

Remarks to the Board, April 10th, 2019 on possible Middle School Re-Zoning

By Mara Kolesas, president of the Berkeley PTA council

The dramatic imbalance in the sociological makeup of Berkeley middle schools is deeply troubling. It defies our professed values and threatens our educational mission.

The trend of de facto re-segregation among middle schools is not new, but it has accelerated in the last years due to mutually reinforcing factors that are too long and complex to discuss here. But enrollment data clearly demonstrates that we are failing at providing also the socio-economic balance and equitable distribution of resources that is necessary to meet the educational needs of each and every child. This is not a single school issue but a district-wide issue. It is impossible to overlook. And it is unacceptable.

There is much more to be said, but I will look forward and simply affirm that we are glad that the District and the Board are taking on this issue.

Fostering a sociologically balanced student body (including the multiple dimensions of the Academic Support Index in terms of tailwinds and headwinds) is key to creating the educational environment that both reflects the values of our Berkeley community AND provides the conditions for everyone to thrive, **together**. Looking into rezoning is a first step in that direction.

So, we support the proposal to create a process to review and address the sociological imbalance among middle schools, while understanding that no course of action has been predetermined.

In this regard:

We would like to see a process that has a **strategic vision**,

- a. that takes into account the system as a whole, not only middle schools but also elementary schools, which prepare children on equal standing for middle school.
- b. that takes into account (and takes!) both long term and short term measures, which must be mutually reinforcing to ensure the educational well-being and enrichment of each and every student in every cohort. (In other words, just re-zoning and hoping the pieces will fall into place will not do, we need a sustained commitment.)

2. We would like to see a process that involves open, transparent discussion and engagement because this concerns all of us - not only because the kind of public education we foster reflects our values about the kind of society we want for our kids, but also because in a more practical sense, the potential changes will have a very tangible daily impact on parents and teachers (and of course kids) at the three levels (elementary middle and high school).

And when I say all of this, I appreciate, I promise, how complex it is. But we owe it to our community.

To conclude, we, the PTA council, support you - the board and the district - in exploring options. And so that segregation (and related issues of opportunity and sociology) cease to be an issue, yes, we encourage you to do the right thing, for the right reasons, and in the right way.

Thank you.