

# Most get Berkeley school of their choice

By Mary Rajkumar  
STAFF WRITER

BERKELEY — The first assignments under Berkeley's controversial new school choice system came out Friday. And they might help parents like the system because most got what they chose.

Almost 90 percent of students who submitted their forms by the February deadline got into their first-choice school, according to the Berkeley Unified School District. Another 6 percent got into their second-choice school, and 2 percent to their third choice.

The assignments were posted at Berkeley schools Friday, to the relief of many parents who stopped by. Others are still waiting to receive their children's school assignments in the mail.

Friday's assignments were one of the first steps in the school district's transition to a new system this fall. The system will replace Berkeley's three-decade-old tradition of pairing schools in different neighborhoods and busing children to them, which once made headlines nationwide as a model for racial integration.

After years of debate, Berkeley is now overhauling its school district to a new system with new attendance boundaries and grade configurations. For the first time, parents can also choose the school they want their child to attend.

The choice system will be phased in this year by "grandfathering" as many students at their current schools as possible. Parental choice will also be balanced by a complex formula for maintaining racial integration at each school. This year's

results suggest the new system will improve racial integration at most schools, according to the school district.

The overhaul at first stirred uproar among many parents. But many are now resigned to the changes, and are working instead to "sell" their school under the new choice system.

Malcolm X parent Clio Tarazi was one of the strongest opponents of the new system, which would change Malcolm X from a middle school with grades four through six to an elementary school with kindergarten through grade five. Tarazi feared that Malcolm X might get left out under a system of parental choice because it is located in a largely minority neighborhood in the Berkeley flatlands.

So the school went on a publicity

campaign, putting out a \$2,000 brochure about its well-established arts program. It worked, with enough families picking Malcolm X as their first choice to fill most classes.

Now it's up to Malcolm X to make its new program work, Tarazi said.

"By hook or by crook, we're going to make it work," she said. "We're not rolling over."

Longfellow parent Peggy Seals also fought against the new system, which would change Longfellow from an elementary to a middle school. Seals was still waiting Friday to get her child's assignment in the mail.

But she said that the fact that almost 90 percent of parents got their first choice was a good sign.

"It's a good thing, as long as the (other) 11 percent don't all come from Longfellow," she said.