

BERKELEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

TO: Board of Education
FROM: Michele Lawrence, Superintendent
DATE: February 4, 2004
SUBJECT: Elementary Student Assignment Plan

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

After more than two years of consideration by a large community task force formed for the purpose of examining the issues around our current student assignment system, the staff is now prepared to present for Board discussion and approval the manner in which we intend to assign students to Berkeley Unified School District elementary schools.

In 1968, Berkeley Unified voluntarily integrated all schools. Our commitment to this important and precious legacy continues to be a primary value in our community. Forty years ago, our primary goal was to racially integrate all schools. Although it is indisputable that each student's racial and ethnic background enriches the learning environment of all students, we believe that the recognition and appreciation of the bedrock value of diversity in our schools should be expanded to consider additional factors that enhance the learning environment and recognize other factors contributing to diverse classrooms. These additional factors have independent significance separate and apart from racial and ethnic diversity.

We believe that assigning students using a multi-factor approach enriches the educational experiences of all students, advances educational aspirations, enhances critical thinking skills, facilitates the equitable distribution of resources and encourages positive relationships across racial lines. Accordingly, staff now proposes to include parent income and education levels as factors in addition to race as a means of expanding the definition of diversity and creating even greater equity among our schools. The new proposal will continue to utilize aspects of the current student assignment plan: parental choice, sibling priority and attendance zones.

Although there may be other components that could be identified as elements that bring diversity to a school, the collection, consistency and unreliability of available data make it impractical to utilize those factors and still ensure a smooth, fair and open process for assigning students to schools of their choice. Thus, as the culmination of several years of work by the Student Assignment Advisory Committee directed toward improving and refining our system of K-5 pupil assignment and in line with the recommendations of that Committee, staff now proposes the modifications set forth and described below. After long deliberation and study, we are convinced that utilizing multiple factors will best

ensure a rich learning environment in our schools and at the same time reflect the broad diversity of our community. To support this goal, the staff proposes including the following aspects in the new student assignment plan:

Parent Education Level

Berkeley Unified School District believes that the level of a parent's education is a key indicator of how a student will perform in school. We recognize that students from households whose parents possess college or advanced degrees have more developed literacy and academic skills when they enter school. A 1999 article by the College Board states: "In one large national study, only 5 percent of the eighth graders whose parents did not have a high school degree had achievement test scores in the upper quartile, whereas over half of the students who had at least one parent with a graduate degree scored in the top quartile¹." We know that well-educated parents assist their children in succeeding at high academic levels. Such help ranges from reading to their children, assisting with school homework, visiting libraries, hiring private tutors, persuading educators to place their children in advanced courses and researching for colleges and universities that might be well suited for their children's abilities. On the other hand, parents with limited resources may lack the necessary skills to provide a comparable level of support².

Moreover, broadening the discussion of parent education level, the renowned sociologist Pierre Bourdieu³ uses the term "capital" beyond its economic conception, to include non-economic forms of capital, specifically cultural and symbolic capital. He contends that different types of capital can be exchanged, acquired, and converted into other forms. The term "cultural capital" represents the accumulation of non-economic forces such as family status, social class, and commitment to education among those components that influence academic success. Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of books, paintings, museums, travel, instruments or exposure to machines (for example computers) in bringing success to a student's future. He argues that educational attainment depends heavily on the cultural capital previously acquired by the subject's family.

Other social reproduction researchers allege that little mobility exists among social classes. Jay MacCleod states: "Several decades of quantitative sociological research have demonstrated that the social class into which one is born has a major influence on where one will end up. Although mobility between classes does take place the overall structure of class relations from

¹ "Reaching the Top: A Report of the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement." The College Board , 1999, p. 9.

² "Reaching the Top: A Report of the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement." The College Board , 1999, p. 15.

³ Bourdieu, Pierre. "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction." *In Power and Ideology in Education*. Ed. Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey . New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

one generation to the next remains largely unchanged⁴.” Consequently, a school system must strive to ensure continued equity in its schools, particularly in a community like Berkeley where the economic and parent education levels are so varied and are subject to change relative to housing markets, the state economy and the influence that UC Berkeley exerts in our community.

