

Tri-city post

BUSD Task Force Faults

Burke - P.S. - Restriction

Jim Masters, facilitator of the Berkeley Unified School District's Ad Hoc Task Force on School Organization, has released a summary report of the recommendations of the Task Force entitled "Desegregation Goals and Student Enrollment Methods: The Problems with the Existing System and Why Change is Needed." The main points of the summary report are:

- 1. The existing +/-5% standard of desegregation is not being met. If the two largest ethnic groups in our K-6 schools, African-American and White, are considered in 30 "groupings," are in compliance with the 5% standard and 2/3 are not.
- 2. The community wants the existing 5% standard to be used. The Task Force was composed of 55 people, drawn from all constituency groups and included community groups such as the League of Women Voters and

the NAACP. The Task Force voted to continue the 5% standard, rather than going to a 10% or 15% standard under which most of the "groupings" would have been in compliance.

3. Why the existing system of student assignment does not produce the desired 5% standard. The currently used zone system can be updated accurately only every 10 years when the census comes out. In the meantime, people move, neighborhoods change, and every child who lives in the zone is assigned to that particular school whether or not the school is ethnically balanced. In addition, ethnic ratios are not constant across age groups which can exaggerate uneven ethnic distribution.

The current BUSD system for intra-school transfers has meant that approximately 1/3 of Berkeley students do not attend their zoned school. The reasons

are: a) Children whose first language is Spanish and who have limited English skills can choose any school that has a Spanish bilingual education program; b) Students from schools closed for earthquake repair reasons have been given their choice of school to attend; c) Parents prefer that their children be close to their work or after school child care.

4. The existing system is perceived as unfair. The Task Force felt the existing system was not as fair as it could be and that all parents city wide should have the same possibility of gaining admission to the school they want their child to attend.

5. The existing system cannot easily be made to work. In a zone system the only major mechanism to adjust ethnic balances within schools is to move groups of students from one school to another. This can be done with accuracy only every

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Desegregation System

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'Parents prefer that their children be close to their work or after school care.'

ten years. Some might suggest changing the policy so that far fewer transfers are allowed. Masters' summary states: "To reduce choices flies in the face of social megatrends in this society . . . Family structures and work patterns have changed enormously in the past 20 years. People have very compelling issues around work, child care and transportation. It will anger people enormously if the district refuses a transfer that solves or prevents a major problem in the rest of their life." The Task Force felt that rather than reducing the opportunity for adjustments, the BUSD should ex-

tend the opportunity for expression of school preference.

6. The Task Force reviewed many methods for assigning students to schools. After reviewing seven different methods for assigning students to schools, the Task Force voted to recommend only the "choice" method in which all parents citywide would have the same probability of obtaining admission for their child to a particular school, and that ethnic distribution goals would be met.

7. There is a better way to achieve desegregation goals. We now have the computer technology to make a system of choice work. The summary states: "The key to the choice system is for each parent to indicate their choice of schools, and for the computer to instantly compare those choices with the available openings for their ethnic group . . . With a system of controlled choice, desegregation

goals can be precisely achieved." Another point made is that over time, parents and teachers who share a similar educational philosophy can come together to increase the quality of education as they define it — such as Montessori method, classics, ungraded "portfolio," extended day care, etc.

In conclusion, Masters states: "The SOTF (Task Force) believes that the commitments of the BUSD to desegregation can be more precisely achieved and can be more fairly achieved through adoption of a 'system of controlled choice.'"

Complete copies of "Desegregation Goals and Student Enrollment Methods: The Problems With the Existing System and Why Change is Needed" can be obtained by contacting the BUSD Public Information Office, 2134 Martin Luther King Jr. Way, Berkeley, phone 644-6348.