

Gilbert Elementary Principal sends an email to staff notifying them of 2017/18 change in school design.

Dear Gilbert Elementary families,

I want to thank you for your continued support of Gilbert Elementary. This is an absolutely wonderful school with a lot of meaningful traditions. One of the many traditions we have at Gilbert Elementary includes the dual language program, which has been in existence for nearly 20 years. Over the years, the program has had a huge impact on students and families at Gilbert Elementary.


Over the summer, Gilbert Elementary received a \$15,000 school design grant from GPS to help propel our school with the transition to become a dual language school, beginning in the 2017-2018 school year. The money from this grant will be used to help market and promote dual language at Gilbert Elementary, send teachers and staff to receive professional development, meet with other dual language schools to learn best practices for implementation, and purchase a Spanish curriculum. The Spanish curriculum will make language learning a cultural adventure, explore language and culture through explicit presentation, supports all students from beginners to heritage speakers, from struggling to gifted, allows for differentiated instruction, embeds the culture within the world language, aligns with Arizona College and Career Readiness Standards, incorporate the Arizona World Language Standards, and contains assessments.

Currently the model that is being used at Gilbert Elementary is called a one-way model, where one teacher is teaching both languages. This model is not as effective as the two-model, where English learners and native English speakers together, provide high-quality language arts instruction in both languages, while integrating thematic units.

For the 2017-2018 school year, kindergarten and first grade (current kindergarten students) will transition to the two-way dual language model. For example, there will be four teachers in both kindergarten and first grade. Two teachers will be the Spanish teachers and other two teachers will be the English teachers. Students will receive English instruction for 50% of their day and Spanish instruction for 50% of their day. The students will spend the morning with the English teacher and the afternoon with the Spanish teacher (or vice versa). English instruction will include English language arts, writing, social studies, and reinforcement in science and math. Spanish instruction will include the majority of math, Spanish language development, and science. For each year after the 2017-2018 school year, we will add a grade level until we fully transition to a full PreK through 6th grade dual language school in the approximate year of 2022-2023.

There is a very exciting time at Gilbert Elementary where our students will have an opportunity to be global leaders and compete for future jobs with others from around the world who are also Spanish-speaking. Along with the excitement, there will also be some questions. Throughout this process, we will hold informational meetings where you can ask questions and learn more about this exciting transition. We will also keep you informed on the transition through email, letters in backpacks, and through our school's webpage. Please feel free to call or email with any questions you may have. Also, see the back of this letter for more information about dual language.

Yours in education,

Justin Sremba  Gilbert Elementary Principal

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Multiple parents received emails (public record) from concerned staff asking if they knew this was happening.

Oct 27: After being asked about Gilbert EI becoming a magnet school, Jill Humpherys responds indicating the school was pursuing a "Leader in Me" program. She knew nothing about the Spanish Immersion program

On Oct 27, 2016, at 3:08 PM, Jill Humpherys <jill.humpherys@gilbertschools.net> wrote:

Since many of these decisions will be made by the schools, I think the responsibility of the board is to see that there is not duplication. Also, this is a transition that will take place over time, not all schools at once. For example, Gilbert EI is a "Leader in Me" school, and I understand that Meridian is interested in the program as well. Since they are far from each other, that should be fine. We wouldn't want Gilbert EI and Burk to both have that program. To me, this will take a lot of input from many stakeholders to figure out.

Jill

Jill Humpherys

Oct 27: Parents reply and inform her the magnet program is language immersion and has nothing to do with Leader in Me. Why was the board uninformed?

Date: October 27, 2016 at 4:50:59 PM MST
To: Jill Humpherys <jill.humpherys@gilbertschools.net>
Subject: Re: Magnet schools

Jill,

Do you know what Leader in me is? Sounds like our Character Counts program. By the way Gilbert EI has been informed they will be full Dual Language. If parents are not interested in the program they can have their children bussed to Another school. The forms are designed to go out to parents. They are just waiting to send them out until after the election. They don't want to anger the voters with reality of what's going to happen. I'm concerned they held a PLC to inform the staff and your being told Leader in Me.

