

Student Assignment Advisory Committee
Public Forum November 28, 2000

Agenda

1. Brief **Introduction**
2. Brief **history** of school assignment programs in Berkeley
3. Description of the **current plan**
4. Description of the **legal climate** and legal issues
5. Read the **preliminary recommendation**
6. **Public discussion, Q. & A. and public statements**
7. What are the **next steps** in the process?
 - Follow-up meeting to **discuss public comments** and **draft** our **final recommendation** to BUSD School Board
 - Presentation to BUSD School Board**

Rules of Participation

Thank you for your interest in participating in this forum.

If you want to have a question or statement read to the committee, please write it legibly on one of the provided **3x5 cards**. Your question will be read by Co-chair Derick Miller.

If you want to make a public statement or ask a question, please fill out a **green card**. You will be called and given **3 minutes** to speak.

A **card** will be held up to warn you that you have **one minute left**. After 3 minutes, you will be asked to finish your sentence and allow the next person to speak or the next question to be read.

Members of the committee will do their best to answer questions and share the information we have learned.

Many people feel strongly about these issues. We ask that participants try to keep their tone **friendly** and **productive**.

Subject: Notes from the Public Forum

Date: Wed, 29 Nov 2000 09:35:24 -0800

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Hello Roia:

Once again, thanks for the leadership that you and Derick have given. The entire committee has worked very hard, very thoughtfully and very respectfully and I think this effort was reflected in the quality of the dialogue last night.

I have two concerns re: Thursday's meeting.

First:: I think we must finalize our recommendations on Thursday so that the document we come up with is completed and ready to be given directly to legal counsel for review before going to the Board. Our time frame is less than short and I think no further edits or considerations are possible after this time. I believe we are very well prepared and can accomplish this if we focus on this task.

To facilitate the process perhaps we can bring laptops and a printer to produce the final document for all to review during our Thursday meeting. I can bring a laptop loaded with MS Office including Word 97 and a printer. The laptop has a USB port and I can bring my Zip drive. It would be good to have a back-up as well.

I would like to suggest that we restore some of Sheila's original draft language as it specifically addresses in it's carefully worded language some of the legal issues that will be of concern to counsel and to the Board. Also, in its narrative about the committee's work it relates the step by step considerations of the committee and I think this is important documentation for any future legal review.

Second: I wanted to try and summarize some of my notes from the Public Forum last night so that the committee can consider them on Thursday. My notes are not complete. Where possible, I have tried to use much of the language as spoken last night. I have purposely left out the committee's answers to questions or comments. If I have misrepresented or misstated, my humble apologies. I am hoping that everyone will contribute to and amend the following as needed:

* A 7th grade teacher from Willard spoke favorably of the curet plan and the beauty of diversity in the classrooms. I believe she drew a connection between diversity and the importance of family and community bonding skills. She spoke of the bridging that happens in Berkeley classrooms and considers it a challenge and a joy to teach in the current system. She said that other Berkeley teachers feel this way as well.

* The student chair of the student multi-cultural committee at Willard spoke and thanked the committee for keeping the current plan. She stated that because there is geographic separation by race that neighborhood schools would equal segregation.

* The President of BFT spoke as a Berkeley parent as well. He described the polarization he had heard about during the process last year. He asked if there were other creative alternatives. He expressed that there was concern among Berkeley teachers that classrooms or certain grade levels were not as integrated as they should be @ K-5. He asked us to please look carefully at the parent choice system and make sure it is working.

In comments later in the evening he again asked if there was an imbalance in the schools; within schools are the classes balanced; and suggested we look at Kindergarten; and look at what happens when students transfer to other schools; look at demographic data very carefully not just by race but by socio-economic as well; do latecomers throw the system out of balance?; we should balance late enrollees, out of district, and SES as well. He also stated that if a priority is to keep families, siblings together, what about giving teachers a preference or priority for their children to be located at their school.

* A written question re: Recommendation # 4 generated much discussion throughout the evening about creative ways for better outreach and communication so that more parents will participate in the first round; so that at each step of the way the process will be more fully participatory.

* A John Muir parent spoke (also as a product herself of Berkeley schools) and expressed support of the current plan, that she came back to Berkeley specifically because of the diversity in the schools; but also of how difficult it was to feel community at the school, neighborhoods are still segregated, that it's hard to build community across geographic distance; she is one of two families who walk the students to school and was there some way to consider proximity.

* A mother spoke as the product of Berkeley schools herself and as an Emerson parent in support of the current plan. She said we experience institutionalized racism, and that we are desegregated but not integrated. She stated that what all parents really want is quality education; let's improve all of our schools. She said she drives 3 miles each day to get her child to and from school and she does feel community.

* There were questions and discussions about what race factors do we use and how do we use them; what % of school age children in Berkeley attend Berkeley schools; has zone choice affected demographics; are we more legally secure now with the current plan/recommendations?

* A parent expressed concern that families of color were left out of the process; that unempowered parents are less invested in advocacy once the choice is made; that this leads to less success for the children in school; that parents with resources and access who consider private schools are more aware of deadlines, can afford child care, can attend forums; access and resources are an issue.

* An audience member who works with pre-school age children (I think) suggested that perhaps with grants we could partner this committee with pre school programs in communities with limited access, going door to door, to reach the unempowered with information about the choice system, deadlines, schools etc.

* A parent asked us to look at the use of the word "minority"; she applauded the mission of the student assignment plan, but expressed concern that with education as a value there is implied inclusion and exclusion; there is inability and lack of ability to attain education; she asked that we look at other outreach tools such as telephone, door to door; she posed the question - is the stated value/goal/mission what we really want as a community?.

* Communication was discussed/mentioned by several people as a very

important part of the process. Some had been well aware of the committee process for some time, others had just received notice of the forum the day before, and this created child care problems, etc. Someone asked if schools should be held more accountable for disseminating information in a timely manner. It was suggested that the committee itself had not failed in communication, but perhaps the breakdown was at the sites.

* Several people, throughout the evening, thanked the committee for its work, its process, and its draft recommendation..