

**Subject: Brief History Notes**

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(Note: speaking notes for the History section of our presentation - comments please, Nancy)

### A Brief History of Assignment Plans for Berkeley Public Schools

By 1960 over 15,000 children attended public school in Berkeley. There were 17 elementary schools (14 K-6 & 3 K-3), three Junior High Schools (7-9), one Comprehensive HS (10-12) and one Continuation High School.

In the early sixties, children attended neighborhood elementary schools and, because Berkeley's neighborhoods were significantly segregated, so were the schools. This is often referred to as defacto segregation.

Elementary schools in the south west "flats" fed into Burbank Jr. High School (now the Berkeley Adult School). Burbank had 73% minority enrollment. In the central/middle section of Berkeley, elementary students fed into Willard which had a more diverse student body with about 49% minority enrollment. The north and northeast section of the city fed into what is now called King, which had only 1% minority enrollment.

Berkeley entered the path of voluntary desegregation during the mid 60's. The first major step was to redraw the city's junior high school zones and reconfigure their grades. Three zones became two with children going to King or Willard for 7-8 and then ALL 9<sup>th</sup> graders going to Burbank. Academic tracking programs for grades 7-9 were also overhauled.

The next step was to find a new student assignment plan for the elementary schools to accomplish complete desegregation. Several years of study and community meetings resulted in the consideration of at least 42 possible plans! The final plan was a "two way busing" plan, which was launched in fall 1968. Four new "Hill to Bay" zones were created each containing one large 4-6 school (Franklin, Columbus, Longfellow and Malc. X) These large 4-6 schools were in the southwest and the remaining 13 elementary schools in the middle and hills sections of the city changed to K-3. Busing was provided for all students living  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile and more away from their school. In very very simplistic terms "Hill" kids went to neighborhood school for K-3 then took the bus down for 4-6. "Flatlanders" where bused uphill for K-3 and then often went to large neighborhood schools for 4-6. The term "sister" neighborhood was often used. The result was fully desegregated schools.

From 1960 to 1990 a variety of events led to a reappraisal of the assignment plan. Student enrollment had gone from 15,700 in 1968 to a low of about 7,900 by 1990. Four elementary schools were closed over the period due to declining enrollment and then Columbus and Cragmont were evacuated after the 1989 earthquake. Berkeley HS was now a 10-12 school; there were only two Jr. Highs- King and Willard, which were now only 7-8.

The Enrollment at many of the remaining elementary schools in the City had gotten out of balance & the District was about to launch a major building program as a result of the passage of a \$152 Million bond act in 1992. The time was ripe to take another hard look at the District's assignment plan and grade configuration.

In 1993, after extensive community discussion and study, the District changed its grade configuration to a K-5, 6-8 (middle school) and 9-12 system, with a controlled choice of schools for the elementary and middle levels. With the addition of magnet school status for one middle school and 3 elementary schools, this is the system that we have today.