

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



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*Prepared in partnership with Maria-Fernanda Gonzalez, University of California, Berkeley
and Collaborative Communications Group, Inc.*

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This report—*Student Enrollment, Recruitment and Retention: Community Conversations about San Francisco Schools*—is the culmination of a six month public engagement effort jointly led by the **San Francisco Education Fund** (Ed Fund), San Francisco Board of Education **Parent Advisory Council** (PAC) and **San Francisco Unified School District** (SFUSD). **Parents for Public Schools-San Francisco** (PPS), **María-Fernanda González**, Ph.D. candidate, University of California, Berkeley, and **Collaborative Communications Group**, a Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm with national expertise on public education and public engagement, joined in partnership to provide expert advice, meet with community members, analyze findings and collectively draft this report.

With a long tradition of serving as a bridge between the community and public schools, the Ed Fund is experienced in engaging individuals, organizations and institutions in positive action around public education. The PAC represents the voices and concerns of parents to the Board of Education and is composed of members from diverse communities and types of schools. For years, the SFUSD has been working with and acting in the best interest of families and youth in every corner of the city to fulfill its mission of helping every student reach his or her maximum potential.

This effort could not have been possible without a team of support. Many organizations and individuals throughout the city helped with this project: convening meetings, recruiting participants, opening their home, or lending a conference room or meeting site. We are grateful for their help. We also thank the cadre of volunteer facilitators who led these meetings and a team of transcribers who carefully recorded what was being said. A complete list of all organizations and individuals who participated in this effort is attached in Appendix A.

Finally, we could not have done our work without the tireless support of Kelley Abraham (Ed Fund) and Wilson Ng (SFUSD), who provided careful administrative support.

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Overview

In March 2006, the San Francisco Board of Education charged itself with preparing a long-range plan to address declining student enrollment and to ensure the success of every student in our City's public schools. Through the Student Enrollment, Recruitment and Retention (SERR) Initiative, the San Francisco Unified School District is developing a plan to support closing the achievement gap, provide all students equitable access to high-quality education in integrated learning environments, and sustain and build student enrollment to strengthen the District's financial condition.

Understanding the values, hopes and goals of the San Francisco community is crucial to this plan. To do this, the District, in part, asked the San Francisco Education Fund (Ed Fund) and the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) to partner in leading a community engagement effort to inform the SERR Initiative. The goals of this effort were to gain a better understanding of diverse community members' aspirations for SFUSD schools; to create shared knowledge about key issues facing the District; and to involve many members of the community in addressing these issues.

In other words, we conducted these meetings because parents, students and community members have something important to say about the future direction of our District.

We held intimate community conversations in nearly every corner of San Francisco to hear what over 900 parents and community members want for and from the schools in our city. What we heard was worth the effort. Within and across conversations, we heard striking commonalities and important differences that we will explore in this report.

This report has two primary goals. The first is to share, as completely as we can, what we heard about community members' values, hopes and goals for San Francisco public schools. The second is to have these voices inform the Board of Education, Superintendent and District staff as they develop policies to improve our schools.

The community conversations discussed in this report are an important part of the SERR Initiative and the District's planning process. The Superintendent and her staff will present a long-range plan to the Board of Education for review and further direction before June 2007.

This report is divided into three sections:

- Section One: What We Did: The Process
- Section Two: What We Heard: The Findings
- Section Three: Where We Should Go from Here: Our Reflections

In Section One, we outline how the effort got started and the methodology we used to gather the community, collect their thoughts and analyze the findings.

In Section Two, we share our findings from these community conversations. The more we listened to students, parents and community members the more clear it became that, while the community might differ on the details, we all share a core set of aspirations. In this section we will explore those 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.

These aspirations come together to shape a vision for schools and a school district that parents believe can and should serve their child and every child well. Parents want every student to have the option to enroll in a school that is close to home and offers solid academics, communication and a trusting environment. There is also a strong call for District



leaders to develop and, with laser-like focus, implement a plan to ensure there are good schools in every community. Parents are frustrated with the politics and debate around school programs and school consolidations that seem detached from strategies for quality education.

In Section Three, we share our reflections on the process and the implications we believe it holds for the important work that lies ahead.





What We Did: The Process

Our goals for the public engagement process were to gain a better understanding of diverse community members' aspirations for SFUSD schools; to create shared knowledge about key issues facing the District; and to involve multiple members of the community in addressing issues facing the District.

With these goals in mind, the Ed Fund, PAC and SFUSD, with the support of Parents for Public Schools (PPS), formed a working group to lead a broad public engagement effort to reach hundreds of parents and community members from across the city to discuss critical issues facing our public schools. The process took place over six months – from September 2006 through February 2007.

