

My name is Dr. Karen Sees. I am here to advocate for my son and all students taking Chinese at Winston Churchill High School (WCHS) who came from the Chinese Immersion Program (CIP) at Potomac Elementary School (PES). My son started Chinese at the age of 3 in a private immersion school in San Francisco. When my son was in first grade, we found out we would be moving to the DC area; we were concerned about his ability to continue to learn Chinese. We were glad to find a CIP, and especially please that the program was part of a public elementary school. Unfortunately, that program has encountered numerous problems with the transition to learning Chinese at Hoover Middle School (HMS) and more so in the transition to WCHS.

We first became aware of issues in the Chinese language program at WCHS when my son's class was in 7th grade; that was the fall of 2004 when the first CIP students arrived at WCHS (they are now 12th graders). Those 9th graders were all placed in Chinese IV and the WCHS teacher quickly told them that they all needed to be reassigned to Chinese III, some to Chinese II, because they were not prepared for Chinese IV. That fall the parents in my son's class requested a meeting with the middle school and county language administrators; we wanted several issues addressed including issues in the Chinese classes at HMS, and the issues that the students from the first CIP class were facing at WCHS. The issue seemed to be a lack of communication between HMS and WCHS (and exacerbated by a personality conflict between the HMS and WCHS teachers) regarding the handoff of the students and what was expected of them. Lack of consistent curriculums from year to year at WCHS (see below) also contributed to the problem.

We were promised that the issues at WCHS would be dealt with. As the year progressed we had several additional meetings and were told that the next class CIP class arriving at WCHS in the fall of 2005 would be much more prepared than the first class. The following fall (2005) when our students were in 8th grade, and the second class had started at WCHS, nearly the same problems were occurring, with the WCHS teacher claiming that the students were unprepared for Chinese IV at WCHS and so were reassigned to lower levels of Chinese. That fall we had additional meetings with the middle school and county administrators who dealt with language programs and immersion programs throughout MCPS. Sometime in the second quarter of 8th grade we were told that the issues that the CIP students were facing at WCHS were because HMS had been following a Chinese Immersion curriculum, which focuses on speaking more than on reading and writing, and certainly not focused on pin yin and tone marks, yet WCHS was expecting that the CIP student would have complete the Chinese I-III language curriculum in middle school (despite the fact that there was no such established county wide curriculum), which focuses on reading and writing and less on speaking.

The decision was made, at least in part, if not largely, because of insistence by the CIP parents, that the curriculum had to be changed to a language curriculum so that our students would be prepared for Chinese in high school and beginning the second semester of our 8th grade year, it was changed. In addition, the county finally made a county Chinese IIB exam that we were told would help ensure that our students had mastered what was expected of them before entering Chinese IV. Those students who passed the exam were either enrolled in Chinese 4 or 4 honors (4H), and those who did not pass the exam were enrolled in lower levels of Chinese. Most students in our CIP class went to Chinese 4/4H, but several went to lower levels.

Our concerns at HMS were varied, but most importantly focused on the teachers having little control over the classroom, the classes being taught to the lowest level of proficiency, and the students being unprepared for Chinese at WCHS. Although some of the issues were eventually and partially addressed for our class at HMS, the lack of timely attention to these issues has most certainly negatively impacted our students' Chinese education.

In an attempt to understand and begin quantifying the issues at Churchill, this fall concerned parents began conducting a brief survey of the families of all Churchill students in the 10th, 11th and 12th grade who were enrolled in the Chinese Immersion Program and at least started Chinese at WCHS.

It is sad to note that most of the 11th and 12th graders from the CIP program have dropped out of Chinese; only one remains in 11th grade and only three in 12th grade. At least 4 of the current CIP 10th graders are talking about dropping Chinese either after this semester or after the end of the school year. Most students who have dropped want

to continue to learn Chinese; their dropping has mainly to do with issues in the Chinese language program at WCHS.

The Chinese program at CH has only one teacher, who appears to have neither oversight nor accountability in the classroom. Information gathered from the survey that appears to contribute to the high drop out rate includes, but is not limited to, many of the following:

- Persistent negative statements in class by the teacher about the students in CIP, including that the CIP has done "more harm than good", and the students were "improperly taught", and will "not succeed" in learning this complicated language;
- Frequent discouragement of students by the teacher from CIP to continue in Chinese and frequent recommendations by the teacher to CIP students that they should drop Chinese; the constant refrain that learning Chinese is hard and not for everyone has taken its toll on the students. There is no commitment to teach to all students, rather it seems there is just a desire to quickly identify the students that can pass the AP test, just teach to them and convince the others to drop out (this results in discrimination against almost all non-native speaking students);
- Preferential treatment by the teacher of native speakers including but not limited to lack of recommendations for non-native speakers for taking higher levels of Chinese, referral of native speakers to higher levels of Chinese based on having Chinese speaking members of their household as opposed to their grades in class, behaviors that are tolerated in the native speakers (walking, talking, laughing, eating during class) are reprimanded in non-native speakers, teaching in a manner that non-native speakers find too fast and/or not understandable;
- Lack of sequential curriculums: students should be able to go from 3 to 4 to 5 to 6 to AP; students shouldn't be told that if they do not receive an A in the prior class they should drop out because they will not be recommended for the next level; why all of a sudden is 5 a "pre-AP" class instead of just the next level up from 4? Why is 5 this year so different than 5 last year? We manage to create sequential curriculums for the other languages, why is Chinese so different?
- A grading system unique to the Chinese classes that is unfair and in violation of the MCPS policies;
- Refusals of the teacher to go over/repeat instructions and/or class processes, and provide assistance/guidance for many of the non-native speakers; and
- Recently, completely unprofessional behavior of the teacher in the classroom, with the teacher crying, calling the parents racists, putting the students in the middle, telling the class that she is going to see a physician, soliciting support which appeared to be directed to the native speakers, and taking an extended leave of absence, etc.

The high drop out rate of students from the CIP in Chinese at WCHS should signal all interested parties that there is a problem. The signal of a problem should also have been clear given the numerous meetings with county administrators, the meetings to coordination curriculum between HMS and WCHS, numerous e-mails from parents expressing concerns and frustrations with the Chinese classes, and the numerous meetings between parents and WCHS administrators - all of which have occurred repeatedly over the past 4 years. Despite all of these, at the recent 10th Grade Tea, Dr. Benz, the principal of WCHS, said that until the prior week she was not aware of the problems. This is incredulous.

A general consensus seems to be that WCHS and MCPS were not and are not prepared for the influx of non-native speakers into the Chinese language program at WCHS, and especially not prepared for those students coming from the CIP. What is happening at WCHS is truly a crisis! It is past time for WCHS and MCPS to resolve the issues in the Chinese language program at WCHS. This program should not be a refresher course or an easy "A" for native speakers. It should focus on non-native speakers learning the language. Without that focus, the general community support for such courses and for programs like the CIP will be difficult to sustain.

It is not just the fate of individual students that is at risk here; it is the quality of the learning environment in the high school, the credibility of the language program, and the synergism of adults in the lives of America's future—the children being taught by Churchill.

Thank you for allowing me to briefly address some of my concerns.