

III. The Waiting Lists and Appeals (April 10-May 25)

A. Waiting Lists.

1. Creating the Lists. It was the parent community that first raised the possibility of keeping waiting lists, and by February 15 they had become a commitment. Staff had assumed that waiting lists would be published simultaneously with assignment lists but, given the need for the above-described reassignments, they were held back until the reassignments had been made and staff had verified that the information contained on the lists was correct. The lists were posted at the District Office and at the individual schools on April 10, the day following spring vacation.

The lists were divided into the three ethnic categories for which capacities had been set. Although staff discussed the visual awkwardness of this presentation and the possibility of creating a single list in which names would be staggered by ethnicity (white, black, other), such a presentation would have caused confusion and upset when students were not taken from the lists in the order in which they appeared, but rather according to the ethnicity of the space available.

The lists were arranged according to Priority and then to Choice. Thus a displaced student who had chosen the school as his first choice would come ahead of a sibling, who would come ahead of a new, in-zone student attempting to come into the school. If there were more than one student in the same priority they would be listed in the order in which the computer had randomly selected them. An example of that ranking is set forth below:

| | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------|---------|----|---------------------------------|
| Oxford Grade 1: | Priority2 | Choice1 | -- | Out-of-zone Oxford student |
| | Priority3 | Choice1 | -- | Sibling of Oxford student |
| | Priority4 | Choice1 | -- | Central Zone non-Oxford student |
| | Priority4 | Choice1 | -- | " " " " " |
| | Priority4 | Choice2 | -- | " " " " " |
| | Priority5 | Choice1 | -- | Out-of-zone non-Oxford student |

Although some parents and staff expressed displeasure as to the three separate lists, in general parents were grateful to have the information the lists afforded, and some - especially those with displaced students -- watched the lists very closely.

2. Placing Students from the Lists. The first significant movement from the lists came just before the second round of assignment at the end of May (see below for a description), in order to create spaces for the late and non-resident applications received. There was further movement through June and July, as secretaries reported students who would not return next year, as well as incoming students who had elected to stay at their current schools. One interesting note is that, of the forty misplaced "Emerson" applications, at this time only six of the students remain on the Emerson waiting list. All the others have been offered a place at Emerson.

B. Appeals

Appeals are taken through a three-step process. First, the parents speak or meet with the Access Coordinator in an effort to resolve the problem. If resolution is not possible, the parent completes and submits an appeal form. Finally, the Student Assignments Appeals Board reviews the appeal. All students except for those being grandfathered were advised of the appeals process in their assignment letter. Appeals were accepted on and after April 15, a date selected to give staff time to design the process and the form.

Perhaps a hundred families expressed a desire to commence an appeal. The majority of these problems were resolved by the Parent Access Office (e.g. parents wanted placements which were possible, errors had been made by staff which were corrected; misunderstandings were resolved). Some four dozen appeals went to the Appeals Board, a panel of five community members appointed by the Superintendent who, along with the Parent Access Coordinator, served ex officio.

Although appeals were to be made only on procedural grounds, most of those received were based upon subjective causes, such as childcare needs or special affinity for a school. Of those four dozen, the majority were displaced students wanting to be reassigned to their schools and kindergartners who had not been given any of their three choices, or who did not like the choice they had been given. Two procedural issues on which the Board took action were in the case of students who wanted to alter their designated ethnicities (generally from "other," to African American), and in the case of misplaced applications. In the former case, the Board allowed for the change of ethnic designation, so long as the change was permanent. In the latter the Board ordered an adjustment of capacity in order to accommodate a greater number of the excluded students. The Board's recommendations for changes in the program are attached hereto as Appendix

