

# Berkeley and Busing—Still Short of Aims

## After Eight Years, Expected Results Haven't Been Met

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**BERKELEY**—On a sunny morning in September, 1968, Berkeley became the first sizable U.S. city with a significant minority population to desegregate its schools as a matter of policy.

With high hopes and nationwide attention, unprecedented "two-way" crosstown busing was begun. Blacks were transported to white schools, whites to black schools.

Now, eight years later, parents, students and school officials in this liberal university city of 116,000 assess the desegregation program with an uneasy ambivalence:

Yes, they still favor desegregation. But no, desegregation has not produced the racial harmony and equal educational results they had expected.

There is widespread concern over increasing academic disparities among the races and over growing isolation by race in the halls and playgrounds.

"The idea that busing would bring the races together largely has not been achieved," says one Berkeley parent, a supporter of desegregation. "There's not that much merging of cultures.

"The kids get along fine up to a certain age and then separate . . . By the time they're in high school, a kid has had to learn where to go, what to say and what to do—in terms of other races. It makes for a complicated social life. And if the kid can't adjust, he can be pretty miserable."

James Catlett, a Berkeley High School vice principal who has worked extensively with black students, observes:

"We were expecting maybe a little too much . . . Our expectations were greater than the students'. We'd like to see them all sitting together on the school steps talking to each other, or going to games or dances together, or all interrelating with each other in the classroom. But that really hasn't happened.

"We didn't realize that even as adults we did the same thing, because of our social need to be with our own ethnic group," said Catlett, now in his 10th year here. "The students are trying to find themselves as an ethnic group. They're coexisting."

Berkeley's junior high schools were desegregated in 1964, largely through boundary changes. Four years later, the busing program was begun for the kindergarten through sixth grades. The city has only one high school.

At present, 3,719 elementary students are riding 36 buses to Berkeley schools—averaging between 15 and 20 minutes per one-way trip. Secondary students ride public transit at their own expense.

Generally, each elementary student can expect to ride a bus at some point in his school career. At the kindergarten through third-grade level, more black children ride buses to what once were predominantly white schools; at the fourth-grade level, the flow is reversed and more white children begin riding buses to what once were largely black schools.

Please Turn to Page 16, Col. 1

# After 8 Years, Berkeley Busing Program Falls Short of Goals

Continued from First Page

The school district itself—while hailing desegregation as "successful" and "exemplary in many respects"—recently acknowledged officially what it called the "negative consequences" of its eight-year endeavor.

In the formal, jargon-laden language of an application for a federal grant, the district warned that "... The gap in achievement between white and minority students is threatening to widen ..."

And, it said: "This academic isolation gives rise to and is aggravated by physical and sociological isolation—separatism in the classroom and on the playground stemming from fear, mistrust, lack of understanding, as well as a lack of commonality in reading, computational and language proficiency as vehicles of exchange and communication."

The district's assessment of desegregation was included in a request for \$463,000 in emergency school aid funds for special programs—including remedial help for underachievers. The aim of the programs would be to reduce disparities in reading and mathematics between white and nonwhite students, to increase what it calls "multicultural understanding" and to develop more parental and community support of the schools.

The application reported that disparities among the races in terms of academic achievement increased pro-

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gressively through the grades and that a special effort should be made to reverse the trend, starting at the fourth grade.

At one school, for example, reading tests showed the average white student performing 0.4 of a grade level better than the average black student at the end of the first grade. But that gap widened to 1.3 grade levels at the end of the third grade and to 3.6 grade levels at the end of the sixth grade.

Further, the application said, surveys showed that a majority of Berkeley parents "felt improvement was needed in providing a safe school environment," and that most of a group of 336 students questioned last fall believed children of different races "often keep pretty much to themselves."

Parental concern over discipline in the schools also was noted—from both blacks and whites. The application included a statement of complaints by black parents, presented to the school board in 1973, asserting that in most of the classrooms they had observed "teachers showed little or no control" over students.

Further, the black parents charged that the schools were demanding less of black students than white. "It is demeaning, degrading and humiliating to the black child who discovers that he is not expected to perform like white children, for whatever reason," their statement said.

Berkeley school officials, fearful that their assessment of desegregation will be misconstrued, stressed that they believed the program overall has been successful.

While, like other communities, Berkeley has experienced a general decline in school attendance, the proportions of white and nonwhite students have remained virtually the same since 1968. At present, according to the district's racial census, 45.1% of the student body is Anglo, 42.4% black, 6.6% Asian, 3.1% Latin, 1% American Indian and the rest other racial minorities.

A district spokeswoman said the grant application's as-

essment of the "negative consequences" of desegregation should not be treated as a definitive study. Such an investigation, she said, would be "costly" and it has never been attempted.

She pointed out also that while white students are scoring progressively higher than nonwhites in achievement tests, all races have shown a "steady growth" in achievement levels since desegregation.

District administrators say the dissatisfaction they hear from parents seems to stem more from general school problems—financial cutbacks, lack of discipline, teacher union unrest, deterioration of facilities and insufficient basic education—than desegregation, as such.

"Nobody—nobody—questions the concept of desegregation," says Dr. Jay T. Ball, director of Project Planning and Development. "There's disaffection in the community—but there's disaffection everywhere."

"... When you try to fashion a system that cuts across social and ethnic lines—and try to make it work, with commitment from all those communities—it really becomes difficult."

There is little doubt Berkeley schools are beset with problems:

—A bitter, divisive teachers' strike last fall went on for five weeks, causing many parents to remove their children from public schools. (Berkeley's current enrollment of 12,622 is down 809 from the same time last year and officials theorize that much of the decline is attributable to the strike.)

