by the LAUSD.

A year ago, the LAUSD set a goal that no more than 60 percent of a magnet program should be composed of either minority or other white children. The Monitoring Committee's report determined the extent to which this target

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was reached. The report also examines the process by which the schools were planned and the children were admitted to determine whether a more even ethnic balance might have been achieved had the magnet programs been implemented differently.

The Monitoring Committee found that most of the 46 magnet programs have not met the target ethnic balance of no more than 60 percent either combined minority students or "other whites." About one-third of the magnets fall within the 60-40 range. An additional one-third have enrollments that fall between 60 and 70 percent of the dominant ethnic group. Seventy percent of one ethnicity was the benchmark used last year to determine which schools could be required to participate in the mandatory component of the desegregation plan - the pairs/clusters/midsites program. The remaining third of the magnet program have either minority or other white enrollments that exceed seventy percent.

The Monitoring Committee conducted a further investigation into schools that sent students to magnet programs, by undertaking a detailed analysis of the records of over 10,000 children. The two findings of this analysis were: (1) fewer than thirty percent of the children in magnet programs have been moved from a school that was a racially isolated school last year to a desegregated magnet program and; (2) many magnet programs draw most of their enrollment from the school in which the magnet program is located, and have very low enrollments from schools that were either minority racially isolated or Anglo racially isolated last year. The second finding is especially true of magnets that occupy an entire school, for these programs give admissions preference to resident children, and will continue to have mostly resident enrollments for the foreseeable future.

The Monitoring Committee found that although the LAUSD stated in the plan that preference for admissions would be given to students from racially isolated schools, in practice this guideline was not followed.

Another issue examined in the Monitoring Committee report is the use of the parent/student preference survey by the LAUSD in organizing the magnet program. The Monitoring Committee found that the survey results were not put to any rational planning use by the LAUSD. The number and location of magnet programs of a particular type was found to bear no relation to the popularity of the program in the survey. For example, among the various magnet themes, the number of spaces allocated to a program varies from less than one percent to nearly fifty percent of the number of parents who expressed interest in such a program in the survey. The LAUSD appears to have sited magnets on a space-available basis, rather than locating them such that they would draw an ethnically balanced student body.

The Monitoring Committee, once again, identifies transportation planning as a major problem, as it has in two previous reports. Magnet programs, although initially conceived as part of the league concept, were later opened to district-wide enrollment. Drawing district-wide does not increase the likelihood of ethnic balance. Instead it created very long transportation routes. Because parents were not anticipating such long bus rides, transportation contributed to the substantial turnovers in enrollments during the first weeks of school, that several magnet program experienced. Additional children sometimes were then admitted because they lived in locations that were convenient to a bus route.

If district-wide enrollment contributed to an ethnically-balanced student body, the lengthy, complicated transportation network might serve a worthwhile purpose. But the Monitoring Committee found no relationship

School Monitoring Committee--Magnet Report

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between the ethnic balance of schools and the geographical representation of its students. Several magnets that are virtually 100 percent minority draw students from all administrative areas within the LAUSD, while several integrated magnets attract nearly all of their students from a few of these areas.

The Monitoring Committee believes that the relative ineffectiveness of magnets in contributing to desegregation is due largely to the lack of coordinated planning of the program. Most of the planning effort went into the educational component of the programs. Almost no effort was devoted to the implications of enrollment policies, siting decision, and program selection on the effectiveness of a magnet in relieving racial isolation. An example of this is the fact that most of the magnets are small programs on host campuses dominated by one ethnicity.

The report suggests that the LAUSD approach magnet planning more rationally in order to create magnet programs which draw an ethnically balanced student body. This process, in addition to giving preference to students from racially isolated schools, might include imposing geographical and enrollment constraints such as limiting the programs area of draw (particularly with regards to small programs on host campuses), clearing the campus of its resident student body, reevaluating the present procedures for admission of resident students, or freezing enrollment.