

THE BUSD "STATUS QUO"

Arguments For and Against the Current Configuration and Student Assignment Method

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DEFINITION OF "STATUS QUO"

Objectives

- 1) Each school is desegregated. Operationally this means maintaining the same proportions of white and of black students in each school within a margin of plus or minus 5 per cent.
- 2) The "burden" of bussing does not fall overwhelmingly on one racial group.

The 1968 Solution

- 1) Assignment of students to school is by zone.
- 2) The grade configuration is split into a K-3 component located in buildings to the east, and a 4-6 component located in buildings to the west. It is served by "two-way" bussing.

ARGUMENTS FOR

- 1. The status quo fulfils its two objectives.** It desegregates the schools. It distributes the burden of bussing.
- 2. The status quo is in place and it is known.** A district-wide change would be chaotic. It would upset the results of years of concerted effort by principals, staffs and parents. The cost of the change is unknown. Such change would be justified only if it could be convincingly shown to correct significant faults in the current system. This burden of proof is upon those proposing change.
- 3. The current configuration has an educational rationale.** Small, intimate schools are available to young children; a series of graduated transitions to successively larger, more challenging environments greet children as they grow through the system.
- 4. The concentrating of children at three 4-6 schools allows the concentrating of resources.** An un-wealthy school district can afford much better enrichment programs at three 4-6 schools than it could offer at twelve K-5 schools. This is true for concentration and breadth of library, music, computer and other enrichment programs.
- 5. The K-3 grade configuration allows more classes per grade level at K-3 site.** For example, Le Conte now has three classes per grade. As a K-5 it would have two. This offers a greater choice of teachers. It allows more opportunity for cooperation among teachers of each grade.

6. Most schools function to some degree as neighborhood schools. Each school is attended by most of the children of its grade level living within its vicinity. The parents of these children are pleased by this, and this facilitates schools' function as centers of neighborhood community.

7. It is probably cheaper than the alternatives. *(The cost of alternative systems is not actually known.)*

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

1. The racial composition currently varies widely from school to school. The balance can only be adjusted by re-zoning, a clumsy and unpopular method.

(The unbalance occurs partly as a result of the great number of within-district transfers.)

2. About 1/3 of Berkeley students are transferring to a school other than that of their zone. This figure includes those attending Arts Magnet and John Muir. The system also encourages cheating - the misreporting of addresses. This amounts to a system of choice for those who are informed and adept enough to take advantage of it. So the status quo, in operation, is a blend of zones and choice.

(This undermines the current system. However, Arts and Muir are part of the current system, reflecting that the district long ago conceded some need for choice.)

3. Many people exit the system at grade 4. The two-way bussing / desegregation "pact" between K-3 and 4-6 neighborhoods is broken at grade 4. Many parents exit to private school when it is their turn to put their kids on the bus. This undermines the fairness of the current system.

(What are the factors leading to this decision by parents? Are their perceptions based upon reality, misinformation or personal biases?)

4. The present system has "driven" 1/4 of the school population into private school.

(But should the system be blamed for this? Is the exodus caused by the current system, or is it a consequence of Berkeley's commitment to city-wide, uniform desegregation?)

5. The grade 3 to grade 4 transition is difficult for children, many parents complain.

(The complaint may be exaggerated by parent anxiety. Children seem more comfortable with the change than are their parents. However, the 3-4 transition can be improved. It can be eased by keeping peers together, by more outreach from 4-6 to K-3, etc.)

6. The 4-6 schools are too large.

(Malcolm X probably is too large. It is nearly as big as a junior high, which violates the ideal of graduated transitions.)

7. The number of transitions between kindergarten and 12th grade, three, is too many. Parents must change their affiliation to schools several times as their children grow. Parents of several children may have to divide their attention among three different schools.

8. The 7th-8th grade piece of the configuration is too short. Two years at one school is not enough for parent engagement with the school or for optimal student engagement with the school community.

9. Whether integration has improved their children's education some black parents question. The price of K-3 integration has been the removal of young black children from their neighborhoods. Provided that schools can be guaranteed equal resources, some black parents would prefer less-integrated, neighborhood schools over the present far-away, highly-integrated schools.

10. Many parents cannot get to the far-away schools to which their children are bussed. Parents need to travel to the schools in case of children's illness, for teacher conferences, or to help in the classroom. Some parents do not have cars available to them, and public transit does not offer convenient routes.

(There used to be district-provided transportation for parents with a need.)