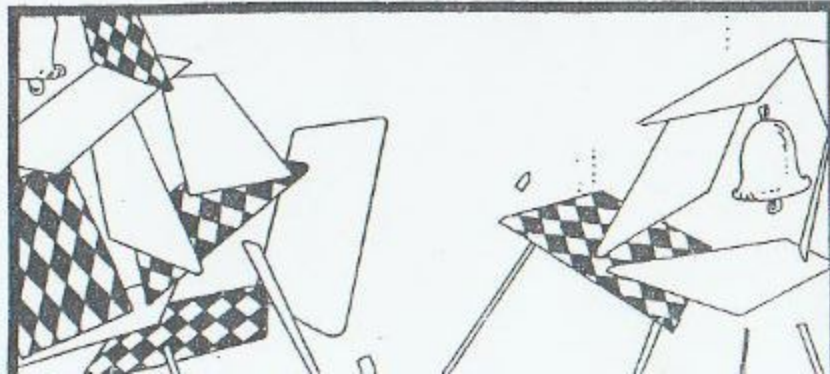


Neighborhood schools vs. integration

Berkeley parents are finding these two concepts contradictory,



GUARDIAN GRAPHIC BY MOLLY KELLY

small site to Malcolm X (4-6), which is huge. Whether it's right or wrong, many parents try to avoid Malcolm X because it swallows kids up and because it's in an unsafe neighborhood."

"We have to face up to the fact that there is fear in many people's hearts; a fear that at the 4-6 level, that's when their kids 'go bad,'" said parent Lloyd Lee at a meeting of Cragmont (K-3) parents.

Early results of another survey

was constituted, and that the purposes of the committee, as well as of the task force, are at this very moment not known to most of the parents of Cragmont," Graham wrote to the Superintendent's Task Force.

According to BUSD legislative liaison Arrietta Chakos, packets were sent to each school to help administrators select a site committee comprised of the principal, three teachers, three staff, six parents, and students, if possible. Committee

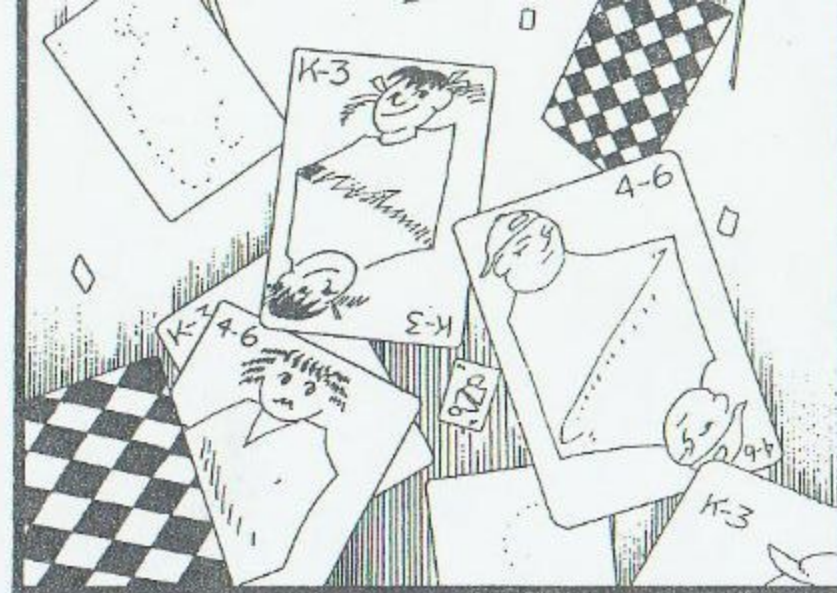
want their kids close to home

BY MEREDITH MAY

UNDER THE GUISE of repairing aging buildings, the Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) is making plans to overhaul the city's entire educational structure. Committees from all 13 of Berkeley's elementary schools have been discussing ways to replace the current K-3 and 4-6 grade configurations, and most want to dump the current system in favor of a K-5 or K-6 "neighborhood school" plan.

The problem with tossing out the current system is that it means discarding the busing plans used to ensure desegregation in Berkeley schools since 1968. And given Berkeley's demographics, a return to neighborhood schools would mean a return to schools divided by race (see "Bye-Bye Busing?" 9/30/92).

