

The Berkeley School
CAIS/WASC Joint Accreditation
Self-Study

Compiled & edited by

Accreditation Leadership Team

Zaq Roberts, Associate Head of School, Elementary Division Head

Sima Misra, Curriculum & Instruction Coordinator

Ann Buechner, Parent

Anne Baranger, Parent

with additional editing by

Natasha Distiller, Parent

Introduction: The School Profile

Mission

To ignite curious minds, awaken generous hearts, and engage a changing world.

Vision

TBS will be a learning-centered school where all children develop essential skills and awarenesses necessary to think critically, create, collaborate, communicate, connect with each other, and engage with communities and the world.

That development will occur as a result of emergent on- and off-campus learning experiences, among diverse peers, constructed and facilitated by passionate, intentional, well-compensated educators committed to understanding and implementing instructional best practices in a culture of continuous professional growth.

Description

TBS is an Early Childhood through Middle School institution on two campuses in Berkeley, California, with 272 students enrolled for the 2013-14 academic year. Both campuses are located in the heart of Berkeley. The Early Childhood Center (ECC), which serves 91 students (ages 2.7 to 5 years), is located on a 0.38 acre campus in a residential neighborhood adjacent to a commercial thoroughfare close to the Univ. of California campus. The 1.09 acre Elementary/Middle School campus, which serves 181 students (K-8th), is located 1.3 miles away on University Avenue, one of the major transportation corridors in Berkeley. This campus was constructed on the former historical Santa Fe Railroad depot site, in a mixed residential/commercial neighborhood.

History

The Berkeley School (TBS) was founded by a group of parents in 1963 as Berkeley Montessori School, Inc. (BMS). It began as a Montessori preschool at Temple Beth El in 1964, and moved to the current Early Childhood Center (ECC) in 1965. In 1969 the school established a Montessori elementary program in Kensington, and moved to a church site close to the ECC in 1978. The school began with a community-based governance system, with an elected Board of Directors made up of parents and teachers that hired Montessorian and long-time teacher Curt Chamberlin as Head of School in 1987.

In 1994, a fire forced the elementary school to relocate to the Hillside School, owned by the Berkeley Unified School District, where the program continued to grow. Given the larger space, a

middle school was added, with a more broadly progressive program not tied to Montessori practice. An immediate search for a permanent home for the elementary and middle school commenced. This was a period of rapid growth for the school, from 181 students in 1994 to 276 students in 1999. Turbulence during that time resulted in major changes in the composition of the Board, formation of a Parents Association in opposition to the Board, and initiation of a Head Search. The Strategic Plan from 1999 emphasized the need for consolidation of internal systems and technology, and improved communications and professional development.

Laroylyn Davis became Head of School in 2000, bringing with her experience as an educator and Lower School Head at St. Paul's Episcopal School. Under her leadership, the Parents Association became a partner with the administration and Board, successful capital campaigns were completed, and the school identified and purchased the University Avenue site and broke ground in February 2003. Construction was completed on time and on budget, with a ribbon cutting ceremony and campus move in February 2004.

The Berkeley School Board of Trustees adopted the 2005-08 Strategic Plan with ambitious goals to create a shared educational vision, cultivate and support the faculty, strengthen ties within the school and with neighbors, and to increase participation in development and stewardship. This plan included initiating a national Head of School search process, resulting in the hiring of Janet Stork in July 2006. Her longtime experience as a progressive educator included stints as the Lower School Head at Dalton School and Head of Morriss Center School in New York.

Janet Stork led the school towards a new vision for a learner-centered school, based on progressive research-based educational practices that included, but were not limited to, Montessori pedagogy. This approach emphasized learning for all members of the community, adults as well as children, and making thinking visible, based on Ms. Stork's experience with Harvard Graduate School of Education Project Zero. Under Janet's leadership, the school made changes to the school's Bylaws that continued the prior movement away from a community governance model towards a Board of Trustees made up of members appointed by the Board through a careful nomination process, and making teacher representatives and the Head of School Ex Officio members.

