

Community Schools in Transition Addendum

It is important for BUSD to begin by changing the elementary school configuration so each student stays longer at a school. A District organization that minimizes confusion and maximizes learning will give continuity and stability for students early school years and increase knowledgeable, meaningful parent involvement. This model proposes two classes of each Pre K-5 grade at each elementary school. This Pre K program is for children four years old. The District might form some Pre K-8 schools to solve some present and maybe future problems.

The building program is an excellent opportunity to ensure that schools are small (300-400 students) in every sector of the city and that playground space is improved. Additionally, the District needs to provide space at each school for extended day care and, if possible, space for community services related to children and their families. The District should not shatter communities because there are sectors of the city that do not have or may not have a school building. The District will be in transition for some time.

The issue of choice of school by parents is important. Every school is different, even if the District resources are the same, because the people in any particular school are different, magnet school or not. What constitutes a good school for one child or family may not be a good school for others. So, the District should describe each school to the public and offer choice of school to every parent every year, but not require choice making.

The 1993-94 school year should see staffs somewhat changed to meet the new grade configuration. Parents might be able to make a school choice decision, but they would be deciding before the teachers or principal had worked together over any appreciable period of time. Any school description the first year would only reflect intention and planning, not reality. The District can anticipate that most parents would choose the school nearest their homes.

This model proposes that, for the first few years and after choices are honored, most students are assigned as close as possible to schools near to their homes. This might continue until new school buildings are ready and a school based, full choice system instituted. Any student should be able to transfer if openings develop. It is unfair (and costly) to deny enrollment of students near a school because others further away would have their first choice chances reduced. In any event, under integration policy, it is not possible to offer everyone their first choice.

District staff must follow integration policy while honoring choices and making assignments. Since Berkeley has yet to achieve racially integrated neighborhoods throughout the city, the District will have to transport students to meet integration policy. The District can reduce transportation times and costs if most students are at schools near their homes. There should be about one third fewer students transported under this model than are at present. Under any system the District should not transport students across University Avenue because of the time involved unless absolutely necessary.

This model recommends Pre K-5 grade configuration at schools of small size and a choice/neighborhood/paired neighborhood integrative policy.

Though District staff promised, they have failed to produce the On Pass modeling necessary for complete understanding of this proposal.