The academic performance of the student population in Berkeley might serve to illustrate the social reproduction theory. As we study patterns of student performance in Berkeley, we find that parent education influences how well students perform in standardized tests. For instance, we found that students who live in East Berkeley are more likely to score higher on tests than students who live in West Berkeley. Progressive scholars have argued that cultural values do not necessarily determine behavior or success in life. Rather, cultural values arise from social stratification forces and reflect one’s social class. Thus, if a group projects limited aspirations or fails to recognize the importance of higher academic achievement, it is not because of different cultural values but because of limited opportunities. By including parent educational level in the student assignment process, Berkeley Unified School District seeks to distribute educational “capital” amongst the elementary schools and maximize the educational opportunities for all students. (See parent education by planning area in the Appendix).

Thus, having schools that only attract students from the surrounding neighborhood could adversely affect both curriculum and the perception of a quality environment. For instance, Rosa Parks and Oxford Schools are very close to the District’s desired racial diversity but are very different in their student demographics relative to parent education and income levels. Since the state of California and the federal government are penalizing or negatively labeling schools based on a single test measurement, it is incumbent on our structures to ensure that each school has an equal chance to excel on all test measurements, since failure to do so can be detrimental to the schools’ reputation.

Parent Income Level

Berkeley Unified School District believes that the economic background of students is of paramount importance. Consequently, we believe that including parent income in our student assignment plan enhances diversity at our schools. Any heavy concentration of poverty in a given school creates inequities because of the inabilities of families to purchase goods and services that can support the learning process. When individual schools have greater access than others to fundraising activities, supportive programs and instructional materials that draw from the financial resources of its parents or neighborhoods this can create conditions of inequity. Consequently, a school

⁴MacLeod, Jay. *Ain’t No Makin’It*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1987, p. 2.

district should attend to those rules and processes that inadvertently create inequitable school environments. Researchers have found that a high concentration of poor students in schools is associated with low academic achievement for both poor and wealthy students alike. Thus, all students do better when school ratios are more balanced.

In the City of Berkeley, race and social class have traditionally segregated residential housing patterns. Gary Orfield, a Harvard professor and researcher, contends that when African American and Latino students reside in predominately minority neighborhoods and attend only their neighborhood schools, they are very likely to then attend economically as well as racially segregated schools⁵. Statistics tell us that these minority-segregated schools are more likely to experience a higher concentration of poverty. Moreover, students in these schools are likely to perform poorly on tests; highly qualified teachers are more difficult to recruit and retain, and consequently poverty stricken schools are less likely to offer the rigorous courses required for admission to colleges and universities⁶. The opposite is true for schools whose parents have higher educational levels and greater wealth. Therefore, because of housing patterns in Berkeley this would also mean segregated white schools and segregated minority schools.

Our own data indicate that for the most part student test scores tend to reflect the economic solvency of their parents. As we examined our data we found that affluent children tend to score higher on tests than less affluent students. Therefore, including the parent income level in a student assignment plan guides us closer in our goal of creating equity amongst our schools and providing a supportive learning environment for all students. (See parent income by planning area in the Appendix).

Race and Ethnicity

In addition to the contributions that parent education and family income make in creating school equity, race and ethnicity also promote diversity and equal opportunity in the school community. Thus, Berkeley Unified continues to believe that using a race-conscious student assignment system is crucial to reducing, eliminating and preventing the negative effects of racial isolation while promoting the educational benefits brought by racial diversity. Geoffrey Maruyama and Jose Moreno, researchers for the American Council on Education and American Association of University Professors, in citing University of Michigan professor Patricia Gurin state:

⁵ Orfield, Gary and Yun, John T. "Resegregation in American Schools." Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project, June 1999.

⁶ Frankenberg, Erica, Lee, Chungmei and Orfield, Gary. "A Multiracial Society with Segregated School: Are Losing the Dream?" Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project, June 1999.

