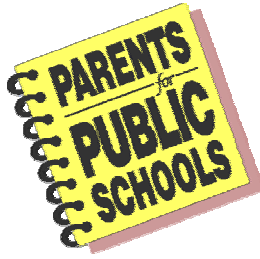




San Francisco Board of Education
Parent Advisory Council



san francisco **education** fund
Collaborate. Innovate. Advocate.

April 2007

Dear Friends:

Since September, we have been working with the San Francisco Unified School District (District) in a unique community engagement initiative to learn what the community wants for and from our City's schools. Through conversations held in Cantonese, English and Spanish, we spoke with more than 900 parents, youth and community members throughout San Francisco. We heard an enormous range of needs, priorities, values and suggestions for improving our public schools.

We recently shared our findings with the Board of Education (Board) and the public. Our report, entitled "Student Enrollment, Recruitment and Retention: Community Conversations about San Francisco Public Schools," explores in detail the following core set of community aspirations:

- **Quality Schools** – Parents use test scores as shorthand for evaluating academic achievement, but their demand for quality, and what it takes to help their children learn, is much more complex.
- **Safe Schools and Neighborhoods** – Parents are concerned about their children's physical and emotional safety.
- **Strong School Communities** – Parents think of their children's schools as small communities.
- **A System that Works for Families** – Parents want to feel that the District is on their side.
- **A Fair System** – Parents want consistency, predictability and equity.
- **Effective Leadership** – Parents want the District to have a proactive, clear, long-range plan.

Our report concludes that District leaders should consider these community aspirations carefully in developing a long-range plan to increase student enrollment and improve achievement. In this letter, we highlight more specific short-term and long-range solutions that we recommend the Board should implement at both the District and school site levels. The original findings and our proposed recommendations are attached.

It might be easy to read the report's findings and these recommendations as a simplistic call for neighborhood schools and dismiss any findings that are disagreeable to you. That

reading, however, would miss the essential call from the community that the District needs to develop a plan to ensure quality schools are accessible to every community. There is a need for more discussion and movement on these issues, as well as on any policy proposal to address the challenges posed by declining enrollment, the gap in achievement among different student populations and budget issues faced by the District. Parents, youth and community members alike want the Board to focus on these issues and communicate its plans to solve these challenges.

The responsibility to implement these recommendations falls on all of us: elected officials of the School District and the City, the Superintendent and central office staff, principals and other school site leaders, School Site Councils and other governance bodies, community-based organizations working with schools, parents and students. If we want to improve our public education system, we must each accept our responsibility and be willing to work together for change.

The District doesn't have to reinvent the wheel to pursue these recommendations. The Board of Education should rely on the work that has already been started through the Community Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, the Community Advisory Committee on Student Enrollment, Recruitment and Retention (SERR), and the SFUSD staff's work on the SERR Initiative.

We look forward to working with school leaders and the community to respond to the findings and recommendations. If you have any questions or would like to discuss these recommendations, our contact information is below.

Very truly yours,



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Enclosure

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Student Enrollment, Recruitment and Retention: Community Conversations about San Francisco Public Schools (March 2007)

Quality Schools	
<u>Findings:</u>	<u>Recommendations:</u>
<p><i>Parents and youth use test scores as shorthand for evaluating academic achievement, but their demand for quality and what it takes to help their children learn is much more complex.</i></p>	<p><i>The Board of Education must focus on concrete steps to support good schools in every community.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elementary school parents want their children to receive a solid academic foundation in core subjects like math, reading, science and writing. They consider art, music and physical education an integral part of a well-rounded education. For high school students, parents want schools to offer a wide variety of special programs, including technology, trades and the arts. Parents want to know that they can enroll their child in a good, convenient school that – at minimum – offers solid academics, good teachers and a welcoming community but parents also want the option of going across town for a specialized program such as a language, academic or arts program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus policy decisions to develop well-rounded, quality schools in every community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents want all teachers to be committed, culturally competent and capable of delivering engaging and challenging instruction to meet each child's individual needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empower principals to select and retain teachers, paraprofessionals and others who are effective in working within their school communities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents want small class sizes at all grade levels to support more individualized instruction and strengthen relationships between students and educators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with the teachers' union to support and train teachers; create an effective evaluation system that both supports teachers and holds them accountable; and provide more staff to support lower student-teacher ratios.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents want principals who are strong and visible and who have been empowered to select and retain teachers, paraprofessionals and others who are effective in working within their school communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in recruiting, training, and evaluating principals and site leaders to manage high quality schools. Reward and recognize those who are effective.

Safe Schools & Neighborhoods	
<u>Findings:</u>	<u>Recommendations:</u>
<p><i>Parents, youth and community members are concerned about children's physical and emotional safety.</i></p>	<p><i>The Board of Education must work with City agencies to support safe schools and neighborhoods.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents want schools where their children are safe and well-supervised whether they are in the classroom, the hallways or on the school yard. Parents want their children to be in a school where they feel emotionally safe to express themselves and take academic risks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocate resources to ensure that all schools have programs and trained staff in place to solve conflicts and build tolerance, trust and community among students and adults.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents want to ensure that their school neighborhoods and the transportation used to get to their school are safe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work actively with City officials and community organizations to identify dangerous conditions and develop measures to create safe schools, safe neighborhoods and safe public transportation.