Rapid changes to the school in 2007-09 included a large increase in the amount of professional development, sending dozens of teachers to summer Project Zero and Teacher's College programs on the East Coast; changing the school's name to The Berkeley School; adopting the current mission statement; accepting children as young as 2 years and 7 months at the ECC; moving the kindergarten to the Elementary campus; reconfiguring the elementary grades from three-year Montessori classrooms to two-year mixed grade classrooms; creating a stand-alone sixth grade as part of the Middle School; hiring non-Montessori progressively trained teachers in the Elementary division; and moving away from Montessori pedagogy in elementary classrooms.

With Ms. Stork's illness and untimely passing during the 2009-10 school year, newly hired Middle School Director Mitch Bostian assumed the role of Interim Head of School, and was hired as

Head of School in June of 2010. He has continued to develop the school's philosophy of learning (not just learners) at the center, while strengthening the internal systems within the school community, and developing engagement and partnerships with the local Berkeley and wider Bay Area community.

Under Mr. Bostian's leadership, the faculty has focused primarily on program consolidation, for example, developing nine school-wide learning outcomes applicable across all three divisions of the program in 2011-12. The Strategic Portfolio process creates annual initiatives, for example, focusing on Literacy instruction for the past two years, which has led to marked gains in reading proficiency. And a curricular mapping process begun in 2011-12 has led to the development of a new curriculum guide genuinely aligned with teaching in classrooms, with active review and documentation by faculty in math, science, and social/emotional learning this year.

Program consolidation has also included a process over the past several years to determine the optimal configuration of our elementary classrooms, based on child-development and educational research, and observations both at our school and several other Bay Area schools. This school year we have shifted from mixed K/1st and 2nd/3rd grade classrooms to stand-alone Kindergarten and 3rd grade classes and two mixed 1st/2nd grade classrooms; thus far this shift seems to meet the needs of these learners more effectively.

Another strategic initiative resulted in the creation of a Community Engagement program in 2011-12. Managed by the Student Life Coordinator, this program has nurtured classroom partnerships with community organizations, expanded service learning opportunities, supported a fledgling, active K-8 Student Council, and substantially increased the number of learning opportunities with experts both on and off campus.

Over the past three years, many TBS teachers and administrators have begun important identity and diversity work through monthly meetings of the SEED (Seeking Educational Equity & Diversity) group. In 2013-14, the TBS Board and administration have worked with a diversity consultant to build shared language and build a diversity lens into decision-making at the school. This spring and over the next two years, work will continue with this consultant with the faculty, family, and student communities, to make TBS a more welcoming, inclusive environment for all.

Several changes have also occurred in recent years in Operations. The Director of Development position was changed into a Director of Advancement in 2011, to coordinate development, communications, and marketing, filled by an Interim Director in 2011-12, and a new Director in October 2012. This past summer, the rest of the office has been restructured, with a change from Business Officer to a new Director of Finance & Operations and new reporting roles; a new Communications Coordinator; and a shift from separate Head of School Assistant/Front Desk and Registrar/Office Manager roles to a combined position for a new Head of School Assistant.

Students

Growing out of our Montessori history and philosophy, many of the classrooms have multiple grade levels per class.

TBS Enrollment by Level

Class	Number of Classes	Enrollment 2013-14	Capacity
Early Childhood (2-5 year olds)	4	91	96
Kindergarten	1	20	24
1st/2nd grade	2	32	48
3rd grade	1	21	24
4th/5th grade	2	41	48
6th grade	1	24	24
7th	1	25	26
8th	1	18	26
Total	13	272	316

For many years enrollment has hovered between 270-280 students, with exceptions like 2008-09, with 300 students total. While the number of applications have grown, TBS has become more selective in admitting students, with a 66% acceptance rate last year, while yield has decreased to 45%, significantly lower than the NAIS average (67%).

TBS has struggled with retention issues for many years, with attrition from 25-30% total, and up to 50% attrition at transition points to the Elementary and Middle School programs. However, in 2013-14, decreased retention to and within the Middle School and 2nd grade was offset by a strong cohort moving from the ECC to the new stand-alone Kindergarten program.

A number of factors likely play a role in admissions and retention challenges. For example, many families pointed to decreases in the amount of financial aid offered since 2011-12, while other families were influenced by programmatic changes such as the classroom configuration realignment.