IV. The Second Round of Assignment (May 25)

The District's initial commitment was that a "second round" of assignments -- for Berkeley residents who had turned in their forms late, and for students currently attending BUSD schools on interdistrict permits ("continuing interdistrict students") -- would be made on or before April 15. However, it soon became apparent to staff that this date was not feasible because of time needed both to resolve the first round errors and to prepare the data for the second round. Beyond this, and also because it made sense not to run the second round until the first round appeals had been resolved. At first staff announced that the second round would be run on May 15, then moved the date back to May 25. These delays caused anxiety and displeasure among parents who were waiting for assignments -- and also among school staff, who were anxious to begin planning their classes for the following year. That anxiety was somewhat exacerbated by staff's failure to take the initiative in keeping parents informed as to the delay. A letter was sent home with all K-7 students on May 15, apologizing for the delay and promising assignments by the end of the month. This promise was kept.

The second round was run on May 25. In it, 334 Berkeley residents and 167 interdistrict students were assigned. In order to place these students, staff was compelled to choose between either filling classes above the 26:1 ratio or creating new (and unprojected) sections with no assurance that the students assigned to those sections would materialize. In the end, staff decided to over-fill existing sections in the expectation that attrition would bring them down to size. In order to allow for some adjustment from school to school, all interdistrict assignments were made provisional so that these students could be moved as late as the second week of school, if actual enrollment required.

In the second round fewer than 50% of all students received their first choice of school. There were a dozen appeals, a number of which involved forms having been submitted in the first round but allegedly lost, and the balance based upon affinity for a particular school.

V. The Third Round (July 12)

After the second round was run, there still remained some two hundred continuing students who had never turned in preference forms and who had to be assigned. Staff had discussed assigning them in the second round, but decided instead to wait in order to see how many of them had not turned in forms because they intended to leave the district. In late May, several days of outreach done by Mr. Earl Bill yielded forms from a good percentage of those students. In the meantime, with the school year ending secretaries began reporting non-returnees and incoming students who were not planning to enter the district. The result of these "deassignments," was that the classes that had swelled beyond capacity after the second round once again subsided so that the remaining students could be assigned without pushing the numbers higher than they had been set in the preceding round.

As had been done in the second round, staff spent several days moving children off waiting lists before running the round. The third round of assignment was run on July 12, and some 200 students were placed. At that time a decision was made to hold applications received between July 13 and late August -- until the secretaries returned and submitted new "deassignment" data, so that applicants could be assigned to schools with available space.

VI. The Transportation Component:

This year, in addition to the other changes described above, the District is converting to a new computerized system of assigning students to transportation routes. In the past bus routes were designed and publicized and students in the area simply went to the nearest bus stop if they wanted a ride to school. Under the new system, each student is assigned to a specific bus stop based upon the distance s/he lives from the school. Then, taking all children assigned to a school and requiring bussing as well as bus capacities and maximum time of routes, the system can then draw routes for each school automatically.

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While in the long run this system will certainly save time and increase accuracy, in the first year of implementation it requires staff to create yet another data base and one which must be kept current with SASI and the assignment program. Thus, if a student's address or school assignment changes, that change must be entered into the transportation system (and entered manually), or the student will find himself assigned to a bus going to the wrong school.

Staff at the District Office and Transportation are collaborating in order to assure the smooth transmission of information and the maximum accuracy of information entered. As part of this collaboration, there will be one back-to-school mailing including information on transportation, reconfiguration, as well as the BSEP-driven A-Plus News. District Staff also plans to recruit and train volunteers to ride the buses during the first two weeks of school to help keep track of both children who appear at bus stops and names on the driver's list.

Part Two:
Critique of The Student Assignment Program
& Recommendations for Next Year

I. Public Education: Given the time constraints, staff was able to accomplish a great deal this year. It goes without saying that next year, with this year's experience and familiarity with the program to guide us, we will be able to be far more informative. As to specific recommendations, they are as follows:

1. To clear up zone confusion, **make zone maps more widely available.** Perhaps we should do the same with the street directories. They could be at libraries, preschools, even churches. At \$1 a piece, we could perhaps distribute 40 maps throughout the community.

