

PROPOSAL FOR REVISIONS TO THE BERKELEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT VOLUNTARY DESEGREGATION PLAN

MARCH 1998

BACKGROUND

Recent court cases and legislation indicate a national move away from ameliorating underrepresentation of minority groups in the workforce and in education by establishing a system that provides preferences for those groups. Further this trend has implications for K-12 education. Programs established to ameliorate racial isolation through the establishment of racial quotas and race based enrollment preferences are similarly vulnerable to attack and or censure. Clearly Berkeley Unified's desegregation program which is focused on achieving defined racial percentages through forced assignments is vulnerable to such attack. Given the current political trend away from programs with an appearance of racial preference it seems timely to relook at the objectives of our desegregation plan and alternative means by which they might be achieved.

Berkeley's voluntary desegregation program has its genesis in a community concern about geographical segregation. The thinking was that the best way to mitigate against the pattern of neighborhood segregation was to desegregate the schools. In the intervening years - - nearly half a century since the first request for consideration of this issue came to the Berkeley Board of Education - - the pattern of neighborhood segregation continues. Even the most cursory look at a map documenting income levels throughout the City of Berkeley shows that income levels vary with elevation, defining sectors that run from north to south across the City. That is, income levels in the hills average X% of those in the flatlands while those in the middle corridor average Y% below the hills and Z% above the flats. While the original issues were drawn along racial lines, the racial segregation was, and is, predominantly a function of socio-economic segregation. Therefore, in keeping with the original intents of the desegregation program and current legal developments, it seems reasonable to define a student assignment plan for Berkeley Unified based on the existing geographic socio-economic sectors.

PROPOSAL

Maintaining the existing K - 5 residence zones, assignments to schools would be made to schools balancing the student populations to reflect the Berkeley community's socio-economic diversity. This would be achieved by dividing the city into 3 north-south sectors cutting across the zones which would mirror the naturally defined socio-economic sectors. Student capacities would be calculated to allow a proportional

number of children from each geographic sector to enroll at each school within a zone. Families would continue to choose schools on the same basis as they do under our current controlled choice system; students would be assigned not on the basis of their race, but on the basis of their address - *-regardless of their race.*

The two zoned middle schools would continue to be available to any student residing within their zone. Transfers to the middle school outside a student's zone of residence would be considered based on the city wide distribution of middle school students, the consistency/disparity of each middle school's enrollment to this distribution and the impact the student's move would have on the socio-economic mix at the schools. Longfellow would continue to draw from the entire city and students would be assigned to it based on the sector in which they live within enrollment capacities consistent with the city wide distribution of middle school students.

SECTORS - Based on information from the 1990 census regarding income levels throughout Berkeley, the following geographical division of the city is recommended to establish socio-economic sectors:

- East (describe boundaries)
- Median (describe boundaries)
- West (describe boundaries)

See Map in attachment ?

SCHOOL CAPACITIES - Looking at the number of students currently enrolled in our schools and living in these defined zones, the following percentages of students from each sector are recommended as a basis for establishing capacities for the schools in each zone:

- K-5 (do we need different capacities by zone?)
- 6-8 - To be used for assignments to Longfellow or out of zone middle schools.

See Chart of School Capacities in attachment ?

STUDENT ASSIGNMENT - Families would continue to choose schools on the same basis as they do under the current system except that they would not be required to identify their race. The computer generated student assignment system would assign students to schools based on their expressed preferences, the established priorities for placement and the capacities defined for students from the socio-economic sectors.

See List of Assignment Priorities in attachment ?

Question: How will we place out of district students? Absolute capacities?

TRANSPORTATION - Home-to-school transportation is a key element of a successful system of magnet schools. In order for families to choose schools outside of their immediate neighborhood and thereby support the socio-economic diversity we espouse, the barrier of distance must be removed. Transportation will continue to be provided on the same basis as in our current assignment system:

- K-5 - Students assigned to schools within their zone of residence and living outside the Board adopted walk boundaries for their school will be provided home-to-school transportation. Students assigned to schools outside their zone for programmatic reasons may also be provided transportation.
- 6-8 - Students assigned to Longfellow and living outside the Board adopted walk boundaries for that school will be provided home-to-school transportation.

A.

EVALUATION OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS - As in the current plan, the Superintendent will report to the Board each November on the effectiveness of the student assignment system. In the case that the system of zones and sectors ceases to provide the desired socio-economic diversity or unfairly impacts any group (intentionally or inadvertently), the Board may convene a committee to review the system and make recommendations to the Board for changes, if necessary.

Question: Do we need to have an achievement component? If so, shouldn't there be some reference to achievement in the background/proposal sections?

General Comments/Questions:

Do we need to say that an outcome of this plan will be racial diversity?

The term "bands" is unappealing - - can we come up with a better name for the cross-cuts? regions? elevations?