

REDEDICATING OURSELVES TO RACIAL EQUITY
 "RENEW OUR WEDDING VOWS"

The Berkeley Plan An Elaboration on BUSD's "New Zones"

Below is a more detailed look at how and why many parents think the "new zones" (NZ) plan is the configuration that the board should adopt on December 15. The group of people who have discussed this kept in mind several things when evaluating the various proposals:

- shorten bus rides
- improve integration (racial, economic, cultural)
- shared busing
- possible to implement relatively quickly and with as little disruption as possible
- improve the situation for schools disrupted by closures due to safety (Columbus/Cragmont)
- reduce costs of busing so state money could be used for centralized registration
- limit impact at schools with successful programs

This plan does not satisfy everyone—No plan will do that. But we think that this plan has EQUITY, Certain schools or areas are not favored with shorter bus rides or different configurations, thus reducing the rancor that exists between schools now. It respects to a large degree the historical connections between school neighborhoods, respects the hard work teachers have put in at each site.

Overview of District NZ Plan

The city is divided into three broad zones—the Northwest, Central and the Southeast. The grade configuration remains similar to the way it is now—nine small K-3 programs feeding into three 4-6 schools. Junior High and High School can remain the same (see below for suggestion to add a third 7-8 at West Campus). Each large zone would be divided into smaller attendance areas that determine exactly which K-3 children will attend. Each zone has three K-3 schools and one 4-6.

North Zone: (K-3) Jefferson, Columbus and Cragmont. (4-6) Thousand Oaks

(There are some particularities about the north zone that are discussed further below)

Central Zone: (K-3) Oxford, Whittier, Washington. (4-6) Longfellow

South Zone: (K-3) LeConte, Emerson, Muir. (4-6) Malcolm X

Each of the large zones are relatively similar to the areas currently feeding these schools, but they are not exactly the same. The shifts were made to ensure racial balance and to shorten bus trips. All zones are within the plus or minus 5% target set by the district. (The north zone looks like it could be slightly under enrolled in African American children, but the model proposed has not accounted for the influx of Latino children who need bilingual programs. The concentration of these kids will skew our balance (rightly so) at the bilingual program school(s). For instance, the southern portion of the current Cragmont neighborhood attendance zones would be in the Central Zone and go to Oxford, a section of the far southwest area of the current Columbus neighborhood attendance areas would also now be in the central zone and also go to Oxford for K-3 and Longfellow for 4-6.

Views on Implementation

We need to consider each zone one by one to see how and if this plan will work.

North

The districts current plan for the north includes two schools that currently don't physically exist (Cragmont and Columbus), and doesn't include Franklin which houses the 1-5 graders from those two schools.

Columbus and TO are in the process of designing their new facilities, but these school will not be opened (at the earliest) until the fall of 1996. The School Board wants to find money to rebuild Cragmont but the feasibility study has yet to be completed and the money has yet to be secured to fund the project. So Cragmont couldn't open much earlier than 1998.

We feel strongly that for any reconfiguration to work it must address the interim situation in the north area. Cragmont is starting its fourth year at a temporary school. Columbus its third. It will be three more years, at least, before Columbus is reopened. And longer than that for Cragmont.

We suggest that instead of having attendance areas in the north zone, we institute a **choice** system for the parents. Thousand Oaks would remain a K-3, and Franklin would transition to be the 4-6 after Columbus opens as the K-3. This would mean that current Cragmont attendance area parents (ones that are still in the north zone) could choose TO, Jefferson or Columbus. (Those in the central zone would be zoned for Oxford). The same would go for all the parents in the TO, Jefferson and Columbus neighborhoods. When Cragmont is rebuilt, Franklin could be shut down, TO take over the 4-6 program and Cragmont reopen as a K-3. The attendance areas proposed by the district for the north zone could then be implemented. We think the cost to administer choice in one area would not be too prohibitive and is a better solution than setting up temporary attendance areas for the time being and then changing them year down the line. As long as TO is rebuilt with kindergarten rooms (which we believe the board want to do anyway so the schools are flexible) it would be perfectly functional as a K-3 and able to later function as a 4-6.

Another big change for the north is the addition of Jefferson. This makes sense in terms of busing, and it puts Jefferson back in the area it was originally zones into in 1968 (it was moved to Malcolm only after the school shutdowns of 1983).