The rethinking of Berkeley's schools moved from discussion to drawing board last June after city voters passed Measure A, a self-imposed tax that would generate \$158 million to upgrade disintegrating schools — some of which had to be closed when they didn't measure up to seismic safety standards. The school board had decided to look at reconditioning the system from the inside out when it realized that deciding what schools to refurbish, and how, meant setting new priorities for the schools. For example, should money be spent to retrofit and reopen the flatlands Columbus School as a 4-6 school, or could that money be better spent elsewhere? It



was a chance to redo the schools almost from the ground up, and the possibilities seemed limitless.

After six months of late-night school planning meetings, the Measure A euphoria has subsided considerably as parents and school administrators, like relatives bickering over a family member's lottery winnings, try to decide where and how to spend the money by Feb. 3 — when recommendations are due in Superintendent La Voneia C. Steele's office.

Almost everyone agrees that Berkeley's schools are failing many students, and many critics believe the current grade configuration system is a key culprit. Berkeley is still operating on the two-way integration system devised in 1968; for grades K-3, minority children from the "flatlands" are bused to the predominantly white "hill schools." In reverse, hill children are bused down to the "flatlands" for grades 4-6. Since there are only two junior high schools for grades 7-8 and one high school for grades 9-12, all located in the flatlands, grades 7-12 are natu-

rally integrated.

But a documented white flight to private schools at the 4th-grade level has pulled the rug out from under busing's good intentions.

The move to return to neighborhood schools was given a big boost last year when school board member Pedro Noguera, the board's only black member, said he supported neighborhood schools. And Martha Acevedo, the most vocal opponent of the neighborhood schools plan, was narrowly defeated for re-election in November.

At a Jan. 5 meeting, representatives from seven of the 13 Berkeley elementary school "site committees" attending told the Superintendent's Task Force on School Organization that they wanted a pre-K-5/6 or a K-5/6 model.

"We sent every child home with a survey, and the main reason parents said they wanted a K-5 system was because it reduced the number of transitions for their children," said Emerson (K-3) site committee chair Marla Wilson. "It causes a lot of anxiety for kids to go from a

"majority" of the 367 elementary school teachers who returned questionnaires "favored a K-5, 6-8, 9-12 grade configuration," said union president Jackie Fox Ruby.

WHOSE COMMITTEE?

Critics argued that a return to neighborhood schools will create a more segregated setting for their children's education, because housing patterns in the city of Berkeley are still separated along racial lines. They also said that minority parents in South and West Berkeley are largely absent from the discussion over the fate of the schools, and therefore "consensus" statements reached by the 18 site committees don't represent the feelings of every community.

"I feel utterly betrayed," said West Berkeley resident and Cragmont parent Joanna Graham. "I went canvassing door to door for the first time in 10 years for Measure A. I thought I was gathering signatures to make our schools seismically safe, not to dismantle the busing system. Neighborhood schools are going to lead to an even more segregated Berkeley. It's horrible."

Now Graham is gathering signatures to prevent the Cragmont school site committee's recommendation to build a pre-K-5 language arts magnet school at its former location in the hills. The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake damaged both Cragmont and Columbus schools, which joined together as a K-6 at the Franklin school site in the flatlands. The kindergarten structure was deemed safe and still operates at the old hill site. Graham said the Cragmont committee has not made a good-faith effort to include Cragmont parents who live in South and West Berkeley in its decision.

"We argue that insufficient outreach was done when the committee

notes sent home with students, PTA memos, and to some extent the media.

"Something as important as that, they should have done something to catch my attention, made it pink, yellow, bold letters, something," said West Berkeley resident and Cragmont parent Sharon Shaifer. "I went back through all my papers and all it says is, 'This meeting is to develop a school configuration model for BUSD to present to the school organization task force.' What does that mean? It should say that if you have a child such-and-such an age who will be attending Cragmont, we're discussing rebuilding the schools and changing integration, and you will be affected."

"I'd say our meetings at Emerson were 90 percent white; there were some blacks in the group, but I don't know where they lived," Marla Wilson said.

According to Measure A facilitator Jim Masters, "with a few exceptions," his review of the racial composition of the site committees' membership looks "pretty good."

"This is exactly the right kind of problem to have," Masters said. "Now that these important issues are coming up, some of the other parents are coming into the process for the first time and expanding the debate."

But will "other parents" be given enough time to expand the debate before the Feb. 3 deadline?

After the site committees make their reports to Superintendent Steele, she is expected to forward her report to the school board in February, Chakos said, which will then make the final decision.