TBS students live mainly in the cities of Berkeley and Oakland, although 23% come from smaller surrounding East Bay communities, such as Albany, El Cerrito, or Kensington; 1% come from San Francisco.

As indicated in the table below, a strength of TBS is the ethnic and racial diversity of the student population. The large number of multiracial students are primarily East Asian/Caucasian, as reported by families. TBS does not currently collect information about families' cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds.

TBS Student vs. Berkeley Census Ethnic Diversity

	African American	Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern	Caucasian	Hispanic	Multi racial	Other/declined
TBS Students 2013-14	4%	10%	52%	3%	30%	1%
City of Berkeley 2010	10%	19%	54%	10%	6%	1%

Comparing the data of our students to the City of Berkeley census suggest that Hispanic, African/American, and Asian/Pacific Islanders are underrepresented in the TBS student population relative to the surrounding community, while there are far more multiracial families attracted to the school.

Establishing gender balance is a consistent goal at TBS, which is made especially challenging by our classroom configuration. We conceive of gender identity beyond the binary poles of male/female associated with anatomy, and include appearance, actions, social constructs, and personal understanding. For the 2013-14 academic year 49% of enrolled students are boys, and 51% are girls.

English is the language of communication and instruction, and the expectation is that all students have or develop appropriate proficiency in English. Spanish and Mandarin are taught informally at the Early Childhood Center, and Spanish is formally taught in grades kindergarten through eight. For 10% of students, an additional language is spoken at home, including Spanish, Mandarin, French, Farsi, German, Hebrew, Korean, Tagalog, or Czech.

The population of the city of Berkeley is highly educated (69% have college degrees, and of those, 38% have graduate degrees). The median age of Berkeley is 31, due in large part to the UC Berkeley, with only 12% of the population under 18. While 2007-2011 census data indicates

65% of employed Berkeley residents work in occupations in management, business, science, and arts occupations, an informal analysis of TBS family reported job descriptions suggests that more than 90% of those employed work in these sectors, with the majority in management, health care (primarily physicians), education (chiefly university professors), and business.

Teaching at TBS

The TBS faculty are made up of caring individuals who create rich, interactive and experiential learning experiences appropriate for the child’s developmental and cognitive readiness, based in sound, research-based teaching practices in carefully crafted, intentional environments. Each program depends on close collaboration of teams of classroom teachers, who meet frequently to revise and articulate curriculum, review assessment data, and plan learning opportunities.

The average student to teacher ratio is 7:1, based on the number of students and full time employee equivalent teachers. In practice, the ratio is lower day-to-day at the ECC than the Elementary and Middle School, due to the needs of these younger students.

TBS Faculty by Division

Division	Number of Full Time Employees	Number of Part Time Employees
Early Childhood	11	2 (50-65%)
Elementary	12	0
Middle School	5	1 (80%)
Specialists	3	3 (50-65%)
Extended Day	2	4 (50%)
K-5 Learning Support	0	2 (80-85%)
Total	33	12

While the majority (42%) of **full-time** teachers have 6-10 years of experience, 12-15% of full-time teachers have 1-5, 11-15, 16-20, or more than 20 years of experience. Three teachers (two part-time) have taught at TBS/BMS for more than 25 years. Not every classroom teacher in the Early Childhood through Kindergarten has a college degree, but all do in the first through eighth grades, and 11 full-time teachers (33% of the total full-time TBS teachers) have a masters or Ph.D. degree.