The Discussion Guide

The working group designed a discussion guide to help lead community members through a series of broad questions about their aspirations for schools, followed by more narrow questions about school choice and the school enrollment process. It also gave community members information about the current situation in SFUSD and asked for input on what should be done given the challenges currently facing the District.

The discussion guide was made available in Cantonese, English and Spanish, and was adapted for meetings with educators and youth.

The Facilitators

To engage a wide spectrum of the community, we reached out to other community-based partners. Thirty-six community facilitators were trained and led conversations based on the discussion guide. Facilitators represented a broad cross-section of city residents [see Appendix A for a full list of facilitators and their affiliations].

The Meetings

In just six months, the working group and its partners collectively convened 87 community conversations of approximately one to two hours each. Conversations took place in schools, community centers, community-based organizations and private homes [see Appendix B for a full list of meeting dates and locations].

Community members were invited to participate by SFUSD parent liaisons, PTAs, PTOs, School Site Councils, churches, after school programs and through personal contacts. Announcements were posted on SFUSD and organization websites, parent listservs and multilingual newsletters. As more community members participated, parents often contacted us to attend future meetings.

The meetings were intentionally small, usually involving between eight and twenty participants. Whenever possible, each small group discussion was held in a single language—Cantonese, English, or Spanish—so that participants could communicate in their primary language. Translators were made available for Russian and Samoan participants.

The Participants

We tried to reflect the socioeconomic, ethnic and linguistic diversity of San Francisco and to include as many different perspectives as we could, with a focus on SFUSD parents. In the end, we spoke with 928 community members, including 184 youth.

We heard from community members, educators, parents and students (see Chart 1). The majority of meeting participants were SFUSD parents and students, though meetings also included prospective public school parents, parents who send their children to non-SFUSD schools (both charter and private), teachers and non-parent community members. More than two-thirds of the adults we talked with are parents or parent-educators. As a result, we use the word “parents” to refer broadly to all parents and community members who took part in conversations. The voices of students are captured separately throughout the report.

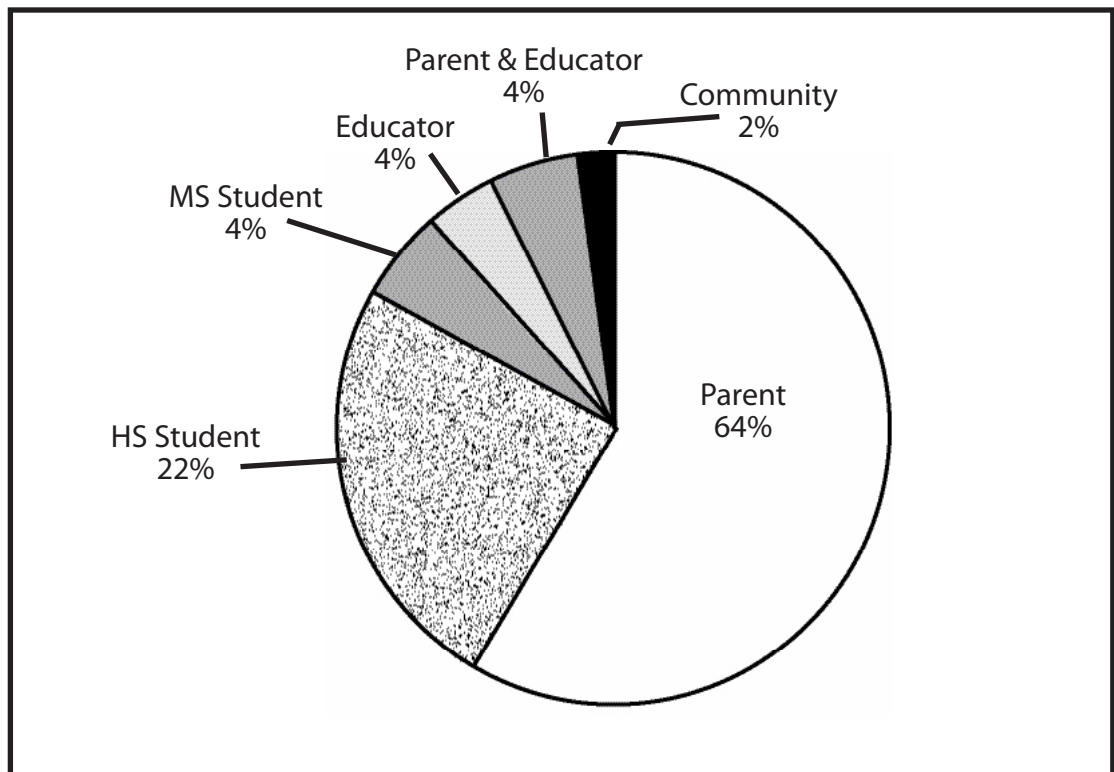


Chart 1: Participant responses to survey question: “Are you a: Parent, Educator, Community Member, High School Student or Middle School Student?”