2. **Do more and earlier outreach to preschools.** If possible we could hold a kindergarten fair in the fall, we could also make ourselves available for meetings at various schools. As to the content of the message we deliver, it should stress the vital importance of parent participation, both for the individual child and for the school. We should encourage parents to view our system as interactive; when they visit a classroom, or a school site they should ask, "What could I add to this situation?" and "What role could I play here?" Our outreach should reflect the belief that each parent -- and each child -- has something unique and valuable to contribute to each school.

3. **Workshops in the South and West Berkeley communities** could be planned earlier and better advertised to offer parents assistance in making choices and completing forms.

4. **Translation.** While many, if not most of the materials used in this process had to be translated into Spanish (and some into Mandarin/Cantonese), since there is no regular translation service, each document had to be arranged for by staff, usually causing a delay of several days. In some cases this caused staff to skip translation and add a note giving a number to call for translation. It would be wonderful to have translation services more readily available, although this year, with more planning time, it will also be easier to plan in the time for translation.

II. Creation, Distribution & Collection of Forms.

While the form worked very well in some ways, in others it was lacking -- as in designating Limited English Proficiency and Special Education status. That might be better resolved between Attendance staff and the ESL and SE Offices, and left off the forms. A **general review of the form**, with input from those who worked with them (school secretaries and District staff) will be invaluable.

The misplacing of the "Emerson," forms created a very difficult situation and prompted staff to discuss possible preventive measures that might be taken next year, such as having all forms turned in at the District Office, or giving receipts for forms. Certainly there will be fewer participants next year, so turning all forms in at the District Office might be a possibility. As to issuing receipts, of the five thousand forms received only about fifty (1%, including the Emerson group), were reported misplaced. Staff will have

to determine whether issuing receipts is worth the work with a 1% error rate (especially if forms are all handed in at the D.O).

III. Entering Data

Overall, and given the number of people involved and the unwieldiness of the process, the accuracy with which data was entered was impressive. Next year, because we will have fewer applicants, it may make sense to enter all data at the District Office. This would depend upon how we handle schools that have to downsize again (do we need to hold all-school lotteries? If so, we may want to involve the secretaries at those schools). This should be discussed and resolved by January in order to alert the secretaries to what their role will be.

Secondly, staff needs to work together for a clearer accord on how Special Education students will be placed. The same is true for keeping accurate records of who is LEP.

Finally, it goes without saying that had we had a network between schools and the district office, the process of data entry and collection would have been much easier, and the benefits more widely felt. On the other hand, once we have a network, we will have to grapple with the issue of "too many cooks."

IV. The Program:

Given its complexity, the program worked very well, and we were extremely fortunate to have a programmer who was willing to be so responsive to our needs. Perhaps the greatest shortcoming in the program was staff's need to rely upon the programmer for small functions, such as reassignments and late-round statistical data. This should be resolved for next year, as the programmer is working to make those and other functions accessible to staff.

As to the program function, two areas should be scrutinized. The first is the impact that falls upon students making their first choice out of zone, which is described above on page . It has been suggested by one of the Appeals Board members, that the program should incorporate a function whereby the first round should be run first to see who doesn't get their first choice because it is out of zone. Then the round should be rerun, making those people's second choice their first, in an effort to give them the best that the program can. The programmer is considering possibilities for resolving this situation and, in the very least, next year staff will be able to explain the ramifications of making such a choice.

Another area of general dissatisfaction was out-of-zone students displaced from current schools, and who felt themselves failed by the program at every turn. In the first place, by working so hard to grandfather the maximum number of students possible, we made those displaced so few as to feel very unpleasantly singled out. Whether or not this can be avoided next year is something we must discuss. In the very least we should be able to spare them the shock of hearing the news first in the middle of the school hall, as they read the assignment list. Perhaps principals could pass on the news, and principals of assigned schools could send a special note of welcome -- this wouldn't take much effort,

as so few students are involved. Beyond this, we might make a special effort to assign displaced students from the same grade to the same school, so at least they would have a peer group, small as it might be. Finally, the Appeals Board also recommends that staff make an effort to make the program more responsive to students in this situation, so they aren't simply bumped from school to school.

