

## Problems with the present and the proposed configurations:

### The present configuration:

- \* **Two years at a school is too short.** (7-8)
- \* **Three transitions is too many.** (K-3 / 4-6 / 7-8 / 9-12)

### K-5: How we get from here to there:

- \* **A K-5 scheme would be a death sentence for Malcolm X**, one of the district's most effective schools.
- \* **K-5 would mean a substantial shake-up for the K-3 school communities.** It would shrink the neighborhood each K-3 could serve. Change could demolish parent and staff communities which have taken years to build. K-5 is practically inseparable from a choice system.
- \* **K-5 leaves the 6th grades forlorn and unwanted.** It is not clear where the 6th graders or their curriculum would be located.

### The "mosaic:"

- \* **Multiple configurations in one small city is a bad thing.** Though it appears to offer a choice to parents, what exactly is the choice? It's the same dilemma which we have found so difficult; Parents are apt to choose not for the sake of the configuration but for the characteristics of the particular schools belonging to it. The outcome of this public debate should be the adoption of a grade configuration acceptable to all of Berkeley, so the decision can be laid to rest for this generation.

# K-4 / 5-8

A proposal by Bruce Wicinas 848-1797  
Le Conte/Malcolm X parent. October 10, 1993

Proposed K-4 schools: All the present K-3 schools, plus Longfellow.

Proposed 5-8 schools: Malcolm X, the new Columbus, Williard, King.

K-5 or K-6 Magnets: Arts and Muir may remain as they are now.

K-4 / 5-8 is a fairly common configuration in the U.S. There are probably people in the audience who have graduated from it. In the Bay Area, it is found at the New Haven school district in Union City.

## Advantages:

1. It allows a simple, uniform configuration throughout the district.
2. Children face only two transitions. (K-4 / 5-8 / 9-12)
3. Students make the transition to their second, larger school at fifth grade rather than fourth. With an additional year's maturity they, and their parents, are better equipped to handle it.
4. It means incremental, not radical, change for most schools. K-3 schools merely add one grade level. Malcolm and Columbus change from 4-6 to 5-8. King and Williard add 5th and 6th grades. The number of classes per grade at Williard and at King becomes smaller,

freeing space to accommodate 5th and 6th grades. Longfellow changes most, but to a configuration close to what it declared as its preference.

These transitions might be accomplished without demolishing parent and staff communities.

5. Students spend at least four years at each school of the sequence. This relieves the anonymity of whizzing through a school too quickly. It fosters improved relations and support among all parties. Staff and administrators are more likely to know each student. There is time for parents, staff and administrators to become acquainted. Parents are able - are obliged - to develop familiarity with each school of the sequence. Familiarity breeds commitment. Commitment fosters quality.

6. The scheme does not lend itself to the same method of two-way bussing we have now. I propose assigning students to the K-4 schools by bussed zones, as we presently assign K-3 students. At the 5-8 level, however, school assignment should be by choice. The 5-8 schools should be organized around all the principles of choice. They will be encouraged to distinguish themselves. Their distinction, reflected in an integrated curriculum, could include not only themes but also learning styles. Racial quotas would remain in place. The resulting four 5-8 schools should all be so strong that parents would not bail out of the system if they did not get their first choice.

This will result in some students being bussed for the whole duration of K-6. However, if they are bussed during grades 5-6 it would be by their choice.

### **Hurdles:**

1. In response to parent objection to mixing 5th and 6th graders with older children, I propose social segregation between grades 6 and 7, as is in place at King at present. Lunch hours and recess would be different for the 5-6 and 7-8 students. Such 5-8 middle schools flourish across the country. A visit to one or two would show how it is done.

2. Malcolm X and Columbus would need some Junior High facilities. Malcolm lacks the athletic facilities that are typical at a Junior High. This could be offset, under a choice system, by allowing Malcolm X and Columbus a programatic focus that makes athletic fields of secondary importance.

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I wish to acknowledge parent Don Larkin of the SOFT for first presenting this idea earlier this year.