Oct 27: Jill Humpherys claims that if the school will undergo any "major change," the board will vote on the change. As will be shown, the board has NOT voted on this change and was not even aware before it was announced.

I would like every school to be a magnet school in that it draws students to its campus and is at the center of its community. I think that some schools will continue to be traditional neighborhood schools and some will offer special programs or additions as a way of engaging students. I believe that the principal, staff, students, and community should have a large part of the decision-making about their school, but decisions also have to fit into an overall district-wide plan. If the programming is a major change for the school, then the board will vote on it.

I hope this clarifies my position for you. Have a wonderful day!

Jill

Jill Humpherys
Governing Board Clerk

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Oct 28: Parents call Gilbert Elementary (multiple office staff members) and confirm that students who do not want to participate in the dual language program will be bused to Burk Elementary next year.

Oct 28: Parents email Jill Humpherys and ask if the board was aware of this change.

Email #1:

Jill,

So were you not aware of this transition? This is kinda a big transition I mean your talking about possibly moving some population to Burk. According to your other emails you said the board would discuss and vote on larger transitions.

I'm seriously concerned that you had to call a principal to find out about this program change. I am hearing parents and staff were not brought into the decision making process. I am literally begging you to go to the campus and ask for the minutes from these meetings (as they are required by law). There will be an exodus of staff if this goes through let alone students. Please follow up on it. Don't take someone's word for it. Talk to parents at Gilbert Elementary.

Email #2:

This confusion is serious. You should all be aware of these LARGE changes. As I pleaded with Jill please go to Gilbert Ele in person. Please ask to see the minutes from their Site Council. Find out what parents were brought into this decision. Are you guys moving the Kids to Burk to control enrollment into Gilbert Jr? This is real and it is happening per "district directive."

FYI: I also have the letter that was sent to staff from the principal of Gilbert Ele. Many of them were made aware of this change the Wed. prior to Fall Break. Let me know if you would like that copy as well. I would be happy to send it on over!

Oct 31: Jill Humpherys had to call Gilbert EI principal to find out what is going on because she wasn't previously aware. Note the claims that the site council & community had weighed in.

I called and talked with Principal Justin Sremba. Gilbert EI will be moving to a model of Spanish Language Emersion where the Kindergarten and First Grade students will have a Spanish-speaking teacher for half the day and an English-speaking teacher for half the day. Mr. Sremba said that he took some of his faculty to visit this type of a program, and they are every excited about it. The program will expand by one grade level each year. It is true that those who do not want Spanish emersion in Kindergarten or First Grade will be bussed to Burk Elementary, and those at Burk who want Spanish emersion will be bussed to Gilbert EI. Students currently at Gilbert EI can finish their elementary experience there, regardless of whether they are involved in Spanish emersion or not. He said that his school site coucil and community have weighed in on this and are excited about the opportunities. They will also keep the Leader in Me program, as all materials are available in English and Spanish. Enrollment at Gilbert EI has continued to decline, so he feels this is a good opportunity to boost enrollment.

I am not a person who likes change, but I also want to win students back to our district. Many families already seek out Gilbert EI for this opportunity, so I think this is a logical step to building up a school that we may otherwise end up closing. If you are concerned, I would be happy to arrange an appointment for us to go visit with Mr. Sremba.

Enjoy your weekend!

Jill

Jill Humpherys
Governing Board Clerk



Liz Ekstrom Sorry I had to post this question here since you don't allow anyone to post on your page. My question is why did you have to contact the principal at Gilbert EI to find out about the new magnet program? That leads me to believe the decision was made without board approval or knowledge. I also know it wasn't a site-based decision like the principal is claiming. This makes me think he was giving the scripted answer handed down to him from Kishimoto, who acted alone in this decision without school, community or board input. Did you know about this program before it was decided on? Will you as board clerk, release the minutes from all the of the site-based meetings where this decision was discussed including the school site council?

