

# Berkeley's School Integration Program Proceeds Smoothly

## City Will Become First in Nation to Fully Desegregate by Using Buses to Change Unusual Sociogeographic Patterns

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One of the things about Berkeley which intrigues social scientists is that the socioeconomic status of residents can be plotted on a sliding scale which corresponds almost exactly to the elevation along the East San Francisco Bay hillside.

The poorest live near the sea level along the bay shore, with income levels rising gradually as elevation increases up the Berkeley Hills to the crest where the richest reside.

The terms of upper, middle and lower classes take on a meaning of peculiar reality in this community.

This fall, however, the Berkeley school system is going to "level out" the city for its youngsters.

Many poor Negro children from down along the seaside will go up into the all-white canyons to go to school. And other white youngsters will travel down the mountain to classrooms in previously all-Negro schools.

### Neighborhood School End

Thirty yellow buses will counter-balance the school effects of de facto segregation in housing, and the neighborhood school approach will end.

No longer will the schools reflect the racially split-level nature of the community. Berkeley will become the first city in the United States with a large black population to become fully integrated.

The integration plan which goes into effect with the start of school this month represents the final act in a long and arduous struggle within the city.

It climaxes a period of turmoil and conflict which mirrors the social changes that have engulfed education during the past 15 years.

To reach its commitment, the

Berkeley school system has gone through an agonizing six years which have included a switch in superintendents at the height of the integration controversy, a recall election of the school board, integration of its junior high schools and finally the decision to effect total integration.

Total integration will be accomplished by bringing about racial balance in the district's 14 elementary schools.

The district is about 50% white, 40% Negro and 10% Oriental, and since there is only one high school which all students attend it is automatically integrated.

In 1964, the district integrated the three junior high schools. All ninth grade students attended one junior high and a cross section of seventh and eighth grade students attend the other two junior high schools. Students use public transportation.

Early this year, the Berkeley school board decided to go ahead with the elementary schools.

### Four Attendance Zones

Under the plan developed by Supt. Neil Sullivan and his staff, the district will be divided into four attendance zones.

These zones generally run north to south from the hills to the flatland, cutting across socio-economic and racial areas.

Within each zone, Negro pupils in kindergarten through the third grade will be bussed to the schools in the white area at upper elevations.

In the same zone, fourth, fifth and sixth-grade white students will be transported down to schools in the Negro areas.

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# Berkeley's Integration Program Is Succeeding

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The division of the district into zones also serves to reduce traveling according to Robert Frelow, program coordinator.

As a result, the longest bus rides will be from 15 to 20 minutes each way.

Due to the location of schools in the district, no regular students are bussed at present. Only a few hundred Negro children under an experimental program and the district's handicapped students are transported.

But come fall, about 3,500 of the district's nearly 16,000 students will be bussed.

Frelow said the transportation program will also provide late buses so youngsters can elect to stay after school and participate in youth activities offered in the school's neighborhoods.

Sullivan stressed that both Negro and white children will be bussed, instead of just Negro pupils as is customary in most integration programs.

"The burden—and challenge — of transportation across the city should be shared by all," he said.

The district has contracted for 20 more buses in addition to the 10 it already operates.

## Higher Initial Cost

The program will cost about \$518,000 the first year because of classroom construction, building renovations and curriculum improvements. It will average about \$225,000 a year in the long run.

But about one-third of the transportation cost will be reimbursed by the state, which helps finance the bussing of elementary students who live a certain distance from their assigned schools.

The total cost will be about 2.6% of the district's \$19 million budget.

About 15% of the district's teachers are Negro and that figure is expected to rise 5% to 10% by fall through recruitment, Frelow said.

They, too, will be distributed throughout the district to provide racial balance.

In making assignments, the district allowed teachers to select preferences for the school or grade level in which to teach. In almost all cases, teachers got either their first or second choices, Frelow said.

## Teachers Back Plan

But the key to the teachers' satisfaction with the necessary shifts was their overwhelming support of the integration program from the start and their involvement in its planning, he added.

Since the plan was approved seven months ago, the district has undertaken a massive program to tell and show residents what it is all about.

Educators are becoming convinced that the success or failure of an integration effort hinges on this aspect of the program — community preparation.

Here is what Berkeley did:

District-published newspapers were sent to all residents explaining the program in detail, including the bussing operation, where stops would be and how the time schedule would operate.

Information was disseminated in community newspapers and on radio and television.

## Opinions Sought

Five hundred workers conducted a door-to-door canvass of the district, asking parents about their attitudes and answering questions.

The district conducted trial bus runs for parents who turned out in large numbers in each zone.

Parents met teachers and principals and were given tours of the school neighborhoods by the home PTA groups. Some parents hosted their black or white counterparts from the other side of the zone at meetings in their homes.

"We got much greater response than we expected," Frelow said. "In fact, our logistics were inadequate. We expected about

500 from each zone and got more than 1,000."

Negro and white fifth graders who will be sharing classrooms this month were taken to summer camps to provide advance contacts.

## Two-Week Look

Each teacher spent two weeks in a classroom in the other ethnic area and some were accompanied by a number of their regular students.

The summer elementary schools were integrated for fourth, fifth and sixth graders.

In addition, teachers have been exposed to district-run sensitivity training and human relations programs since 1962.

To Sullivan, however, the bussing program will provide only desegregation, with integration to come later.

"We are not simply moving children's bodies," he said. "Every classroom will be integrated racially and socioeconomically."

When this takes place and personal understanding and harmony are achieved among students and teachers, integration will have arrived, he added.

## Quality Instruction

Quality education will be maintained, Sullivan said. Studies have demonstrated, he said, "that integration causes the achievement of Negro pupils to rise without causing any corresponding decline in the achievement of white pupils. We are convinced that this will also be demonstrated after total desegregation is in effect."

Most feel this kind of commitment, planning and community preparation will make integration a success in Berkeley.

"There is a consensus to support this effort and to try to make it work," Frelow said. "This is particularly true among the leaders in the community. I'd say there is critical optimism generally. Of course, there is more skepticism among the black militants and in some white areas, too."

But even most of these detractors are giving the program a chance to prove itself. Frelow and others do not expect parental defiance and say they will be very surprised if more than a few parents balk at having their children participate.

## Recall Campaign

The high-water mark for opposition to integration came in 1964 when an attempt was made to recall the school board members who ordered the integration of the junior high schools.

Supt. C. H. Wennerberg, who supported integration, resigned in the midst of the uproar and was replaced by Sullivan.

The integration forces beat the recall and since then the opposition has become relatively quiet and almost resigned.

With the integration of the junior highs in 1964, the ethnic makeup of Berkeley's population stabilized for the first time since World War II, bringing to an end the big white exodus and Negro influx.

School board members who vigorously supported integration have been returned consistently, and two years ago voters approved a \$1.50 increase in the property tax rate despite all indications that total integration was on the horizon.

## Bigotry Unfashionable

"It's just not very fashionable to be called a bigot in Berkeley," said Frelow. "The feeling is that if it can't work in Berkeley, it won't work anywhere."

But does Berkeley provide an example that others can follow?

"We hope that we can provide courage for other cities to move in this direction," said Sullivan. "The fact that one community did and still retained the support of its electorate is crucial."

Others suspect that Berkeley's unusual sociological makeup and liberal attitudes may be even more crucial.

Frelow points out that almost all of the communities that have achieved integration have been college towns like Berkeley, which is the home of the University of California.