Gurin suggests that democracy in the United States is characterized by homogeneity and common identity, where people of common backgrounds and beliefs come together, rather than by diversity, where heterogeneity of backgrounds, perspectives, and identities predominate. In the latter type of democracy, groups need to forge alliances that respect competing perspectives... The leaders of today need skills that permit them to work effectively in heterogeneous environments. These skills include perspective-taking, acceptance of differences, willingness and capacity to find commonalities among our differences, acceptance of conflict as normal, conflict resolution, participation in democracy, and interest in the wider social world⁷.

Consequently, because our goal is to teach students how to thrive in a multi-cultural and multi-racial society, our ability to impart these skills in a diverse environment becomes of paramount importance. Students in these environments are more likely to experience “enhanced learning, higher educational and occupational aspirations, and positive social interaction among members of different racial and ethnic backgrounds⁸.” The benefits of diverse environments enrich not only racial and ethnic minorities but white students as well. Patricia Gurin found that white students in racially diverse classrooms were more likely to score higher on complex analytical tests, possess greater intellectual confidence, desire to pursue graduate degrees, understand and appreciate the ideas of others, and were more likely to maintain and pursue friendships across racial and ethnic lines⁹.

On June 23, 2003, the United States Supreme Court in *Grutter v. Bollinger*¹⁰ held that student diversity is a compelling state interest that can justify the use of race as a plus factor in student admissions. In reviewing the University of Michigan Law School admissions policy the Court ruled that such policy complied with the strict scrutiny test. In upholding the consideration of race to promote diversity the Court drew on *Brown v. Board of Education* to affirm that education “is the very foundation of good citizenship¹¹.” The Court further states: “We have repeatedly acknowledged the overriding importance of preparing students for work and citizenship, describing education as pivotal to

⁷ *Does Diversity Make a Difference? Three Research Studies on Diversity in College Classrooms*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education and American Association of University Professors. 2000, p. 10.

⁸ Frankenberg, Erica, Lee, Chungmei and Orfield, Gary. “A Multiracial Society with Segregated School: Are Losing the Dream?” Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project, June 1999, p.12.

⁹ Gurin, Patricia. “Wood and Sherman: Evidence for the Educational Benefits of Diversity in Higher Education: Response to the Critique by the National Association of Scholars of the Expert Witness Report of Patricia Gurin in *Gratz et al v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger et al.*” 2003, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 123 S. Ct. 2325, 2003.

¹¹ *Id.* at 2340

‘sustaining our political and cultural heritage’ with a fundamental role in maintaining the fabric of society¹².”

School Equity

One of the justifications for considering the diversity factors in the student assignment plan is the extent to which these factors will contribute to school site equity. One of the measures of success of the student assignment program will be the extent to which schools offer a comparable education to the students enrolled at each site. Of course this does not mean each site must be identical since individual schools assume distinct and unique characteristics. However, each of these distinctive schools will share the equal responsibility of meeting the educational goals for achievement that apply to the District as a whole. In such a learning environment choosing or attending one school rather than another will confer neither significant advantage nor disadvantage to pupils enrolled at any individual site. The establishment and identification of a “base” program required by all schools ensures that equity without diminishing the unique qualities of a given school.

Staff Diversity

Equally important is attaining the goal of a faculty that parallels the diversity represented in the student body. This may be difficult to implement for a number of reasons such as the applicant pool, recruitment and outreach, retention problems, etc. Nevertheless, this is an important goal as well as a crucial part of site equity and our employment practices will strive to support this endeavor.

Summary

For the reasons mentioned above, the Superintendent and staff recommend the approval of expanding the student assignment system to include the three outlined diversity factors. Should the Board approve these components, the attached document details the mechanics and process that will be used to implement the student assignment plan.

POLICY/CODE: Board Resolution 7008

FISCAL IMPACT: None

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Receive for Approval the Student Assignment Administrative Regulations.