"We'll be seeing bulldozers in '93 for sure," Chakos said. "And as far as changing the grade configurations, we expect to see a certain

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EDITORIALS

Selling California cheap

GOVERNOR PETE Wilson just launched another year's campaign to move full speed backward with the losing strategy of Reaganomics that has already undermined the national and state economies.

Desperately offering to sell California for less and less, Wilson is undermining the resources that once made California attractive to investment: an educated work force and a strong infrastructure.

The trade-off is direct: Two of his proposed business tax breaks (the research and development credit and the net operating loss carry-over) add up to \$355 million, while the proposed cut to universities totals \$350 million. (Education, of course, takes additional major hits at the community college and K-12 levels.)

The tax breaks are more likely to enrich the wealthy than to build the economy. Because state and local taxes add up to less than 2 percent of the cost of doing business — and are mostly deductible from federal taxes anyway — such breaks are unlikely to affect business decisions.

The crumbling state education system, on the other hand, is definitely hurting the economy — from high-tech industry to garment shops — by increasing training costs and limiting the supply of skilled workers, as business leaders told the Assembly Democratic Economic Prosperity Team last year.

Cuts in other children's services also undermine the quality of the future work force, as well as imposing costly burdens on

the state budget. As funds for child-abuse prevention were slashed, for example, incidents of child abuse increased — and the state spent billions on foster care, health care, and incarceration for the young victims.

Wilson says the weak state economy requires these budget cuts. It is, rather, the weakness of the political will to tap into the wealth held by high-income individuals and big corporations, and to reform the self-defeating tax system foisted on California by the tax-cutting movement in the form of Prop. 13 and the Gann limit.

While public health politicians prepare to enact the budget-crisis rerun, however, advocacy groups are growing in political and organizational sophistication, as Jean Tepperman reports on Page 10: They are pushing for a new approach to the state budget.

Steve Barrow of the Sacramento-based Children's Advocacy Institute explains: "Now they say: 'Here's the revenue, here's the program, how much can we pay for? There are 100,000 children at risk and our program reaches 20,000. But this year we can only afford to help 19,000.'"

"Instead," Barrow says, "we should make a three- or four- or five-year plan about how we can get to 100,000. We need to identify the needs, figure out what it takes to meet them, and make a plan."

As for this year, we must call on legislators to reject Wilson's cuts in health, education, and welfare, and come up with the progressive revenue measures needed to stem further erosion in the quality of Californians' lives.

Don't abandon desegregation

THE BERKELEY UNIFIED School District seems poised to reconfigure the grade structure of its elementary schools, abandoning its K-3, 4-6 structure in favor of a K-5 or K-6 neighborhood plan. But what the BUSD is really

meeting for six months, we think the school system isn't really thinking through the long-term consequences of its actions. Most of the plans being generated by the committees don't squarely address the question of desegregation, as if it is not important enough to take

SCHOOLS

FROM PAGE 17

amount of change in the fall of '94."

But even critics of the neighborhood schools plan admit the shortcomings of the current system.

"A lot of the black parents in my neighborhood favor a K-5 system too, and I can't blame them," Graham said. "Of course they want schools of their own; what are they getting out of the current system? It's much harder to band together, organize, and fight to make integration work in the current situation."

And they worry that integration is losing priority as a goal in Berkeley schools.

"There are a lot of integration issues that go with reconfiguration that I don't hear being discussed," said Dr. Howard Pinderhughes, a race relations expert with UC Berkeley's Institute for Social Change. "Our schools are perceived as failing by both blacks and whites, so it's true that the primary concern should be quality education for kids."

"Quality education used to be going to school in an integrated environment," Pinderhughes said. "And while it still is for many, I think ... integration has moved down the list."

While many people argue that busing is no longer needed because Berkeley is "naturally integrated," a study of several education models for Berkeley schools by the Superintendent's Office compared a map of BUSD's 15 attendance areas with the 1990 census and found: "There are two Berkeley elementary schools which ... would be naturally integrated and four that would be relatively integrated. In contrast, there are seven schools in which neighborhood attendance, almost no matter how the boundaries of the 'neighborhood' were drawn, would fall outside most mathematical defi-

nitions of an integrated school" (see chart).

