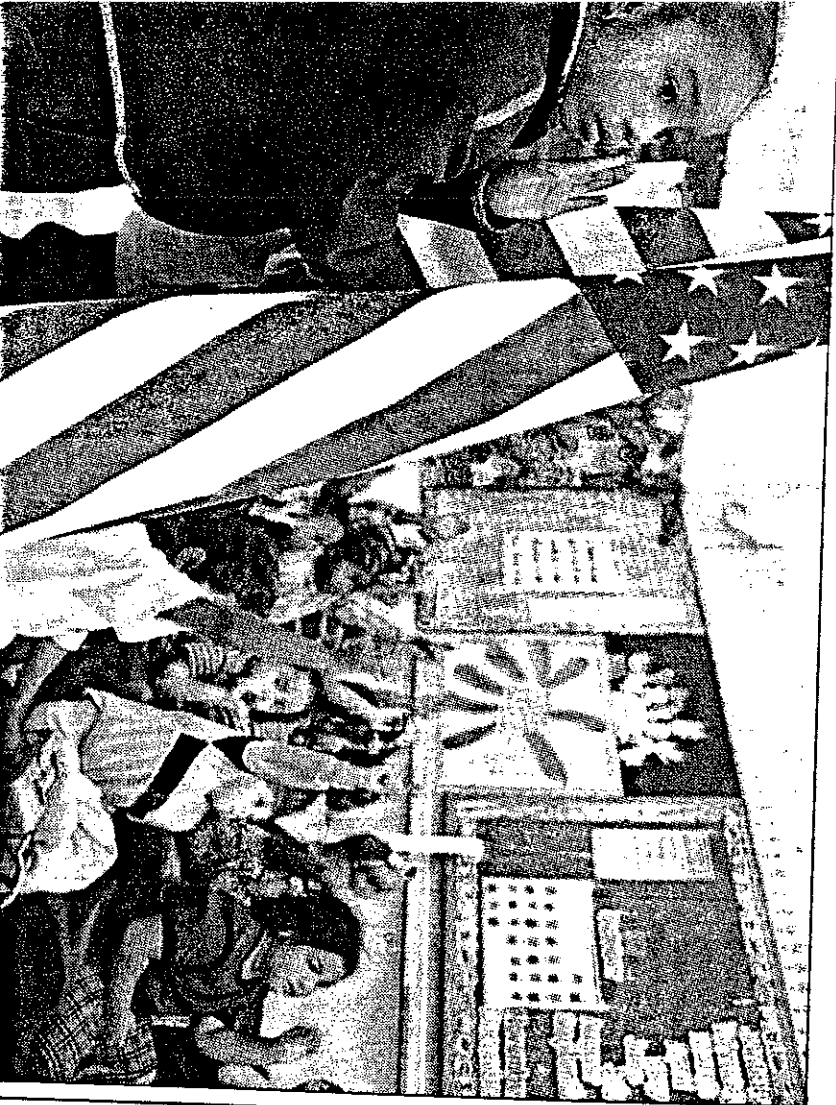


THE BERKELEY VOICE

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School district may drop race from admissions policy

By Marc Albert

Under the threat of a possible lawsuit from the Pacific Legal Foundation, the Berkeley Unified School District may drop race as a factor in assigning students to local schools.

The foundation has filed a complaint against schools in Huntington Beach, which use a similar formula.

Steve McCutcheon, a spokesperson for the foundation, said that under Proposition 209, districts can't use race as a factor.

"Our position is that government should not be making economic or edu-

cation decisions based on race," he said. "In Huntington Beach, they have open enrollment, but then they look at various factors," including proximity to the student's home, whether students have siblings enrolled in a school and race.

If they had too many black students, they wouldn't let more black students in, and if they had too many Hispanic students, they wouldn't let any more Hispanic students in," McCutcheon said. The same is true for white students.

Berkeley parents are asked to state their race so the district can enroll an in-

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Signs designating hijacked

Schools

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tegrated mix of students at each campus. Some groups are advocating open enrollment and parent choice and the rebirth of the neighborhood school.

"I think most people favor neighborhood schools," McCutcheon said. But the idea is not universally embraced.

"If we start going to neighborhood schools," said John Selawsky, a member of Berkeley's environment committee who failed to win election to the school board last year, "what we're going to see is a return to de facto segregation."

Selawsky said the area around Cragmont School is predominantly white, while the neighborhood around Malcolm X school is mainly African American.

"The important thing is for schools to have equality in facilities and in programs," McCutcheon said.

It is believed that the group has issued a Freedom of Information Act request for documentation of BUSD policy.

Neighborhood schools would solve one irritant for parents — driving or busing their children across town, a policy that adds to vehicle trips and congestion.

"Sometimes doing the right thing is inconvenient," Selawsky said. "I can't seriously think that people believe in separate but equal."

But there may be a middle ground.

"I keep hearing about the re-segregation of Berkeley schools," said BUSD Superintendent Jack McLaughlin. "We are absolutely not going to re-segregate the schools. It's a matter of putting forward a policy that will face the least amount of court challenges."

Last month the school board appointed a commission to study the problem. Among the solutions being proposed, according to McLaughlin, is one based on socio-economic factors based on geography and home

prices. Parents would not be asked how much money they earn, but the district already has a computer model of city home prices by block.

A similar system was adopted last year for Berkeley's magnet schools as a condition before accepting federal funds.

"We've done the run (with the magnet schools) and you don't re-segregate," McLaughlin said.