¹² *Id.*

BERKELEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

NEW STUDENT ASSIGNMENT PLAN

The goal of the new elementary student assignment plan is to integrate schools by utilizing (i) parent education level, (ii) parent income level and (iii) race and ethnicity. To accomplish this goal, we created a composite diversity map that takes into consideration these three diversity factors. The parent education and parent income diversity factors were developed from data available from the 2000 US Census. The race and ethnicity factor was developed from multi-year data drawn from the K-5 student population in Berkeley Public Schools. Our student assignment lottery will no longer rely upon the actual personal attributes of students. Rather, each student will receive priority based on a composite of attributed diversity characteristics derived from the planning area in which the student lives. This new proposal will continue to utilize certain aspects of the 1995 student assignment plan: parental choice, sibling priority and attendance zones. In addition, the same methodology will be implemented in assigning students to all elementary schools; magnet schools will not use a separate student assignment system as in the past.

Choice

Choice will continue to be an integral part of the student assignment plan. The District will continue to encourage parents to learn about the elementary schools through forums like the kindergarten fair, the school kindergarten nights, school visitation hours and outreach to for profit and non-profit pre-schools. Parents will continue to submit a “parent preference form” where they will rank their school choices as “first choice,” “second choice” and “third choice.” The District will process the parent preference forms in accordance with the parents/guardians’ choices.

Siblings

Berkeley Unified School District is committed to maintaining school sibling priority. Thus, the District will continue to honor such requests to the extent possible based on space availability.

Attendance Zones

The District will continue to be divided into three elementary school attendance zones. Students who reside in a given zone will continue to have priority to the schools in their zones. The District will periodically review the zone boundaries to assess whether because of housing patterns and population changes they continue to provide student diversity and appropriate seating capacity. The zones boundaries are:

The Northwest Zone consists of Jefferson, Rosa Parks Environmental Science Magnet and Thousand Oaks Arts and Technology Magnet.

The Central Zone consists of Berkeley Arts Magnet, Cragmont, Oxford and Washington Communication and Technology Magnet.

The Southeast Zone consists of Emerson, John Muir, LeConte Science Magnet and Malcolm X Arts and Academics Magnet.

COMPUTATION OF DIVERSITY

In order to devise the composite diversity map, we divided the City of Berkeley into 445 “planning areas” (See planning areas map in the Appendix). Since 1990, we have been using this scheme of geographic divisions, which is much smaller than census tracts but larger than city blocks; typically each planning area is between 4 - 8 city blocks. The three diversity composite factors are derived in the following manner:

I. Parent Income Level

The average household income data were taken directly from 2000 Census (See parent income by planning area in the Appendix). The data are then divided into the following categories:

1. \$4000 - \$26000
2. \$26000 - \$47000
3. \$47000 - \$68000
4. \$68000 - \$89000
5. \$89000 - \$111000
6. \$111000 - \$132000
7. \$132000 - \$153000

II. Parent Education Level

The data are educational averages computed from the 2000 Census. Each planning area educational average is then weighted using the following methodology:

- 1 - Finished grade 8 or less;
- 2 - Did not finish high school;
- 3 - Finished high school;
- 3.5 - Some college or associate degree;
- 4 - Bachelor’s degree;
- 5 - Masters or professional degree;
- 6 - Doctorate.

Each weighted educational average yields a decimal number between 1.0 and 6.0. In Berkeley, each planning area educational average varies

between 3.0 and 4.6 (See parent education by planning area in the Appendix). In order to compute the educational average in each planning area the following formula is applied:

$$\text{“Education Average”} = \frac{\sum_{\text{over all the above categories}} (\text{Population of category} * \text{Weight per category})}{\text{Total population}}$$

III. Race and Ethnicity: Percentage of Students of Color

For the purpose of including race and ethnicity as one of multiple diversity factors, we developed a single-numeral measure for race and ethnicity within each planning area (See percentage students of color by planning area in the Appendix). Thus, we represent racial and ethnic diversity as a single percentage, “percent students of color.” We computed this percentage from a multi-year pool of data drawn from the K-5 student population in Berkeley Public Schools in the following manner:

$$\text{“Percent students of color”} = \frac{100 * \text{Sum students of color population in planning area}}{\text{Total population in planning area}}$$