Like · Reply · October 31 at 12:09pm · Edited



Jill Humpherys for Gilbert School Board Liz, I receive messages all the time, I do have board email, and I try to answer that as much as possible. I did a tour of Gilbert EI in September, so I had a great discussion with Justin Sremba. My suggestion is that you call Mr. Sremba and talk with him. I called the principal first because I always want to check that I have an accurate understanding of the facts before I communicate with the public. I don't want to make a mistake when I am working with community members for better understanding. As board clerk, I have access to governing board meeting minutes. Just like you, I would have to ask for the minutes. I think it is important to for you to call the principal and talk with him about your concerns.

Like · Reply · October 31 at 12:14pm · Edited



Liz Ekstrom Jill Humpherys for Gilbert School Board So you are not wanting to answer my questions? You want me to talk to the principal instead ?

Like · Reply · October 31 at 12:14pm

Oct 31: Jill Humpherys then changes her response, claims she just needed to clarify the details but that she had known from

 **Jill Humpherys for Gilbert School Board** As I said, I had a terrific discussion with Justin when I was at Gilbert EI in September, and we did talk about changes to the Spanish Immersion program. The questions you are asking can be best answered by the principal.


The fact is that we have declining enrollment in our district and we have to take action to turn that around. We must find ways to bring students to our district. That means trying some things that we haven't in the past.

Spanish Immersion at Gilbert EI is one of the oldest immersion programs in the East Valley; until now the district has not put much effort into helping this program grow. Why would anyone have a problem with working to make a program with a track record for success more well known so that people are aware that they have that option for their children?

I am a big fan of neighborhood community schools! I want to keep schools open and available for our students. I would rather work hard and take some risks than watch schools continue to decline and then close.

If you private message me your phone number, I would be happy to talk with you about any concerns or suggestions you may have.

Like · Reply · October 31 at 12:33pm · Edited

 **Liz Ekstrom** It's a public concern, and I am asking on behalf of many other parents, so I would like you to answer publicly seeing as you hold a public office. The program is not the problem. The fact that the community and school staff are saying they had no part in this decision is the problem. The principal told you that the site council approved this. I was told otherwise. Why don't they release the meeting notices and communication to the public since there are so many concerns?

Like · Reply · October 31 at 12:39pm

Oct 31: Parent sends FOIA for Site Council Meeting Minutes and any public notices of meetings that were sent to community.

Nov 1: District responded and said parent would get them when they found them.

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Nov 2: Julie Smith is asked if she was aware of email about Gilbert EI school design change and if the board approved the change. She did not know about the change or the email going out and confirmed the board did not vote on this.

Nov 2: Julie Smith emails Dr. Kishimoto asking why this transition was not discussed by the board. (Contradicting Jill Humphery's earlier claim that the board knew)

On Wed, Nov 2, 2016 at 10:56 AM, Julie Smith <julie.smith@gilbertschools.net> wrote:
Dear Christina,

I have been receiving phone calls, e-mails and individuals approaching me in public about the decision you made to apparently change Gilbert Elementary to a school-wide dual language immersion program.

Governing board members should not be finding out about school-wide changes from members of the community. I am requesting a report to the board completed by Friday, November 4th containing the following information:

- What changes are being made to Gilbert Elementary school as a whole and what is the target initiation date?
- How will this affect current staff at the school and their job status?
- Where are families who do not wish to participate in this program being told to enroll?
- Why were the steps of an application to administration and then the governing board skipped?
- What is the cost of initiating this program?

Provide any supporting documentation showing school committee meetings building to a consensus of this school program design decision.

Respectfully,
Julie Smith
Julie Smith
Governing Board Member

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Nov 2: Dr. Kishimoto responds to the email and includes the whole board (public record) and claims Gilbert Elementary is “exploring” and the board will vote in December or January. Dr. Kishimoto’s statement contradicts the Gilbert Elem. principal’s letter (Julie Smith has a copy of this letter) that communicated the decision is already made.

On Wed, Nov 2, 2016 at 1:53 PM, Christina Kishimoto <christina.kishimoto@gilbertschools.net> wrote:
Board Members,

In response to Julie’s request for clarification, I am sending a response to the entire Board so that we are all on the same page.

