

BERKELEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

TO: Board of Education
FROM: Michele Lawrence, Superintendent
DATE: February 4, 2004
SUBJECT: Proposed Policy for Student Assignment

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The City of Berkeley is a community rich in its diversity. This can be measured by the various racial, ethnic, economic, educational, and linguistic backgrounds of the population that inhabits the City. Therefore, it was not surprising that in 1968 the Berkeley Unified School District became the first major school system to voluntarily integrate its schools. The District initially implemented a school desegregation system by using “paired schools” and instituted a mandatory “two-way busing system.” Under this plan the District transported students from the predominately non-white West Berkeley to the predominately white East Berkeley for kindergarten to third grade and East Berkeley students to West Berkeley for fourth to sixth grade; thus, eliminating school segregation created by the de-facto residential segregation within the City.

Following the commitment to further desegregate the junior high schools, the District created two junior high schools that served students in grades seventh and eighth. The junior high school boundaries were drawn in a manner that would ensure racial integration in the two schools and again cut across City boundaries.

Over time, because of demographic changes within the City’s population, the budget constraints which required the closures of schools and the resultant shifting of attendance patterns, several schools became racially imbalanced. Additionally, many parents and teachers had expressed concern about disruptions that occurred with the “paired school” plan requiring students to change schools after the third grade. Thus, these factors necessitated the development of an alternative integration plan.

In 1995, after six years of evaluation and community discussions, the schools were reconfigured using a K–5 Elementary and 6–8 Middle School model. To that end, the School Board adopted a “controlled choice” student assignment system. The goal of the controlled choice plan was to give families a choice of schools within one of three zones and requiring each school within the zone to meet the zone-wide racial proportions of three racial categories: black, white, and other ethnicities, at a ratio of plus or minus 5%.

As a result of the changing legislation in California, in September of 2000, the Superintendent, Jack McLaughlin, convened a Student Assignment Advisory

Committee. The Committee's charge was to develop two alternative assignment plans at the elementary level: One including the use of race and one with factors excluding the use of race. Following a public forum the Committee recommended retaining the existing controlled choice student assignment plan. The Board elected to maintain the existing plan. However, throughout the following year the Committee continued to meet and discuss equity in our schools and race neutral factors to create school diversity.

During that same year the Committee was asked to formally address the earlier charge of a student assignment plan that expanded the definition of diversity and one that did not use race as a factor. A progress report and a preliminary proposal, requiring no Board action, were presented for discussion. Again, community input was sought and opinions were expressed regarding the merits of the components of this preliminary plan. The Board indicated areas they felt needed greater development and asked staff to continue their work. Since that date, further study and refinement have been done and the staff is now prepared, based on the work of the Committee, to present both a policy and program components of a student assignment system.

Now, in preparation for the coming year, it is time once again to consider the means by which we assign students. Tonight, the Board is asked to consider adopting a new policy and a new system for assigning students.

Attached is the proposed Board Policy that establishes the philosophy and goals on which the Student Assignment System can be based. Although the Board has previously approved a resolution indicating their beliefs and desires, staff is recommending a formal policy be adopted in keeping with our new policy adoption procedure.

POLICY/CODE:

Resolution 7008

FISCAL IMPACT:

None

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Accept for second reading and adoption the proposed policy for the establishment of a District Student Assignment System and Criteria.

ELEMENTARY STUDENT ASSIGNMENT

BERKELEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Berkeley Unified School District believes that diversity in our student population enriches the educational experiences of students; advances educational and occupational aspirations; enhances critical thinking skills; facilitates the equitable distribution of resources; reduces, prevents or eliminates the effects of racial and social isolation; encourages positive relationships across racial and economic lines by breaking the cycle of racial hostility to foster a community of tolerance and appreciation of students from varied and diverse backgrounds; and promotes participation in a pluralistic society.

Berkeley Unified School District believes that our commitment to these ideals is a strongly held community value and as such, we are committed to ensuring that policies, processes and educational programs that promote the values of socio-economic and racial diversity will be designed and implemented.

Further, Berkeley Unified School District believes that free and public education is the right of all the children of Berkeley, hence, at each and every school a quality education shall be provided that ensures equal opportunities for all students to be taught a strong core curriculum, participate in enriched learning experiences and receive resources that promote success for all students.

To advance these values, the District's Student Assignment Plan must be developed to ensure that that each elementary school's student population, within an identified zone, reflects the diversity of the student population attending District elementary schools within that zone. Such a plan should be developed that achieves the goal of socio-economic and racial diversity with a target range of plus or minus 5-10%.

Legal Reference:

Education Code: 35160	Authority of Governing Board
35160.1	Broad authority of schools districts
35160.5	District policies; rules and regulations
35291	Rules
35350	Transportation of students
35351	Assignment of students to particular schools