The last big change for the north is changing Columbus from the 4-6 to a K-3. None of the K-3's are located in south or west Berkeley and many parents like the idea of having some of these areas kids be able to go to early primary nearer to their home. The district is also leading the way to implement integrated social services at school site. Columbus would be perfect for this type of program given the neighborhood it is located in. These type of services are much more beneficial to the children and their families if they are offered closer to home and right at the start of school education.

Middle zone

The big change here is Whittier's grade configuration and district-wide magnet status. We propose Whittier become a K-3 that retains its arts program. The 4-6 component of the arts program moves en masse to Longfellow and continues. Although Whittier loses some of the cohesiveness of being a K-6 (everybody else would like that too), this new configuration could actually expand the successful programs to serve more Berkeley kids: the Whittier building would expand the number of K-3 classrooms once the 4-6 leaves. And the 4-6 program could serve more kids at Longfellow if this was what was wanted by the school community (as Longfellow is rehabilitated or rebuilt with Measure A money, a performing arts component could be designed into the facility). Eliminating district-wide magnet substantially decreases the money spent on busing. This configuration will also eliminate the racial and economic imbalance currently at Magnet (which negatively impacts all the other K-3's in the city. Magnet currently has less than 1% AFDC families enrolled. It is roughly 9% overenrolled with whites and roughly 12% underenrolled with African American children.)

Oxford, Longfellow and Washington remain the way they are. Washington does not become a K-5 as is their desire, but nobody else gets that favored configuration either. Longfellow picks up some students (it has plenty of space), and gains a specialty program (arts) similar to the way Malcolm X

now has the Gilbert & Sullivan, Shakespear, and music programs.

South

This zone loses Jefferson as a K-3 feeder school to Malcolm. They will be missed but the John Muir children will make this up. Muir is a smaller school than Jefferson which is just as well since Malcolm is slightly overenrolled currently. Muir has never been big enough (classrooms) to be a true K-6 with 2 classes at each grade level. This change would eliminate the problem.

Problems

The biggest problem we see in implementing this plan is the fact that Berkeley only has two Junior High Schools and three 4-6 schools. This means that kids that have been in school together for several years are sent to different 7-8 programs. It is awkward and disruptive.

Food for Thought—Improving the 7-8 programs

A slight modification of New Zones would be to make West Campus into a **third** 7-8 for the central zone. This would mean the 7-8's are smaller and more cohesive. It also means that kids will go to school together with the same group from 4th through 8th grade—each 4-6 would have its "own" 7-8 to feed. Instead of just improving the linkages between the K-3 schools and the 4-6 schools, we could also really be able to improve the connection between the 4-6 and junior high years.

West Campus was built as a junior high, it has a field, a pool, and a large site. It would need to be upgraded with its Measure A money for safety and to bring it up to current standards.

The draw backs are that it costs more to open and operate a new site and the BSEP money would be split three ways instead of two. A new home would need to be found for the Adult school which is currently housed at West Campus.

Strengths of The Berkeley Plan

The focus of this plan is to reunite neighborhood/school communities. Each zone is now *contiguous* and can focus on *developing relationships between the linked schools and neighborhoods*.

We can renew our pledge to have truly *integrated* (not just desegregated) schools. We led the way in 1968, it is now time to take the next step toward high achievement for all our children. Each zone has a mix of ethnic, cultural and economic constitutes. All school will benefit from each groups' input.

This plan expands some existing successful programs (Arts) and leaves intact others (Emerson, Malcolm X, Jefferson, Oxford, Washington, TO, etc.). It sets the stage for improving the situation at schools that have been severely disrupted by closures (Columbus/Cragmont) and gives those parents and families a better short term solution than is in place now.

Busing costs could be significantly reduced by eliminating the two district wide magnet programs and grouping schools by geographical proximity. These savings could be applied towards setting up the much needed central registration/parent information center.

The integration targets can be more easily met over the years with larger zones (less prone to demographic shifts).

This plan would be fairly easy to implement since it relies heavily on the strengths of our current system. Children would be grandfathered into their current school, but as soon as the district set up their central registration, zones could begin implementation.

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Here are the notes typed up from our meeting last night. Please let me know anything I have left out, things that are unclear, or stuff that shouldn't go in. Mention of typos is also always appreciated.

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