But many of the site committees' K-5 scenarios gloss over the desegregation issues. BUSD has come up with a set of computerized maps showing different school attendance boundaries. After calculating that there are not enough students to turn all of Berkeley's elementary schools into K-5 schools, the models present a series of tables and numbers as ways to maintain an average 61 percent utilization in all the elementary schools. The only mention of integration is a vague one-liner: "The additional students would have to be acquired by either a choice system or by zoned busing."

A couple of proposals suggest an open enrollment that would cap off one ethnic group when it reached desired capacity, using special programs, themes, magnets, and other gimmicks to create a racial balance. Another suggests doing away with school boundaries entirely and dividing Berkeley into two school zones by a diagonal line from the northeast to the southwest. Buses making the rounds of all the schools could carry kids from the school closest to their home to the school of their choice. School choice would be maintained as long as students stayed on their side of the line. Again, no one knows how the schools could keep from self-segregating.

"I could see something like certain kids will be allowed to go to their neighborhood hill school, and those that aren't will just go to private school, which frankly is not much different from what we have going on now," Pinderhughes said. "I haven't made up my mind as to which system is best, but I question scrapping a system that hasn't been given a chance to work and moving to another that has the potential of losing ground in terms of integration and race relations." ●

busing) plan that's been in place since 1968. A plan many parents from the hills never liked anyway.

By moving away from busing and back to the neighborhood schools of the '50s, Berkeley school officials are saying that integration is no longer a goal, no longer a priority, in the school system. That is a tragic miscalculation.

If the experiences of the past few years — the Rodney King rebellion, the clashes in Bensonhurst and Crown Heights, the Tawana Brawley affair — have taught us anything, it is that race relations is at least as important as any of the three other R's (reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic) for the world of the 21st century.

In a country that is increasingly multicultural and multiracial, in a state where there will be no majority population very soon, learning to get along with people who look different will be crucial to getting along in society, and to society getting along.

To put children into classrooms segregated artificially by neighborhood will put them at a disadvantage in a world where their parents won't get to pick who they'll work with or live next door to. Instead of teaching children to avoid people different from themselves, parents — and school board members — should be teaching them that differences are to be welcomed, cherished, accepted, and, most of all, are inevitable.

Even though site committees have been

People who strongly oppose reconfiguring the schools believe they have already lost that fight, and that the real battle is to make sure that, no matter how the grades are reconfigured, desegregation is not one of the casualties.

But it's not really surprising that these committees have decided to scrap the mandatory busing plan. Many busing plans have been court-ordered anyway, and Berkeley has been somewhat unique in having voluntarily desegregated. If busing in Berkeley is dismantled, the city may ironically be one of the last to be sued to force it to desegregate.

Besides lots of grumbling, not much has been done to change the plan since 1968 because it meant rethinking Berkeley's entire educational system. When Measure A was passed last year, providing \$168 million to repair school structures, the opportunity for that rethinking finally presented itself. It meant the school board had the chance to decide which schools would be repaired, what new facilities would be in each school, and, in the end, what students would be in each school.

This is an opportunity that is not likely to present itself again any time soon, and the school board had better make sure it comes up with a plan that is going to work — our children will be stuck with it for many years to come.

Projected Enrollment in Neighborhood Schools

School		White	Black	Asian	Hisp	Oth'r
Cragmont	Actual	109	8	5	13	19
	Desired	50	59	12	16	15
Emerson	Actual	70	9	18	6	22
	Desired	40	48	9	13	12
Jefferson	Actual	120	56	17	21	20
	Desired	76	89	18	25	23
Le Conte	Actual	118	100	33	24	38
	Desired	102	120	24	33	31
Oxford	Actual	92	1	17	4	12
	Desired	41	48	9	13	12
Arts	Actual	125	52	36	5	28
	Desired	80	94	19	26	25
Washington	Actual	84	122	35	23	47
	Desired	101	119	24	33	31
Thousand Oaks	Actual	95	4	10	4	14
	Desired	41	48	9	13	12
John Muir	Actual	96	5	4	4	18
	Desired	41	48	9	13	12
Longfellow	Actual	31	298	18	49	27
	Desired	137	162	32	45	43
Malcolm X	Actual	49	305	16	32	37
	Desired	143	168	34	47	45
Columbus	Actual	76	194	33	102	45
	Desired	146	172	35	48	46
Franklin	Actual	58	169	25	85	32
	Desired	120	141	28	39	37

Source: Berkeley Unified School District Superintendent's Office, January 1993