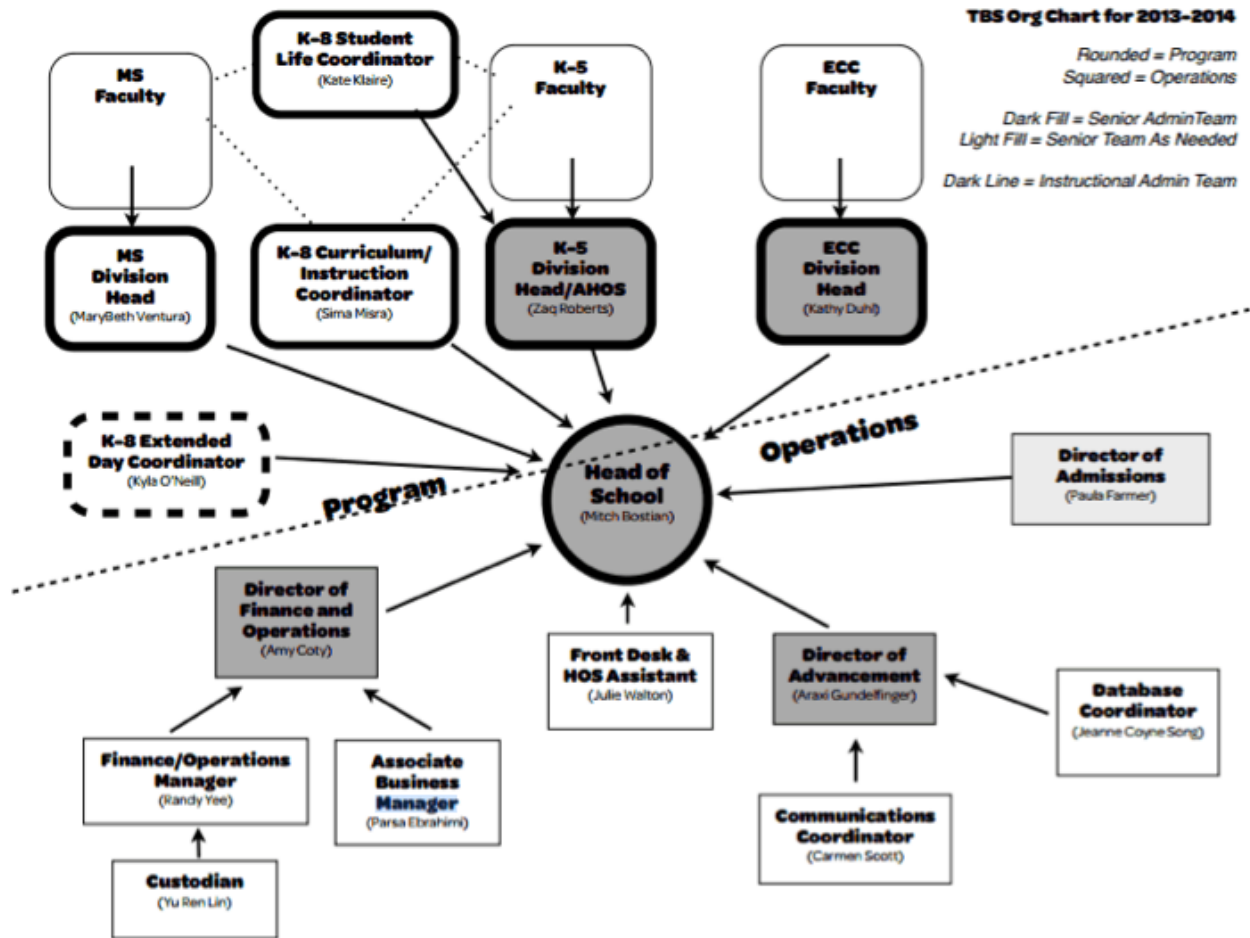
TBS has made strides in recent years in increasing the ethnic diversity and gender balance of its faculty, although the full-time faculty are still primarily Caucasian and female, as shown below.

TBS Full-time Faculty Ethnic Diversity 2013-14

African American	Asian/Pacific Islander/Middle Eastern	Caucasian	Hispanic	Multiracial	Other/declined
7% (2)	9% (3)	64% (21)	15% (5)	3% (1)	3% (1)

TBS Full-time Faculty Gender by Division 2013-14

	male	female	declined	total
ECC	0%	92% (11)	8% (1)	12
Elementary	33% (4)	67% (8)	0	12
MS	40% (2)	60% (3)	0	5
Specialists	33% (1)	67% (2)	0	3
Extended Day	0%	100% (2)	0	2
Total	21% (7)	76% (25)	3% (1)	33



The teachers in each division report to a Division Head; in the case of the Elementary, Division Head Zachary Roberts is also Associate Head of School. The K-8 Curriculum & Instruction Coordinator and K-8 Student Life Coordinator join the Division Heads to make up the Instructional Administration Team, which meets weekly with the Head of School to chart the academic course of the school. The K-8 Extended Day Coordinator also reports to the Head of School and coordinates with the Student Life Coordinator in planning Co-curricular programs.

