

## A COMMUNITY DRIVES ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S DIRECTION



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The first school district in the country to voluntarily integrate, Berkeley Unified Schools spent more than 25 years busing children. But the system – which was built on an unusual grade configuration that split elementary schools after the third grade – needed re-examining by the time a multimillion-dollar bond measure (Measure A) passed in 1992, opening the door for potential school reconfiguration. Fern Tiger Associates proposed and conducted a unique, grassroots planning process, designed to maximize participation from Berkeley’s multi-ethnic population.

School board officials and the superintendent went door-to-door to recruit parents to host or attend a participatory, small group meeting. FTA designed and conducted the meetings to be convenient and “safe” for participants, where Berkeley families could discuss the highly-charged issues of school reorganization comfortably in their own homes among friends and neighbors in sessions convened on weekends or evenings. Town hall meetings and more small meetings followed, until a clear, workable plan for a “controlled choice” system of K-5 schools within the district emerged. To ensure communication between parents and the district remained clear and open, FTA designed a special newsletter, *A+ News*, for all Berkeley families to keep them abreast of progress and the various impacts of the reorganization.

*As BUSD was considering reorganizing its elementary schools, PBS’ “Frontline” ran a documentary blasting Berkeley High School as a failed experiment in integration. To show that Frontline had missed the mark, FTA helped the district mobilize to talk to the media about ways in which the documentary got it wrong. Widespread coverage in regional and national print and broadcast outlets put an effective end to a communications crisis and renewed the morale of the Berkeley High community.*



**BERKELEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT** enrolled a total of nearly 8,000 students in 1993, in grades K-12. The student population reflects the diversity of the Berkeley community.

