

November 7, 2019

Dr. Kent Scribner, Superintendent
Fort Worth Independent School District
100 N. University
Fort Worth, Texas 76107

Dear Dr. Scribner,

My team and I learned of your decision to eliminate our B Sharp Program of Choice (POC) at the Leadership Academy at Como Elementary through an email from David Saenz. After 10 years of dedicated involvement and development of this unique program, I am dismayed and disheartened by your decision. I am even more disappointed in how you chose to deliver the message to not only us, but to the families at the Leadership Academy at Como Elementary. With an established program such as B Sharp and such a longstanding “partnership” with FWISD, one would think its elimination would merit a call from senior leadership, preferably you, the Superintendent, to offer explanations, as well as appreciation for our steadfast dedication to the Como community.

Similarly, the B Sharp families received a vaguely written note in their students’ backpacks on Wednesday, October 23rd, announcing a meeting on Monday, October 28th with Priscila Dilley and David Saenz indicating “changes to Program of Choice options” as the meeting topic. The meeting was poorly attended with only nine B Sharp families present. They were completely blindsided by your decision to cancel this POC at Como. One must wonder if that was the intent behind such a poorly organized attempt to announce this decision; a decision that has a huge impact to these families.

My family and I, along with our B Sharp Team, attended the meeting hoping to have a better understanding of the District’s decision and greeted Dilley and Saenz before the meeting. Not once during the entire meeting were we acknowledged. Dilley and Saenz continually referred to “our partners”, as if the “partners” were not sitting in the room.

During the October 28th meeting, no clear explanation was offered. Dilley and Saenz repeatedly stated the decision was the result of “many factors” and to “balance alignment” in FWISD, something I found to be very insulting to these students and parents. The meeting then turned into a recruiting meeting for the Leadership Academy Network, specific to those who had transferred to Como for B Sharp. Dilley and Saenz promised free transportation in perpetuity by FWISD, even if the POC was no longer available on campus.

In a time of fierce and growing competition for students, including charter schools that are directly targeting Como because of its longstanding failing reputation, what message is being sent, both to the Como and philanthropic community, now that the school is finally performing at an acceptable level? Was there any involvement of the African American or the Hispanic communities in this

decision? Was there any involvement of the Fine Arts community since you are dismantling the only non-charter, non-private elementary program to focus on music?

The B Sharp students at the Leadership Academy at Como Elementary have lost a strong grip on their future through the District's cancellation of our one-of-a-kind music program serving the Como community. The genesis of B Sharp is the El Sistema program, developed almost 50 years ago in Venezuela to promote social change through music. It has successfully delivered hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty and into successful careers and life. Through their B Sharp experiences at the elementary level, students are being primed to envision an achievable, successful future. Where else can a Leadership Academy at Como Elementary student be a part of a group that performs on the stage at Bass Performance Hall?

Along with our B Sharp After School program and our B Sharp Youth Orchestra, we have touched the lives of over 1,300 children and currently have 100 in the B Sharp POC, 75 in B Sharp After School, and 45 in the B Sharp Youth Orchestra. The program is seeing very measurable results in the children that participate.

After years of underperforming, based on the 2019 campus and district grades released by the TEA in August, the Leadership Academy at Como Elementary School is one of the only elementary schools with a predominantly African American student population to achieve a grade of B. This is particularly significant since FWISD is the only large urban school system in Texas that failed to make a grade of B, and 38 FWISD campuses received a grade of D or F. B Sharp played an impactful role in these positive outcomes at the Leadership Academy at Como Elementary.

Available data points to the academic value of the B Sharp program:

- 1) In 2016-2017, the FWISD Grants, Compliance, and Monitoring Department reported that twice as many B Sharp POC students were on track to graduation as compared to their peers at the Leadership Academy at Como Elementary.
- 2) STAAR Performance Results from 2017-2018 show that B Sharp students out-performed non-B Sharp students in both reading and math at the Leadership Academy at Como Elementary, and B Sharp students out-performed the FWISD district average in math.
- 3) In May 2019, the FWISD Grants, Compliance, and Monitoring Department reported that B Sharp POC students showed a statistically significant increase in core grades after the implementation of the B Sharp POC.

During our 12 year "partnership", 10 of which have been dedicated to B Sharp, we have invested approximately \$5M and arranged additional outside funding of approximately \$500K. Throughout our involvement, my Foundation has contributed to general school support funds, developed a new science lab, initiated an adult education class for families in the Como community, sponsored annual 5th grade fishing outings, granted college scholarships to Como community students, and purchased school uniforms—to name just a few initiatives. We have grieved with these families during loss, provided financial and emotional support during times of need, and developed deeply connected relationships with these children.

The District has been involved in funding B Sharp, as well, and we have done our best to be responsible partners with the District. This, particularly during your administration, has been increasingly challenging to say the least. Many organizations probably would have left sooner, but we started this initiative in late 2007 with the intent of never walking away from Como.

It is with great sadness that I have concluded that we must give up our fight to be involved with FWISD beyond this school year. You and the District have made it abundantly clear that we are not wanted. Our B Sharp After School program at the Leadership Academy at Como Elementary and the B Sharp Youth Orchestra will conclude this year as well, and we will find a “partner” that wants to treat us the way we treat them...with respect and perhaps even a small dose of appreciation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read "John C. Goff". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large loop for the letter 'J' and a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

John C. Goff