Certain educational practices reflecting TBS values are present throughout the school, early childhood through eighth grade. We believe in heterogeneous and flexible groupings, so no tracking occurs. The twice-yearly progress reports do not include letter grades, and instead teachers provide extensive narratives and indicate understanding of skills, concepts, and learning habits based on frequency of observation in a wide variety of assessments. And each classroom or middle school advisory meets every morning to create the safe social/emotional community and connections necessary for learning to occur.

Early Childhood Center

Fourteen teachers, including three teachers in each of the four classrooms, teach a traditional Montessori curriculum blended with Reggio Emilia and play-based early childhood philosophies. The Explorer program for 5 year olds provides afternoon enrichment for students as a transitional kindergarten. The curriculum incorporates science, art, cultural studies, music, practical life, drama, early mathematics and literacy, and environmental education into the life of the class.

Elementary

Lower Elementary (K-2) classes are taught by two co-teachers, one Montessori-trained and the other with a more traditional teaching credential and training in other progressive pedagogies. The Upper Elementary third grade is taught by two co-teachers, while a head teacher and full-time assistant teach fourth/fifth grades. Elementary classroom experiences include mathematics, reading, writing, science, cultural studies, and social/emotional development. In addition, instructional specialists work regularly with all K-5 students in the visual arts (in the Art Studio), music (in the Depot performing arts space), Spanish (in the Depot Spanish classroom or for K-2, in the regular classroom), movement (in the Depot for K-2), and physical education (usually in the park). Learning specialists both push in or pull out students to support students with learning differences.

Middle School

Sixth grade is taught in half-sized groups by two co-teachers specializing in mathematics and science or the humanities. In seventh and eighth grades, discipline specialists work with half-sized instructional groups in the areas of mathematics, English, science, and cultural studies. In addition, all Middle School students are provided with Spanish, drama, art, and physical education classes by additional discipline specialists. Weekly exploratory classes, taught in trimesters, provide students with opportunities for service and leadership, music, science, physical education, cooking, and other areas of enrichment.

