

Parents frustrated by new school assignments

With the vast majority of children getting into their first choice school, Berkeley Unified School District officials say their new "controlled choice" system is succeeding.

Eighty-six percent of the students who enrolled by the Feb. 15 deadline got their first choice school, according to Parent Access Coordinator Nancy Greenman, who coordinates the new system.

But some parents whose children will have to change schools because of the new zoning system say their children are paying a price for the new system.

Next year will be the first year of the reconfiguration plan. The plan board divides the district into three zones. The plan allows parents to pick which schools within their zone they want their children to attend.

But Greenman said the number of spots at schools are shrinking as schools shift from a K-3 to a K-5 system. While each school has about the same number of children, it must have fewer children in each class, Greenman said.

As a result, a number of children are displaced from their schools. Children who live in a school's zone get top priority for schools in their zone. As a result some children who live in a school's old zone, or were transfers from another zone, have been displaced.

Greenman said there are three- to four-dozen children who have been displaced from their schools by the process. "Those kids are at the top of every waiting list," Greenman said. "At this point a number have gotten back in."

"The zone changed for our side of the block," said parent Illana Weisman, whose block is divided into two different school zones. Her daughter went to Jefferson and will be entering the third grade next year. But because the school zones were redrawn, her daughter cannot be "grandfathered" into the school she attended this year.

She said her daughter had trouble at school at first but is doing very well now, and she does not want to disrupt her by moving her to a new school.

Weisman said her appeal, which included a letter from her daughter's teacher, has been denied.

Another parent, Karen Wilairat, said her son, a second-grader, had originally transferred into Jefferson from another zone. But he cannot attend the school he went to last year because he is from outside the district. Wilairat said her appeal has been denied.

Jeanette Badal, an Oakland Public School teacher with two children in Berkeley Public Schools,

says her youngest child, a second-grader, will have to leave Jefferson school because of rezoning. "A few yards of asphalt and we are out of the zone," she said.

Badal said she originally wanted her child to go to Oxford school, which is closer to home, but she was in the Jefferson zone. Badal said her child is used to Jefferson now, and she does not want to move her child. Badal said her appeal has been denied.

All three parents said it is impor-

tant for their children to stay with their friends. "He needs a chance to be kept by the friends he has made," Wilairat said of her son. "Friendships take time to grow."

Greenman said the appeals process is supposed to fix procedural errors and was not meant to be on the basis of an affinity for a particular school. "Although I know some people are disappointed, I know that in most cases the children are going to be welcomed and are going to fit in very well."

Berkeley Alzheimer's respite center seeks volunteers

Alzheimer's Services of the East Bay Berkeley center is looking for volunteers interested in helping with music, art, and exercise activities as well as with clerical tasks, kitchen help, and meal pick-up.

Hours are weekdays from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

To volunteer contact Anessa Hileman or Katherine Skvarca at 644-8292. Orientation and training are provided for volunteers.

Alzheimer's Services of the East Bay is a nonprofit community agency which offers a comprehensive range of day services for people with middle to late stage Alzheimer's Disease and their caregivers.

Are You