Note: Next year we will face a compounded displacement situation in which, if we don't guard against it, students who were displaced, say to Whittier this year, may find themselves displaced again. This should certainly be considered and avoided if at all possible. In general, staff should be as specific and clear as possible with numbers, so that out-of-zone students in a downsizing grade know very clearly who they are and what may happen to them.

VI. Wait Lists.

While desirable to parents, the wait lists became quite burdensome to staff, especially when calling through numbers of students with bad telephones and who -- having been placed on the lists automatically -- refused the offer of reassignment when it was offered.

This could be remedied by making the lists voluntary. That is, students who wished to be on the list would be added, in the order of their priority. We would also make it clear that the lists would be maintained only through the first or second week of school.

VIII. Other Issues.

- **Impact of Downsizing.** One issue which will be of vital interest to current parents at the smaller elementary schools is where and to what extent downsizing will occur next year. This year, for a number of reasons outlined above, a number of parents of displaced students were not only upset but also shocked to find their children out of their schools. Although the possibility of having to leave one's school is never pleasant, it can be softened to some extent by being accurately predicted, so that parents and students can be prepared for what is ahead. If possible, both the families and the current schools of displaced students should be given the assignment information before it becomes public knowledge, to allow for the parents and schools to work with students on this issue. If possible, the school of assignment should also be involved. Wherever possible, students should be given the opportunity to transfer with a friend. Finally, in a situation such as Whittier's, students should be given the opportunity of choosing to go to Washington in a group, perhaps even with a teacher. Although these solutions may take extra time to work out, in the end they will save the time staff has taken this year to deal with the individual parents in this situation -- beyond which they seem more likely to serve those parents' needs.

- **The Oxford/Jefferson Kindergarten Waiting lists.** As described above, a huge number of white families put in preference forms choosing Oxford first -- enough to form two extra sections just on their own. At Jefferson, the waiting list would have formed a section and a half. While some of these families will accept their assignment to other schools, a great number of them will not. Part of the problem is that they were assigned to Franklin, which they find unacceptable for a host of reasons including distance, neighborhood, size and future insecurity. Part of the problem is that they want to go to school in their own neighborhood. Certainly a number of them probably wouldn't have gone to Oxford even if they had been assigned there, but it is possible that a number of them would have gone, and the challenge to staff is to examine what strategies could be used for holding them next year.

- **The limitations of choice in the Northwest Zone.** There was a great deal of dissatisfaction among Northwest zone parents, especially kindergarten parents, as to the inequities in their choice as compared to choices given to families in other zones. Families who did not specifically want a Spanish language immersion school (Thousand Oaks), and who objected to Franklin's location, size, and bilingual focus, saw themselves as having only one real choice -- Jefferson -- while they saw families in other zones having three or four attractive schools from which to choose. Staff should consider possible resolutions to this situation -- or at least to this perception -- of inequity.

- **Neighborhood Proximity as a Priority.** This issue has a narrower and a broader focus. At it's narrowest, it is the complaint of parents living within view of a school that they were not given a priority that would have assured their children of assignment, at least in kindergarten. The arguments in favor of this include the fact that a school's neighbors are it's best after-hours guardians, and if they are disenfranchised the school as well as the neighborhood suffers an important loss. The arguments against involved the difficulty in delimiting what constitutes preferential proximity and whether that could be standardized from school to school.

The broader issue, which this last point opens into is the conflict between integration and neighborhood schools. If a family living across the street from a school are assured admission, why not the family living around the block. And certainly the family two blocks away feels a greater natural affinity for the school than they do for another school on the opposite side of their zone -- a geographical entity they view as artificial and against their best, if not natural, interests.

