

# Race Factor in School Placement Policy Under Fire

## *New Census-Based Criteria Proposed*

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The nation's first major school district to voluntarily integrate public schools, Berkeley Unified School District, must now consider eliminating racial preferences, the Board of Education learned Wednesday.

The school board debated how to best maintain diversity after a district committee warned that the use of racial preferences in school assignments may come under attack.

The district assigns students to schools based on the results of a lottery in which race is a factor.

The lottery ensures the racial make-up of each school does not deviate more than 5 percent from its surrounding neighborhoods.

The district only uses racial categories which make up more than 15 percent of the district, leaving Berkeley schools with only three categories, black, white and other, said Roia Ferrazares, co-chair of the student assignment advisory committee.

Members of Ferrazares' committee said they intend to recommend a policy to the school board on Nov. 20 that would use new standards based on census-derived data to evaluate school assignments.

"We're trying to look at things we could use legally and still maintain diversity," said Nancy Riddle, who was elected to next year's school board Tuesday night.

The committee's move is a delayed reaction to Proposition 209, which ended race-based accommodations in public institutions in 1996.

While there is no single interpretation of the proposition, a 2001 court ruling raised a red flag among many in the district.

"The climate in California and the liti-

gious nature of our society does create a danger for us in using a method that flies in the face of recent court cases," said Superintendent Michele Lawrence.

The proposal raised criticism that it could increase levels of racial segregation.

"This is really a core value for Berkeley and an issue for schools everywhere," said Boardmember John Selawsky. "Our neighborhoods aren't necessarily integrated. Our schools are our only avenue for real racial integration. I don't think this community

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## School Board to Vote On Recommendation

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wants to give that up without a fight."

The committee has mapped three zones in Berkeley based on four measures of diversity—family income level, parent education, single parent homes and households where English is a second language, Ferrazares said.

Though the committee has yet to make a recommendation, they said sample data tests have provided results similar to the current racial breakdown in schools.

"We will be able to maintain racial

diversity and hopefully improve socioeconomic diversity," Ferrazares said.

Monitoring the results with shifting populations may be difficult.

"My concern is three to five years down the line when demographics change," Selawsky said. "Do we have to keep redrawing the lines? What if our factors aren't fully correlated over time?"

The community may give suggestions to the board at a community meeting Dec. 4, Lawrence said.

The school board is scheduled to vote on the intended recommendation Dec. 11, she added.

"Right now even using race gives uneven results," said Boardmember Shirley Issel. "So it's an imperfect system that we already have."

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