

## **DELIVERING OUR EDUCATIONAL VISION: BERKELEY SCHOOL FACILITIES IN THE FUTURE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Strategic Plan 1992-1996 for the Berkeley Unified School District states that our mission is "to ensure that all of our students discover and develop their special talents, achieve their educational and career goals, and succeed in a rapidly changing multicultural society." The Strategic Plan also states that the District "will base all decisions strictly on the best interest of the student" and that "excellence is worth whatever it takes."

Implementation of the Strategic Plan to achieve these goals has to go with creative thought regarding the state of District-owned facilities. The District must "provide safe, attractive and functional facilities that achieve optimal return on investment," as stated in the Strategic Plan.

It is imperative to look at facilities use from a broad perspective. Our children are likely to be living in a highly competitive, multicultural, multi-racial environment of rapid technological change. As educators we must respond to these needs with a range of educational programs that go far beyond the traditional academic subjects and teaching methodologies of our parents' generation, or even of our own. Our school buildings must be able to sustain these new programs.

When planning school facilities, it is important to take into account certain assumptions about learning:

- Not all students learn in the same way; therefore, they should not be taught in the same manner;
- Not all learning and teaching are best performed in the same standardized periods;
- Not all teaching and learning activities are best accomplished in standard group sizes;
- Not all students learn at the same rate;
- Not all teaching and learning processes require the same space, equipment, material and technology;

Therefore, not only must teaching methodology and curriculum be reconsidered, but also how we manage our schools and school buildings. If our facilities are to serve and enhance learning, they must be made to accommodate variable time and

staffing patterns, student group sizes, instructional and organizational patterns, and the integration of technology.

I appointed the School Building Advisory Committee in the Fall, 1991, to help realize this long-range facilities planning component of the District's Strategic Plan. The need to create a comprehensive long-term facilities plan also coincided with the extensive structural evaluations by Shapiro, Okino, Hom & Associates (SOH&A) of District-owned facilities after the Loma Prieta Earthquake of October 1989. This body of information, not previously available, provides a basis on which to make long-term decisions.

Several BUSD school buildings have been assessed as seismically unsafe in the event of an earthquake. In addition, some buildings built 30 to 50 years ago no longer work well for educational purposes. Immediate action is necessary to address the critical safety issue of structurally deficient buildings and to remedy deteriorating building systems that include faulty furnaces, obsolete plumbing, nonfunctional windows, and lack of adequate play yards.

The School Building Advisory Committee systematically studied each school site, collecting information from site staff and parents, community people, consulting engineers, and architects. Committee members used the following assumptions developed as part of the Strategic Planning process:

- All BUSD facilities which house students and staff will be made safe (from structural, fire, asbestos and other life-safety hazards);
- There will be a stable student enrollment over the ten-year planning period;
- Schools will be racially integrated and ethnically balanced;
- There will be extended day care at or near each K-6 site;
- Teacher/pupil ratios equivalent to those established by BSEP will be maintained.

The Committee also gave high priority to: (1) full program accessibility for disabled persons; (2) asbestos abatement; (3) more flexibly designed schools to accommodate changes in use, and (4) recognition that school facilities provide a neighborhood resource and focus.

The District has been given a serious challenge to respond to the need for safety at our school sites, and we must act to insure this safety. A tremendous opportunity to revitalize our deteriorated facilities to support our educational vision is before us and we must accept the challenge to match the vision to reality.