REPORT OF THE STUDENT ASSIGNMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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T0:   Board of Education

FROM: Student Assignment Advisory Committee

PREPARED BY: Student Assignment Advisory Committee

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Summary

The Student Assignment Committee met a total of 8 times between February 27th and June 5th. Our goals were to continue our study of alternative assignment plans and focus more extensively on two avenues for strengthening the current assignment plan: disaggregating the "Other Ethnicity" category and developing a list of criteria for studying school site equity. The committee also followed the student assignment process as it unfolded for the 2001/2002 school year. The following report is an update on the Committees findings thusfar.

Alternative plans:

Magnet School Assignment Plan

The magnet school assignment process was studied with data supplied to the committee during the May 15th meeting. The Student Assignment Committee was able to reach consensus only on one point: that the geographical band map, upon which the magnet assignment system is based, is outdated and an unreliable indicator for locating diversity and housing trends in the city of Berkeley. The results of the 2000 census and socio-economic statistics were not available in time for the Committee to analyze them. It is likely that this information will require reevaluation of the band map. Committee members believe that gentrification and soaring housing prices may make any neighborhood-based desegregation plan unreliable in the long term.

The suggestion was made to add a section to the preference forms in which parents would indicate their economic status by checking off a range of incomes into which they fall. However, the Committee believes it is doubtful that parents would provide this information voluntarily and reliably, and that verifying this information would be overly intrusive.

The fundamental question to be answered with respect to any assignment system based on socio-economic status or income is whether socio-economic diversity is a desired goal irrespective of race. Is socio-economic isolation damaging in the way that racial isolation certainly can be? The Committee has continued to regard race as the dominant issue.

Staggered Assignment System

Following a suggestion from a community member at an April committee meeting, the Committee explored another alternative option. The idea was based on the assumption that more white parents tend to apply for kindergarten during first round of preference forms, while African-American and Latino families tend to apply later in the assignment process. The staggered assignment plan would operate as follows: all students who register before a pre-determined date are assigned according to their choices, without regard to their race. Until this date all schools are allowed to fill to only a fraction of their capacity, leaving the same fraction of unfilled capacity at each school. All students who apply later in the assignment process are proportionally distributed among all schools without regard to race OR to choices submitted. This staggered assignment plan was studied, but the data needs further analysis before any conclusions can be drawn.

School Site Equity

Based upon positive feedback from the Board, the Committee embarked on the further study of school site equity this past spring. We asked ourselves: what does school site equity mean? Why is it important? How do we develop assessment criteria? What follows is a brief discussion of our studies thus far.

Discussion: Equitable or Equal?

What is school site equity? Our Committee spent a great deal of time brainstorming what we meant and, more importantly, what we did not mean by equity. In considering the issue of equity, what quickly became clear was that we did not mean equal. By programmatic, thematic and architectural design our schools *are* different. The introduction of the District's "Guide to the Berkeley Public Schools" states "while all of our schools have the same strong core curriculum, each of them is unique". The community value of diversity permeates through out our schools. There is no interest in cookie cutter one-size-fits-all programs.

Shifting away from the precise concept of "equal" schools, the Committee focused instead on the concept of school site equity. The sense here is that each of our middle and elementary schools will likely have different kinds and levels of resources and that they also will have different educational program strengths. However, the goal of the student assignment plan is to place all students in an integrated environment to ensure equal assess to a strong core curriculum, enriched learning experiences, and individual, community, social and educational resources that promote success in a rapidly changing multi-cultural society. Therefore, it is crucial to have not only integrated sites but sites that overall have equitably (fairly) distributed human, environmental and financial resources.

Why is Equity Important?

As more fully discussed in our December 6th, 2000 report to the Board, the existence of school site equity in Berkeley strengthens our Student Assignment Plan in the face of a fluctuating legal environment. It is a "compelling governmental interest" of the Berkeley Unified School District to reduce, eliminate or prevent the negative effects of racial isolation. The Committee concluded that our current plan is narrowly tailored to meet this compelling interest and that one of the core reasons for this is that our current system uses race in an even-handed fashion that does not advantage or disadvantage any individuals or groups unequally because of their race. Even if a student does not get his or her first choice, the alternate assignment will provide an equally valuable educational experience. There is no risk of exclusion from a superior program (as was the case with Lowell High School). Our current plan is race-conscious but not race preferential. Our assignment plan considers race but ultimately impacts all races equally. All kids are reshuffled and distributed to basically equitable schools. Everyone is affected equally and there is no burden placed on one group. The challenge here, of course, is to make sure that our schools are and remain equitable.

School site equity is not only legally important but it is also a moral imperative. It is the expectation of the community and the responsibility of the District to ensure that every child has equal access to a good education. While every site will have different strengths it is never acceptable to let an entire site languish such that the children are educationally disadvantaged.

