

# NAACP vows to fight school choice option

The NAACP has pledged to file a lawsuit against the Berkeley Unified School District if plans to allow parents to choose which school their children attend are adopted by the board later this year.

This month's NAACP newsletter outlines the organization's concerns over the so-called schools of choice plan which they say will result in resegregation of students.

"To African-Americans, 'choice' schools are only a slick and sophisticated way of saying 'neighborhood' schools. To return to anything approaching a neighborhood school would mean an end of integrated education and constitutes grounds for a lawsuit," the newsletter reads.

The schools of choice model under BUSD consideration would allow parents to decide where their children attend school, but would limit school enrollment so that racial and cultural balances are adhered to.

Even so, NAACP members, like George Perry, are convinced the plan won't work.

Perry, who served on the district's School Organization Task Force said "We know what has happened in the past regarding equal educational opportunities. Blacks and Hispanics will get the worst teachers. A good example of that is East Campus," which as the district's alternative high school is predominately attended by minority students but has few resources or minority teachers.

While the concept may appear to work on paper by offering second and third choice school assign-

ments to guarantee desegregation, some school board agree that with current location of schools it would be hard to guarantee parents their choice.

"You have to have a basis for choosing, so schools have to be distinguished from each other to make them unique. Right now the only unique is location," said school board President Pedro Noguera, speculating that because the district's largest elementary schools are in the flatlands, competition will be high for schools in the hills.

However, Noguera said it is too early to reject schools of choice.

"I think it's premature to know what the impact of choice would be. I'm skeptical of going to a choice system because it would tend to have an effect of resegregating schools. It would be difficult to get parents in the hills to send their children to schools in the flatlands," he said.

Board member Miriam Topel also agrees that the issue deserves attention.

"I've talked with George Perry and I have a lot of the same concerns," she said.

While Topel said she is not con-

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# NAACP

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cerned that the district will return to neighborhood schools she "wonders that there is an inherent unfairness to parents to inform themselves" under the proposed plan.

"It takes a lot of time and belief that you can go in there and do that. Parents have to be committed to checking all these schools out" before deciding where to send their children, she said.

Perry and other NAACP members agree that the system would likely result in resegregation.

"The only ones who are benefiting are people who are more middle

class and who know how to work the system," he said.

In response to the perceived threat, Perry said the Berkeley NAACP is making schools its top priority.

"We're going to look at changes in the system and look at schools in terms of how resegregated they have already become. Longfellow and East Campus are great concerns. With the number of black students there the staff is not appropriate. We need to get more black teachers into those schools," Perry said noting that efforts to improve minority teaching levels at Berkeley High School have met with success.

In the meantime, while applauding efforts to further public debate on school organization issues, Perry said he doesn't hold much hope for the process.

"In 1968 we had such an involved community on this issue. You could go out on the street corner and everybody was talking about it. It was really an incredible experience. I would say that now it's gone almost in the other direction," he said.

Perry attributed the lack of community interest to changing times.

"I think a lot of people are older and there has been a great deal of disenchantment with the board and superintendent.