IV. Composite Diversity Map

The three diversity factors detailed above are then combined to yield an integer “classification” category limited to values 1, 2 and 3 (See composite diversity map in the Appendix). Because each diversity factor varies in the manner in which it is measured, it must be linearly transformed from these disparate outcome spaces to a common outcome space (a decimal value between 1.0 and 3.9). The three diversity factors are then “mapped” using the following equation:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{“Composite Diversity Average”} = & \\ & .33 \times (2. + (\text{Parent Income Level} - 34000) / (70000 - 34000)) + \\ & .33 \times (2. + (\text{Parent Education Level} - 3.4) / (4.1 - 3.4)) + \\ & .33 \times (2. + (70 - \text{Percent Students of Color}) / (67 - 30)) \end{aligned}$$

Each diversity category (1, 2 or 3) is derived from this “weighted average” by applying two thresholds or “break points” to the decimal value. The breakpoints were determined after multiple experiments and careful considerations. The breakpoints were chosen to divide the city’s K-5 population into three proportions.

Weighed Avg. 1.0 to 2.2 →	Weighted Avg. 2.2 to 3.0 →	Weighted Avg. 3.0 and Above →
Category 1	Category 2	Category 3

The following is an example of computations for three planning areas. The locations of areas 34, 231 and 239 can be seen on the map that follows.

Planning Area	Average Income	Average Education	Percent Students of Color	Diversity Composite Outcome Weighted Average	Category
34	104753	4.5	10	3.66	3
231	36250	3.4	92	1.78	1
239	47574	4.2	29	2.82	2

Use of Diversity in the Student Assignment Lottery

Utilizing the three composite diversity categories, students will be assigned proportionately to elementary schools. As noted above, the actual personal attributes of students will no longer be relied upon in determining student assignments. Rather, the lottery will give priority based on the attributed diversity characteristics derived from the planning area in which the student lives. Based on his or her attributed diversity characteristics, each student will fall into one of three composite diversity categories. Priority will be given based on these composite diversity categories.

Monitoring

It will continue to be an important administrative function to monitor each school's diversity composite throughout the student assignment process (See composite diversity outcome: parent education, parent income, and race and ethnicity; composite diversity outcome: parent income; composite diversity parent education; composite diversity outcome: race and ethnicity in the Appendix). After students have indicated their school choice and are placed by lottery, it may be necessary, in some instances, to resort to a "safety valve" by which we would manually assign a student to his or her alternate choice should there be an imbalance in any of the three factors that is outside the plus or minus 5-10% range of flexibility. We expect to use the "safety valve" method of readjustment very rarely, if at all. We believe that retaining some means of discretionary administrative intervention will ensure that student needs for special programs, staffing variations, school seating capacities or late enrollments are compatible with the student assignment plan.

In October of each year as the District prepares the State required CBEDS report, an accompanying document will be included which will inform the Board of each school's diversity balance as an additional means of monitoring the implementation of the Assignment Plan.

Each year in preparation for kindergarten enrollment, sensitivity will need to be given to the analysis of developing trends or significant shifts in housing patterns or community development projects that may alter the makeup of a given planning area. The supporting software allows for modifications should these circumstances occur over time. Staff would then bring to the Board proposed revisions to the plan in order to maintain the policy goals.

Appendix

1. Planning Areas: 1-445
2. Average Parent Education by Planning Area
3. Parent Income by Planning Area
4. Percentage Students of Color by Planning Area
5. Composite Diversity Map: Parent Education, Parent Income, Race/Ethnicity
6. Composite Diversity Outcome: Parent Education, Parent Income, Race/Ethnicity
7. Composite Diversity Outcome: Parent Income
8. Composite Diversity Outcome: Parent Education
9. Composite Diversity Outcome: Race/Ethnicity