

To: Superintendent McLaughlin, Vice-Superintendent Spaeth, School Board Members  
Date: March 7, 1995  
From: Bruce Wicinas

cc: Nancy Greenman, Bob Tryon, Kathryn James

## Re: **Status of School Assignment Software and Student Choice Data**

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The choice assignment cannot proceed without decisions on the following.

### Immediate Decisions required:

1. **The grade configuration: School capacities by grade level.** The exact capacity figures are required for the final, binding run of the software. I want to receive a copy of the numbers signed by the Superintendents and by each Board Member.
2. **"Grandfathering": Where to draw the line.** "Grandfathering" and racial balance are starkly at odds at some sites. The numbers appear to indicate that we must "bump" some number of attending students from their sites.
3. **Strategy for dealing with the onslaught of insincere applications from non-BUSD parents.** I never expected the number of Berkeley resident applications at any grade level to exceed the district's entire grade level capacity. This is what has happened, however. I need a strategy for dealing with this. Do we grossly over-book some schools? A poor approach to this will undermine the validity of the whole assignment process.
4. **Proximity Preference** Is there to be a proximity preference of any kind? If so it must be quickly chosen, so that the work of detecting and flagging the affected children can begin.

### Finish Date

I strongly recommend that we slip the March 15 date a couple of days.

- a. The prerequisite decisions, listed above, need more than casual consideration.
- b. In several respects, the data is not fully ready.
- c. Not all the details of the software are working.
- d. I have not finished studying the behavior of the software to my own satisfaction.  
It has yet to be examined by anyone besides me.

### Status

We are all under time pressure. The District is committed to the March 15 date. However, much more rests upon the quality of the outcome than upon making the date.

This project is extremely complex. This is our first time. We are now in the midst of a necessary period of trial and error. Nevertheless, we want the outcome to contain as few errors as possible.

Correcting the data took substantially longer than we had budgeted. Writing the program that detects errors and automatically zones the children took me much longer

than I expected. As of this moment I have about 95% of the data we anticipate having (which is about 90% of resident students). The last 5% will take a couple of more days.

The software contains many mechanisms. All must run perfectly:

- 1) The task of random assignment to schools based upon first, second and third choices has become only the core of what the software does. (This is all I thought I signed on for!)
- 2) The software handles the Board's hierarchy of five priorities.
- 3) It handles "grandfathering," in more than one way.
- 4) It handles siblings, in more than one way.
- 5) The software uses the student's address to automatically identify each child's zone.
- 6) Zoning consists of three different schemes: the three K-5 zones, no zone for 6th, and Williard-King zones for 7th.
- 7) The software automatically detects siblings using parent phone number, because the District's Student Information System has no way of recording the sibling connection.
- 8) Applicants to grade 6 and to grade 7 are processed in a manner that differs from that of K-5.
- 9) The software must exclude LEP student from random selection while saving capacity for them.
- 10) It must include non-resident children of district employees while excluding other non-resident applicants.
- 11) The program must be specially instructed about 8th grade siblings Williard/King 8th graders because their records are not included in our runs.
- 12) The program must prepare a waiting list.
- 13) The program produces a assignment chronology to allow humans to check its function.
- 14) The software will produce statistics describing the outcome of its assignments.
- 15) Finally, the software must feed the outcome to a "mail-merge" program of an outside mass mailing contractor, via a means yet to be determined.

This complexity means not only that there was a lot to write, but that there is a lot to check. The program is now only slightly incomplete. Its validation is still grossly incomplete.

### Responsibility

The Board and the Administration must be comfortable with taking responsibility for this process and its outcome. You must allow yourselves the time to know what's going on. We must be allowed enough time to achieve accuracy.