—Physical disrepair—broken windows, stopped toilets, flaking paint—is widely in evidence.

—The district's deficit-ridden budget, plagued by inflation, last week forced the school board to lay off 122 employees for the 1976-77 school year.

—There also has been continuous debate over the value of an ambitious, multimillion-dollar program—financed by the federal government—to develop experimental schools within the Berkeley system.

The experimental schools, seeking to meet diverse community demands, offered a wide curriculum—ranging from traditional studies in literature, science and history to such novelties as macramé, sailing and Swahili. At one time there were 21 experimental schools. Now there are 14.

Among the experiments was a large-scale ethnic studies program—offering special courses on blacks, Chicanos, and even Anglos. Supporters defended the value of the program but some critics believe it helped spawn racial separatism at the very time the district was trying to remove racial barriers through desegregation.

The ethnic studies program now has been cut back.

Two experimental schools—"Black House" and "Casa de la Raza"—were forced to close when the federal government found they were racially exclusive. But the district has retained "ethnic coordinators" to offer course material to individual teachers on Asian, Afro-American, Chicano and women's studies.

In recent years, violence in Berkeley schools—some undeniably with racial overtones—has inspired allegations of official permissiveness and lack of supervision.

Concern here reached a peak three years ago when a science teacher was beaten by two 16-year-old youths in a school corridor. The teacher lost partial vision in one eye.

At public hearings, students, teachers and parents blamed the incidents on everything from "white racism" to the "Vietnam war."

More recently, both school officials and knowledgeable parents say, instances of violence have declined. But they

are troubled now by the apparent spread of disciplinary problems to the lower grades.

Officials say they maintain no statistical barometers to indicate whether interracial incidents are increasing or declining.

"We've stayed away from that," one administrator said. "We look at that as just part of life. We've had our share of rip-offs—wallets being taken in the rest room and so forth—but that's the kind of thing that happens in any school these days, regardless of race. It's just too difficult to tell what motivates it."

Some parents and officials say they believe tension in the schools has declined in the last two years. They hope—but cannot be sure—they are beginning to see an improvement in race relations among students who years ago entered desegregated schools.

Jay Bradford, who as director of transportation oversees the district's busing program, believes there are fewer racial conflicts among students now than when the program first began.

"The kids who started school after the program started in '68—that's where we show the biggest improvement," said Bradford.

Vice Principal Caplett has discerned a relaxation of tension since the peak of concern in 1973, but is hesitant to attribute it to the desegregation program. "The students I talk to really don't see a drastic change (in race relations) because of the integration program," he said.

Some administrators now are more troubled by the apparent spread of disciplinary problems to the lower grades.

In fact, under a new proposal to improve the education of fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-graders, supervisors would be employed to "guarantee the safety" of students in the halls, lavatories and playgrounds in the schools.

These schools also would be reorganized to assure that students would become better acquainted with more students in other classes, reducing the potential for conflict outside the classroom.

District officials and parents are quick to warn against attributing all conflict among students to racial differences.

"From what I see, if there's friction, it's likely to be between the haves and have-nots, regardless of race," said Dr. Kathrynne Favors, director of curriculum and human relations. "When you have a child whose father is well off and who has traveled all over the world up against a

## Much conflict is seen as being due more to economics than race.

child whose father has been unemployed for five years, that's when there's a problem."

Age, along with social and economic class, is also seen as a significant factor in relations among the races.

One parent, a white liberal, is dismayed by how often he hears high school students use racial terms in describing their associates and activities. Their descriptions are not always derogatory—but they are categorical. For example, all Asians—Japanese, Chinese or Korean—are referred to as "Chins" (rhymes with "lines") and they are noted—and sometimes resented—for their academic achievement.

But another parent, restaurant operator Narsai M. David, is encouraged by the infrequency of racial references among the grade school companions of his child.

"I just never hear kids this age identify themselves in

Please Turn to Page 17, Col. 1

# BERKELEY BUSING FALLS SHORT

Continued from 16th Page

racial terms," David said. "I consider that a helluva lot more meaningful in the long run than whether or not some kids don't do so well on a test."

"Of course, desegregation caused some painful readjustments at first. Kids were beat up and physically hurt. But I think that's all behind us. We have kids functioning together now."

A black parent, Mrs. Amanda Williams, also is optimistic about the desegregation program, despite its problems. "I've had four children go through the Berkeley schools—before and after desegregation," said Mrs. Williams, president of a group called Concerned Black Parents. "As a parent, I wouldn't want to go back to where we were—separate and unequal ..."

"We didn't expect to take youngsters from different backgrounds—whose parents had been separated for years—and put them together where they would be acceptable to each other right away ... They have their choices, just like adults."

But despite a universally expressed belief in desegregation, many here acknowledge that after eight years the program has not met their expectations.

Such a theme was heard repeatedly earlier this year at hearings conducted here by the California Advisory Com-

mittee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

Student leaders reported that students often segregated themselves. "You can't just force two people to sit together in a class and call that integration," said Julie Sherman, a junior at Berkeley High School. "I think integration is a good thing, but I don't think it's working this way."

The president of the Berkeley school board, Gene Roh, told the committee: "We really cannot say that we have significantly improved racial relations in our district, nor social relations, nor do we possess strong data that we have raised significantly the achievement of minority students."

And a former board president, Carol Sibley, lamented that school desegregation had taken place at the same time some young activists were advocating separatism and militancy.

This activism, for example, was expressed in "hate whitey" writings posted on school bulletin boards—but school officials took no action, she recalled.

"This was a mistake. We should have clamped down on this. But we were all afraid of being called the worst thing you could be called at the time, a racist. We were cowards."

"Desegregation was not all we'd hoped for," she said. "But it was not a failure."