Staff's fairly consistent experience with this issue was that all parents who had wanted their neighborhood school and not gotten it were disappointed, but that parents who did get a school they felt was as good (or even better) than their neighborhood school, and whose only disadvantage was distance, were generally able to overcome their disappointment quite quickly and accept their assignment. On the other hand, parents who felt that they'd been barred from their neighborhood school and shunted to an inferior school with the added burden of transportation, felt that the system hadn't served their interests. Even a cursory review of other districts' experience with controlled choice

indicates that this is by no means a novel conclusion: this system's success will rest to a good degree on parents' perception of each school as truly and uniquely desirable. To the extent possible, staff needs to work to combat the perception that any one school is inferior to the others in its zone.

- **The Significance of "Other," as One of Our Three Categories.** One result of this process which becomes obvious from the numbers, is that, while the percentages of both white and African American dropped, even in existing grades, the percentage of "other" increased -- generally correspondingly. In other words, people who formerly called themselves black or white, are now calling themselves other -- along with Asian, Hispanic, Native American children, and children who are any combination of the above.

In the system as we ran it, clearly "other" is the wild card, and it may be a good thing for us to examine whether this system of classification is achieving what we mean to achieve.

In staff's experience, many parents are uncomfortable with this means of classification. Many parents have questioned whether their classification of their child may not have kept him or her out of a desired school. In a number of cases this has created some bitterness. Other parents have determined that their classification has indeed excluded their child and, through appealing and being granted the right to change ethnicity, the same child who was once excluded as "other," is not accepted as African American.

Finally, some parents have expressed a deep uneasiness at being categorized as "other." One Asian couple complained of feeling invisible. Despite the fact that the capacity created for this group matches its existence as closely as does the capacity for white and black, this couple felt very strongly that being lumped with other groups had actually lessened their chances for getting the school they wanted. They felt betrayed and ignored.

- **Separating in Order to Combine.** More than one frustrated parent commented that in seeking to teach children that they were all alike, our system of categorizing by ethnic code had in fact made them all the more conscious of their differences. While the Board's intent was never to deny the differences among children, the comment does raise the issue of whether it is possible to create and maintain diversity unselfconsciously, and if so, how. Obviously these are issues that cannot be resolved either swiftly, nor clearly, but both staff and the system might benefit from considering them.

- **The Middle Schools.** Another volatile and problematic issue this year involved the middle schools, specifically Longfellow's disadvantage versus King and Willard. Although Longfellow's sixth grade is as large as King's, the Board has promised that any Berkeley resident in that sixth grade who wants to transfer to King or Willard for seventh grade will be assured of assignment to the school in whose zone s/he lives. This raises the issue of Longfellow's seventh -- and eighth -- grades, and what can be done to make them viable.

- **Commitment to Interdistrict Students.** This year the Board assured all continuing interdistrict students that not only would they be placed for next year, but they would know that placement in the spring. As mentioned above, when it came time for the assignment of these students, most projected sections in the District were full, so that a decision had to be made whether to open new sections or overfill the existing ones. The situation was resolved by overfilling and making interdistrict assignments provisional, but even so, reassigning these students will add an extra complication to the already complex situation that will face us the first two weeks of school. Furthermore, many interdistrict students were bitterly disappointed to be assigned away from their schools, while in some cases siblings were separated (because of the impossibility of finding space for both siblings at any one school). Given this experience, the Board may want to reexamine the District's commitment to interdistrict students and what special assurances -- if any -- they should be given next year.

- **Mind Changers.** A smaller problem is posed by parents who change their minds and want their children to be reassigned. This year we were quite liberal, in the understanding that the system was new and people might have been confused when they made their first choice. On the other hand, there has been a great deal of mind-changing (between five and ten percent), which creates work for staff and confusion at the schools. It has been suggested that mind changers should have to fill out a new preference form and go through the process again. This is something staff will want to discuss before next March.