Okay, School Site Equity is Important. So How Do We Define, Monitor and Maintain Equity?

Rather than engaging in lengthy theoretical discussions regarding equity measurements, our Committee spent several meetings brainstorming a list of potential areas of study for assessing equity. We broke the list down into core areas as follows: student population characteristics, parent/family characteristics, programs on site, geographical/physical traits of the campus, teaching staff/ administrative staff, and funding. See Appendix A.

Data was collected for several of the list items and briefly presented to the committee. We are very thankful to Cathy James, Bruce Wicinas and Francisco Martinez for the amazing amount of data that they collected and compiled for our review. Although we have a lot more data collection and study ahead of us, we have already learned more about our schools and their differences. Perhaps the most important thing that we have learned so far is that in several cases the data does not support long held "folklore" surrounding certain sites and patterns. Lesson learned – don't assume!

Caution

If criteria are identified to evaluate schools and ensure comparability then the next step is for the BUSD Administration to assess each site and analyze the results. The school board must then review this analysis. If a site is bursting with strengths then the Administration and the Board must strive to understand what is going right at that school and how could that success be shared with other schools. If, on the other hand, a school is obviously languishing then the Board must do more than review and accept a report. Action must be taken. Appropriate changes and human and/or financial resources must be identified to strengthen the site.

"Other Ethnicity" Category

The Current Situation

Currently, BUSD recognizes three groups for student assignment purposes: White, African-American and "Other Ethnicity." Each group should encompass at least 25% of the student population in order to be considered separately. Those groups that have not reached the 25% threshold are grouped in the "Other Ethnicity" category. This Other category currently includes Latinos, Asians, Interracial, Filipino, and Native

American students. The two largest sub groups in this category are Latino and Interracial.

Analysis

       The Committee spent several sessions on this issue. The Committee focussed its analysis on the 2000/2001 kindergarten class.

       The "Other Ethnicity" category has reached over 40% at 8 out of 12 Berkeley elementary schools. Latino students make up the majority of the Other category, and comprise over 25% of the school population, in 4 out of 12 schools. All 4 schools, however, have Spanish immersion or bilingual programs, which require a proportion of Spanish-speaking students. When the Committee studied these 4 school populations apart from these special programs, the number of Latino students at the sites not longer stood out. In fact, if the remaining students were further scattered it could potentially leave too few Latino students to place in regular classrooms at the 4 sites, and put those students at risk of feeling isolated in their classrooms. It might prove impossible to create a threshold even as high as 15% across all schools without drawing students away from these popular Spanish-language-based programs.

       The category of "interracial" accounts for over 15% of the kindergarten class in 9 out of 12 schools. Interracial children are fairly well scattered throughout the district and no school stands out as having a higher population of this group.

       Pulling out interracial children from the "Other Ethnicity" category, and making it a separate group, would effect the next largest populations – Asian and Latino –as well. For instance, if the District-wide kindergarten percentage of "Other" is 44% and the percentage of interracial students is 15%, a school could have as high as 44% of interracial students and still be consistent with the District-wide percentages for the three identified groups (African-American, white and Other). However, if separate capacities were defined for interracial students, fewer of these students would be assigned to this school and more Asian, Filipino, Native American and Latino students would instead be assigned and effectively increase those populations.

       Currently, students in the Other category are well distributed throughout Berkeley elementary schools, with the exception of schools that have immersion or bilingual programs. Any consideration of change to either the threshold percentage of 25%, or inclusion or exclusion of groups from within the "Other Ethnicity" category, should include a careful study of the effects on smaller populations such as Asian, Filipino, Native American and mainstreamed Latino students. In the Southeast Zone, for example, there are only 13 Asian kindergartners. Does it make sense to proportionally assign them among the schools? If there are two Mandarin-speaking students in one zone, should they placed at the same school? Should exceptions be made in student assignment for language needs?

Conclusion

       Our committee has more data & information to collect, study and analyze and we have the energy and good will to continue.

The points that the Student Assignment Advisory Committee would like to address with the School Board at this time are:

1. The Student Assignment Advisory Committee requests that it be allowed to reconvene in the fall to continue to assess the data collected and further study the assignment process.
2. Improved communication between this committee and the School Board needs to be established around issues of desegregation in Berkeley schools, so that the Committee might ensure that its process and direction is informed and productive.
3. The Student Assignment Advisory Committee would like to continue its identification of key measurable criteria with which to evaluate school site equity so that the Board has additional tools to monitor sites to help ensure that every child has equal access to a valuable educational experience.
4. The Student Assignment Advisory Committee would like to seek outside consultion and advice to aid us in the gathering and analyzing of data.

