

# Berkeley Unified School District

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**SUPERINTENDENT**  
LaVoneia C. Steele, Ed.D.

December 16, 1993

Dear Parent:

Last night the Board of Education unanimously approved the concept of a new grade configuration plan and school assignment system for our schools that I believe offers far more educational benefits for our students than the current K-3, 4-6, 7-8 system.

The new plan calls for the creation of eleven K-5 schools and three middle schools divided among three residential zones. As the map is currently drawn, schools are located in the following zones:

In the North Zone: Columbus, Jefferson, Thousand Oaks, and Cragmont will become K-5 schools; King Junior High will become a middle school for grades 6-8.

In The South Zone: LeConte, Emerson, John Muir, and Malcolm X will become K-5 schools; Willard Junior will become a middle school for grades 6-8.

In the Central Zone: Oxford, Washington, and Whittier will become K-5 schools.

There are several possible sites for a middle school in the Central Zone, including Longfellow, East Campus, and West Campus, but that decision has not been made. Over the next two months District staff will be looking at these possibilities as well as developing more detailed plans for the transition to this new system.

Under this new plan students will attend a K-5 school within their residential zone, based on maintaining racial and ethnic balance in each school. A decision has yet to be made on whether or not middle school students will be able to attend schools outside their zone.

As you can see, there will be major changes, but I want to assure you that they will not occur overnight; most children, in fact, will remain in the schools in which they are currently enrolled. District staff will return to the Board in March with a detailed implementation plan. No grade configuration changes will occur before September, 1995.

As you probably know, we will be rebuilding and renovating many of our school buildings over the next eight years with Measure A funds, and the construction schedule will affect the implementation of the K-5/6-8 system.

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There are many reasons we have chosen a new grade configuration for our schools. Among the most important are maximizing student achievement and enhancing integration.

Currently, our student achievement levels are not where we wish them to be; test scores for minority students are too low. Nor are our schools as well integrated as they will be under the new plan.

Our principals and most of our teachers believe changing our grade configuration will improve our students' academic achievement. They believe the transition between grades five and six is better than between grades three and four. Likewise, the three-year middle school provides more time for teachers and staff to get to know their pupils at a crucial time in their educational and social development.

In addition, this plan:

- Allows students to remain in one elementary school longer which fosters greater parental involvement;
- Shortens the amount of time students spend on buses;
- And, places two schools for younger children (Malcolm X and Columbus) in south and west Berkeley, enabling Kindergartners in those areas to attend school in their neighborhood.

I am sure many of you have questions, and in the months to come you will receive more details, including maps of the three zones. I am very excited about the possibilities this plan provides for collaboration among schools within each zone, and for the educational benefits it offers our children.

I also would like to thank the hundreds of parents who have helped us come to this decision, who have served on a task force or site committee, who have hosted house meetings, and who have given up their Saturdays to join us at workshops. Public schools belong to the public and they need the support and creative input of everyone in our community.

I wish you a very happy holiday season and look forward to a productive and exciting 1994.

My very best wishes to you and your family.

Sincerely,



LaVoneia C. Steele, Ed.D.

Superintendent

LCS/la