During the summer retreat I shared with the Board the process by which schools will submit requests for partial or full school design implementation models. School Principals and their Councils were highly encouraged to explore this process and to use the School Design application to document and investigate their ideas. We had a discussion at the retreat that anywhere from 5 to 7 schools would explore this process and there likely would be three to four submitted applications. Most of the questions posed by Julie in her email are part of the application that will come to the Board. The question regarding “skipping the Governing Board” approval is not accurate - since draft applications to me are due in December and then they go to the Board if they reflect substantive programmatic/design changes.

Gilbert Elementary School is exploring taking their model of dual language to a full school design rather than continuing with an on-again, off-again partial model with incomplete curriculum. While the school is completing their exploratory work, I have received one question about neighborhood district lines, but all of the other comments that I have received have been excitement for a renewed emphasis on language learning.

By allowing Principals the time to share and explore ideas, and engage in research, we can push our thinking around designing schools around students and effective models. I have not approved anything, but I have supported Gilbert EI in exploring and documenting this design. In addition, several of our schools presented ideas to one another at the October Principal’s Conference so that they could get peer feedback. Out of this discussion and collaborative, Gilbert EI and several other area schools have shared ideas about shared communities.

The board will receive a school design presentation in December or January when the school-based teams have completed their research work.

Please let me know if you have any further process questions.

Christina

Nov 3: Julie Smith responds asking why her questions were not directly answered

From: **Julie Smith** <julie.smith@gilbertschools.net>
Date: Thu, Nov 3, 2016 at 6:04 PM
Subject: Re: Gilbert Elementary
To: Christina Kishimoto <christina.kishimoto@gilbertschools.net>

Christina,

I appreciate your correspondence however I did not receive responses to my questions. If things are as you state, why is Gilbert Elementary sending out letters to parents stating the school model is changing starting August of 2017?

Julie

Julie Smith
Governing Board Member

Nov 3: Neither District nor School has responded to the FOIA request. These documents should be easily accessible and should take no longer than an hour to pull together.

Nov 3: Dr. Kishimoto does not take a phone call from a concerned parent. The secretary tells the parent that they will receive a call back but no return call was received.

Nov 4: Gilbert Elementary tells a parent that they have the site council minutes but will not submit them "until next Tuesday," which is after the election

Nov 4: In response to a parent email addressed to board members, Dr. Kishimoto responds that Gilbert Elementary is having a "school design conversation," but fails to address that parents have already been informed of the change.

Mrs. Ekstrom,

Please note that your FOIA request was received by district office. FOIA is a district matter, not a school matter. As is our best practice, we will be responding as quickly as possible within our legally required time frame.

The Gilbert Public Schools Governing Board adopted a new Theory of Action codified in GPS Policy Manual BA in 2014 that places greater autonomy on schools, which states in part, "Empowerment and autonomy place decision-making authority at the school level which is closest to the students for effectiveness and efficiency." When the Board went into retreat to discuss, and at a later Board meeting approve, this policy, there was consensus Board support for this new empowerment approach. In fact, the Board members discussed the GCA and Neely Tradition models as examples of this empowerment approach.

Gilbert EI is going through a school design conversation that will be documented and brought to the board for discussion and consideration when they have completed their work. The Board does not pre-approve whether a school community is allowed to have a discussion and complete their research on an instructional model. The time frame for the school design process was discussed in detail with the entire Board at their August 2016 retreat, including the notice that Gilbert EI was exploring a whole school Dual Language design. The school will be supported in completing their due diligence in this process and will be allowed to get their work done.

The school did receive a \$15,000 planning grant to support their existing Dual Language Program and to explore an expansion into a full school design. Planning grants were also provided to other schools to prepare their research and materials for future Board presentations: Mesquite Jr, Gilbert Jr., Patterson Elementary. The Dual Language School design suggestion came from parents, teachers and community members in the Gilbert EI community who cited existing full school design models in neighborhood districts where fidelity to the Dual Language program is stronger and more consistent. I applaud the Gilbert EI teachers for wanting the quality and consistency in program that is best for students.

Christina