Appendix A - List of Potential Areas of Study
For Assessing Equity of BUSD Schools
Prepared by the Student Assignment Committee June 5th, 2001

Student Population Characteristics:
>Gender
>Race

>Socio-economic:
>>Total FRM per Site
>>FRM children %
>>Total AFDC per Site
>>AFDC %

>English Language Learners (ELL) per site
>% ELL children per site # of languages spoken
>Learning disabilities
>Physical disabilities
>Out of District permits
>Caregiver status
>US citizens, immigrants
>Class Size per school
>Class size by grade level
>ADA as a percentage of school population
>Crime statistics per site
>Choice - % of incoming that selected site as their first choice

>Learning readiness – Kindergarten readiness
>>% of incoming Kindergarteners that attended pre-school
>>Kindergarten entrance/placement exam
>>Average age of kindergarteners entering the school by gender

>Suspension/Expulsions:
>># suspensions per school year
>>% suspensions and ethnic breakdown
>># expulsions per school year
>>% expulsions and ethnic breakdown

>Test Scores
>>SAT9 test scores - disaggregated
>>SAT9 test score increases – matched scores

>Transiency of students:

Measure of transiency – % of kids in 5th grade (or highest grade) that entered the school in kindergarten.
% of entering kindergarten class that enrolled in August/September
Is there an attrition pattern at the school that indicates a desire to bail at the end of a certain grade level?

School transit:
    % of kids walking
    % of kids taking school bus
    % of kids driven in individual auto
    % of kids taking mass transit
    Average distance from child's home to school

Parent/Family Characteristics:
ELL parents
Parent education level
Parent Socio-economic
US citizens, immigrants
Number of parents who are BUSD employees per site
Number of parents elected to school board over the last ten years

Household:
    % children living with single parent
    % children living with two parents
    % children living with grandparents or other relative
    % children living with non-relative guardian

PTA meetings per year
Average PTA meeting attendance
Housing patterns – single family home, apartment, etc.

Programs on site:
Grade configuration of school (K-3, K-6, etc.)
Spanish/English Emersion
Bilingual
Chinese Bi-cultural
Magnet school
Distinguished school

On Site After school programs available? What kind?, private or BUSD (examples include After School Learning Programs (ASLP), Extended Day Care (EDC), YMCA Kid's Club, Healthy Start, Etc.)

Nutrition Network
21st Century

SCPP
SNPP
Garden Program
After school music, dance or the arts?
School theme (non magnet school)

Tutoring Resources:
      Cal tutors
      Break the cycle
      Reading recovery FTE per site, per capita
      Classroom volunteers
      Other

Libraries:
      # books in the school library.
      # library books per child.
      # books in the school (including classroom collections).
      # total books in the school per child.
      Total square feet of library
      # square feet per student
      Credentialed librarian?
      # hours library open per week

Technology:
      Computer used for instruction per site
      Computer per student
      Number of classrooms connected to the Internet
      % of classrooms connected to the Internet

Functioning School Government:
      # School Site Council meeting per year
      # BSEP site meetings per year
      # Title I Site Advisory meeting per year
      Proper sign offs on annual site plans?
      Are all school committees fully formed?
      Proper noticing of committees?
      Quorums at meetings?

Geographical/Physical traits of Campus:
      Geographic location of school
      How old is the school building?
      Is all measure A work completed?
      Evaluation of building
      Evaluation of grounds
      Evaluation of playground structures
      Upgraded for ADA compliance?

Maintenance work orders per year
Maintenance work orders open
Building square footage per pupil
Play yard square footage per pupil
Total site acres
Total students per acre
Separate Kindergarten Play yard?
Separate Kindergarten Bathrooms?
Air Quality issues
Noise issues from surrounding business, street traffic
Character of surrounding neighborhood – industrial, residential, mixed use, etc.
Access to mass transit

Teaching staff, Administrative staff:
Diversity of teaching staff
FTE Full credential per site
FTE Full credential per student
University Interns per site
District Interns per site
Pre-Interns per site
FTE Emergency credential per site
FTE on Waiver per site
Experience of teaching staff:
> # of years teaching
> degrees/specialties
> language spoken
> English proficiency of teacher
> # Units completed by teachers

Adults per pupil at each site
What is the character of other adults onsite?
Number of years that the Principal has been at the site

Funding:
General fund budget for site
Title I funds
BSEP (Berkeley Schools Educational Excellence Program) funds
SIP (Site Improvement Program) funds
ELL funds
Federal Magnet Funding
Healthy Start Funds
PTA funds
Technology grants
BPEF (Berkeley Public Education Foundation) grants
In Dulchi Jublio grants
Other Grants
Community business partners?