

72 proposals added to Measure A potpourri

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Berk - P.S. Restructuring
By Margaret Brentano

Those expecting to hear specific recommendations for spending \$158 million in Measure A bond money at last week's Berkeley board of education meeting were treated instead to a management consultant's report on still more possibilities for the district.

Superintendent LaVoneia Steele was expected to present three or four concrete plans for use of the Measure A funds voters approved last June. Instead, the board heard the Berkeley-based consultant group — MAP, or Management Analysis & Planning Associates — hired in October 1992, deliver a report suggesting 72 possible scenarios for the future of Berkeley's schools.

Speaking for MAP, Marge Plecki said that her group saw its role as providing alternatives rather than recommendations — recommendations would come from the superintendent and decisions from the board.

To that end, MAP developed a "Matrix of decision elements" — a graph with one axis listing four variables of elementary school grade configurations: status quo (the current K-3, 4-6 system), K-5, K-6, and an option called "mixed" — meaning different grade configurations for different schools.

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The other axis consists of what MAP referred to as "other decision dimensions," the topics that the Berkeley Board and public have been discussing since the possibility of major changes to the schools was first proposed: three possible versions of desegregation criteria, status quo, plus or minus 5%, or plus or minus 10% variation between schools; total number of schools, the current total of 12, or 11, 10 or 9; and parent choice.

The combination of these different variables results in 72 possible solutions.

The report is rich with comparisons to other school districts, especially with examples of parent choice programs and themes for possible magnet schools, but, as the board pointed out, less helpful about the possible impact of these plans on Berkeley itself.

The MAP report contains an appendix describing the possible financial impact of the variables, prepared by students at UC Berkeley's graduate school of Public Policy, but the actual Berkeley variables are still so unclear that potential costs covered enormous ranges.

Creating magnet schools, for instance, they estimate, could cost between \$45,000 and \$1.2 million for start up, and between zero and \$2.7 million annually, excluding transportation.

The report states "A parental choice plan could cause transportation costs to either soar or plunge, depending on the plan's specifica-

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tions and on parents' choices."

Also difficult to estimate is the cost of converting the current K-3 schools to either K-6 or K-5.

The graduate students who prepared the report believe a change to K-6 would cost the district additional transportation dollars, while the K-5 plan, with sixth-graders included in middle school, might actually save money because junior high school students use public transportation.

The graduate students' most concrete figures involved the closing of three schools — not specifically named.

They posited that because of savings in maintenance and upkeep, and administrative salaries, savings per year, per school could be as high as \$347,000.

But this figure does not take into account the additional cost of transporting the children whose neighborhood schools would have closed, nor the possibility that enrollment would increase under a magnet system if the approximately 24 percent of Berkeley children who now attend private schools were drawn back into the system.

Board president Dr. Pedro Noguera reacted strongly to the report.

"Frankly, I'm disappointed," he said. "It seems like we're reshuffling the deck over and over again and not coming any closer to the very hard decision we have to face as a board." He seemed particularly disappointed that the report didn't delve into the difficulties

that would arise if grade configurations were changed or school choice offered.

The real question, Noguera said, is "How do we convince our parents voluntarily to send their kids to school in other neighborhoods?" He also questioned the casualness with which the report suggested that teachers would be moved between schools.

After citing the great things he had seen happening at Malcolm X's recent open-house, he asked another question not addressed by the report: "How do we make sure we build on our successes and not create disruption for the sake of disruption?"

The board was united in its frustration. Member Miriam Topel said: "I still don't think it's clear what we're considering," and student board member Sarah Rosenkrantz was very direct:

"This is what I think we should do: we need to go forward and make a decision. No one is willing to lay out a specific plan."

School Superintendent LaVoneia Steele told the board she thought "a piece is missing — a large one — of information necessary to make a decision." She said they still didn't know "what the community feels will be right and best for this community."

She is expected to offer her final recommendations by June 2, with the Board to decide on the plan for Measure A spending and school reorganization by the end of the school year.

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