Strong School Communities

<u>Findings:</u>	<u>Recommendations:</u>
Parents, youth and community members want schools to be strong communities.	<i>The Board of Education, District staff, principals and teachers must communicate more effectively with current and potential public school families, at the District level and at school sites.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents want their schools to be warm and welcoming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit, train and support staff to ensure that they are representative of their student population; culturally competent; and able to communicate with parents, engage the community, and support student achievement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents value communication with their children's teachers and principals, and believe communication is a necessary condition for strong academics. Parents want to be partners in creating success for their child and their child's school. They need the school to support their involvement with ongoing, accessible communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand translation services to provide interpretation at all parent-teacher meetings and ensure the translation of all important documents sent home.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most parents want their school communities to reflect San Francisco's socioeconomic and cultural diversity. But for parents across the city, diversity is often trumped by a school's location and academic quality, and their own feeling of belonging. 	

A System that Works for Families

<u>Findings:</u>	<u>Recommendations:</u>
<i>Parents, youth and community members want to feel that the District is on their side.</i>	<i>The Board of Education must make it easier for all families in San Francisco to select, enroll, and be assigned to a quality public school.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents, particularly elementary school parents, want a quality school close to home or easy to get to. They also want the option of choosing a school that will best meet their children's needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider establishing neighborhood or community attendance areas for some elementary schools, while continuing to guarantee access to schools across the city for parents who do not wish to choose a school in their community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even parents who are happy with their children's schools want more predictability in the enrollment process, and are uncomfortable with a process that feels excessively complicated or random. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise the enrollment and student assignment policy to be fair, understandable and transparent.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents want the District to provide clear and accessible information that will help them choose a school that is a good fit for their child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to work proactively with community groups, childcare providers, media and City agencies to reach out to all families to ensure they understand the enrollment process and participate in choosing schools.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents want to participate fully in the enrollment process, but many encounter significant language, time and information barriers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support parents throughout the enrollment process by making it easy for parents to access EPC counselors and enrollment information in their own communities, and making the District's website more user-friendly and accurate. Ensure that all staff that touch parents in the enrollment process (EPC staff, principals, and secretaries) have the training and resources to provide clear enrollment information and excellent customer service.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After school programs are essential for many parents, and they are an added draw even for those who don't need them. Parents want high-quality after school programs that provide academic, enrichment, and social opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work proactively with the City and other community partners to ensure quality after school care is available and accessible at every school.

A Fair System

<u>Findings:</u>	<u>Recommendations:</u>
<i>Parents, youth and community members want consistency, predictability and equity.</i>	<i>School leaders should make access to resources more fair and equitable across the District.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents recognize that not every child has access to a good school convenient to home. Parents want the District to identify what works to support student achievement and to replicate successful strategies throughout the District. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus all policy decisions on ensuring that every child has access to a good school in their community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents don't understand how resources are distributed across the District and feel that access to resources is not equal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post financial information that includes actual (not average) dollars allocated and spent for each school – including central office funds, STAR funds, Dream School, Title I, actual teacher/staff salaries, and parent generated funds and grants – to compare school by school resource allocation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents want better systems for recruiting and supporting teachers and for holding them accountable. They want to see teacher quality distributed more evenly within and between schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with the teachers' union to develop a teacher assignment system that distributes teacher quality more evenly throughout the District and limits concentrations of novice teachers at any school, particularly at lower performing schools. Work with labor unions to give principals more responsibility and accountability for schools by allowing them to choose new staff members. Work with unions to develop a system for parents and students to provide input into teacher, principal, and District evaluations.

Effective Leadership

<u>Findings:</u>	<u>Recommendations:</u>
<i>Parents, youth and community members want the District to have a proactive, clear, long-term plan.</i>	<i>The Board of Education must focus on and communicate what they're doing to improve all schools, increase access to high quality schools, and address declining enrollment in public schools.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents want the Board of Education and the District to adopt a long-range plan to assure quality schools for every child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly articulate how the Board of Education and the Superintendent will collaborate effectively to assure quality schools for every child. Develop a long-range plan to achieve quality schools across the city that articulates what works to support student achievement and what it will take to replicate successful programs, which includes priorities, timelines and measurements of success.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents want the District to publicize its successes while it continues to improve. Parents want the District to provide information that they can trust about enrollment, school closures and plans for raising student achievement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch a highly visible public information campaign, highlighting the District's success, the SERR Initiative's long-range plan, and the steps the District is taking to address declining enrollment, reconfigure student assignment and support student achievement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents do not want to close schools, and many do not see a relationship between school closure decisions and the District's needs or long range plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate the public about the reasons for school closures and the resources that will become available to the remaining school sites. Help the community understand the connection between funding resources and improving educational outcomes in the long run.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents cite the lack of affordable housing, poor quality schools and an unpredictable enrollment process as reasons families are leaving the city. They want District leaders to work with the City and with community partners to improve neighborhood safety, increase affordable housing and improve public transportation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work proactively and expand the partnership between the District, the City, and community partners to improve neighborhood safety, increase affordable housing for teachers and families, and improve public transportation to meet the needs of the public school community.

Student Enrollment, Recruitment and Retention: Community Conversations about San Francisco Public Schools

Recommendations from the San Francisco Education Fund, the Parent Advisory Council to the SFUSD Board of Education and Parents for Public Schools of San Francisco (Ver.3_4.23.07)