Board of Trustees

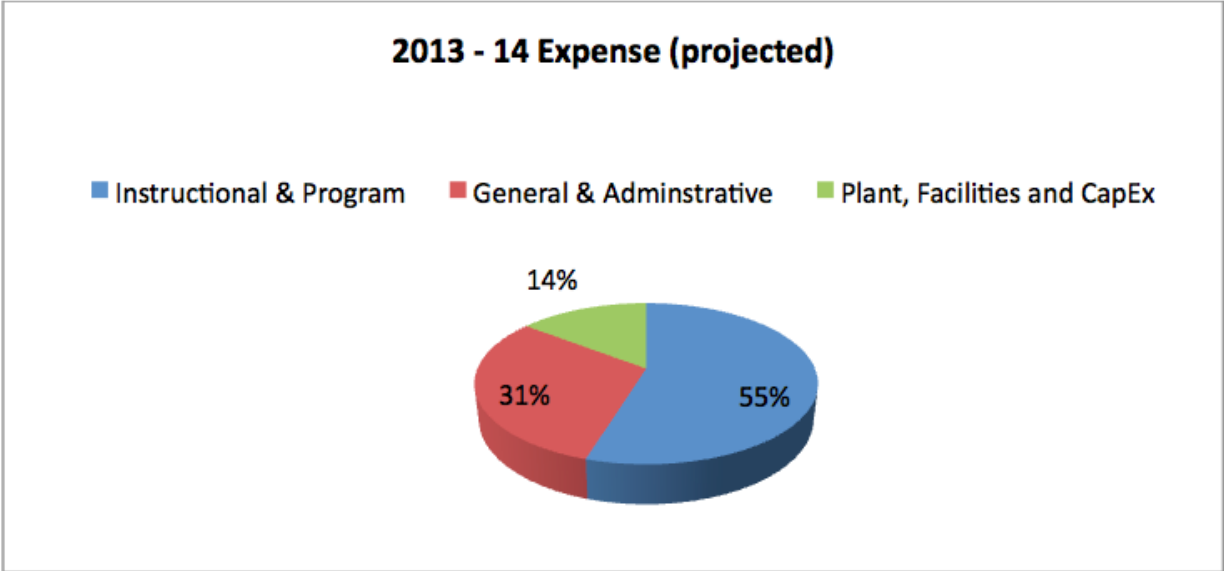
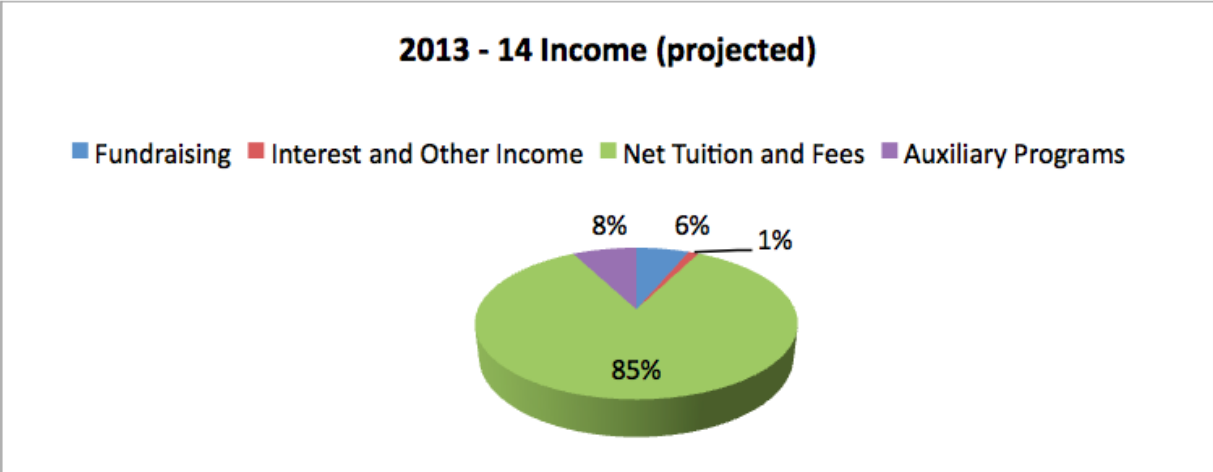
The Berkeley School's 2013-14 Board of Trustees is composed of six parents, four alumni parents, and four other community members; all members were nominated by the Trustee Committee and approved by the Board. There are also several ex-officio, or non-voting, members of the Board: three representatives from the faculty, the Head of School, and the Chair of the Family Association. The Board's meetings, held six times a year, are open to the community.

The work of the Board is done largely by committees. The Executive committee includes the Chair, Vice Chair, Chair Emerita, Secretary, Treasurer, and Head of School. The Board is also served by Development, Finance, Site, Trustee, and Strategic Planning committees, as well as other advisory and ad hoc committees.

Finances

As described above, The Berkeley School is supported by a relatively consistent student enrollment (currently at 272) across early childhood through the 8th grade, with no material receivables, annual debt service at 3% of operating expenses, and financial aid allowances at sustainable and competitive levels. Proportionally, overall, The Berkeley School stands in a strong financial position as far as the annual operating budget is concerned:

TBS Operating Income and Expenses



In 2013, the School aggressively pursued, and closed, a \$7.4 million refinancing of its main campus facility loan, thereby reducing annual debt service burden to a sustainable level for the term of the loan (3% of the operating budget), provided the School remains competitive in the marketplace.

The main challenge to The Berkeley School is common to most independent schools in its peer

group: delivering a superior program through funding of competitive instructional and leadership salaries, related professional development, and other critical curriculum and program resources, while responsibly maintaining and developing its physical plant and technology infrastructure, and building its financial reserves.

Alumni

Graduates from TBS go on to a wide variety of independent, parochial, and public high schools, and alumni and alumni families report general satisfaction with their experience at TBS in annual surveys. The advancement office has a total of 296 alumni in the database who graduated from the Middle School, and a total of 259 alumni families, stretching back to the 1999-00 school year. Alumni are welcomed back annually for a January dinner, and several alumni (usually high school and college aged) sit on a panel every year for an Alumni Night parent education event. Building stronger connections between alumni and the school community has been a recent focus for the Advancement office.