We talked with parents of GATE students, special education students and English language learners. We met with people whose primary languages included Arabic, English, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, Samoan, Tagalog and others. We heard from a group of community members that was ethnically and racially diverse as well: 10% of participants were African American, 24% were Asian, 24% were Latino, 4% were Pacific Islander and 26% were White (see Chart 2). Together, participants represented all but one residential district in the city. We collected demographic and other information through a brief survey of conversation participants [see Appendix C for additional detail on participants and a summary of their survey responses].

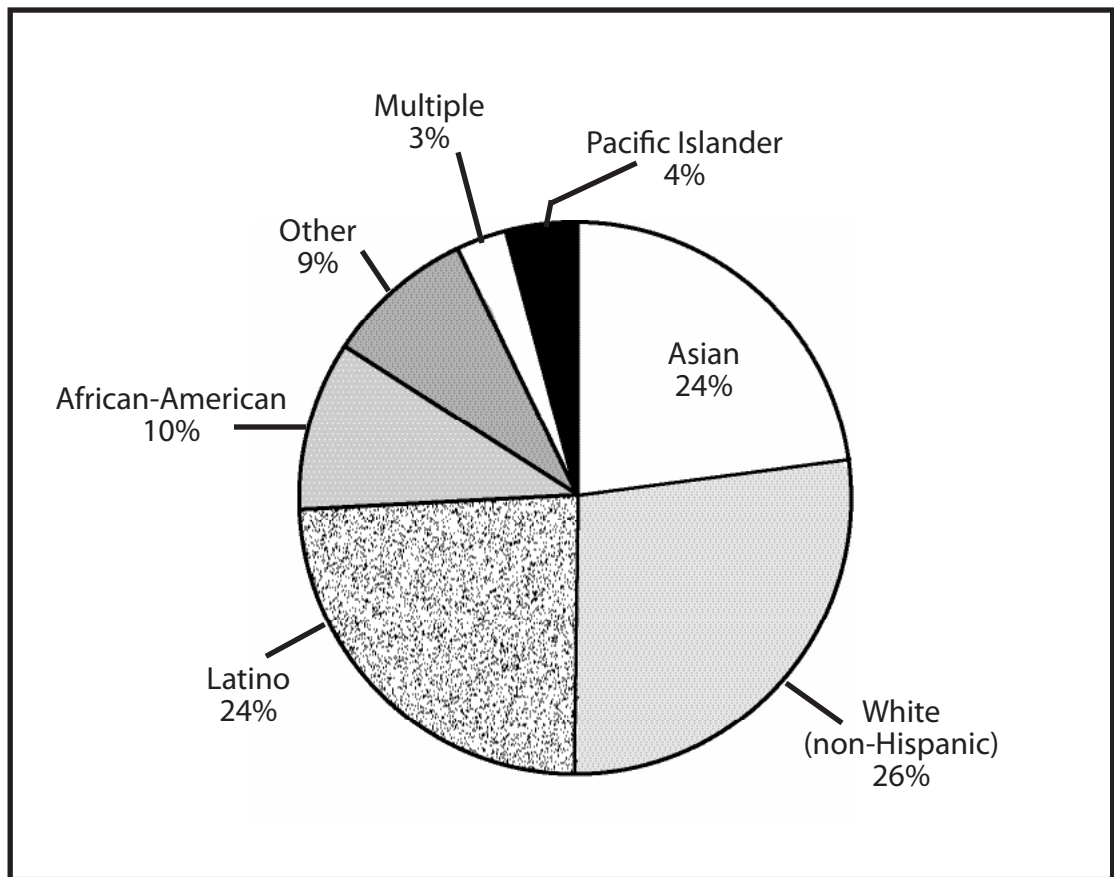


Chart 2: Participant responses to survey question: “What is Your Race/Ethnicity?”



What We Heard: The Findings

Our goal for this section is to share, as completely as we can, what we, the working group, heard about community members' values, hopes and goals for San Francisco public schools. The more we talked with students, parents and community members, the louder we heard that, while we all might differ on the details, we share a sense of what matters. In this section we will explore these six priorities:

- **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-term plan.

In reviewing this section, please note that the order of the values and findings is not meant to indicate a ranking. As a group, parents felt strongly about each of these values.

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.

When asked what they want or look for in a school, most parents included ideas like “strong academics,” “a place where you know you're getting a quality education” or “academic excellence” in their answers. We also heard that, for the majority of parents, academic success means a lot more than just high test scores. “Test scores are important,” noted a parent and San Francisco School Volunteer, “but don't represent the general experience of what is a good school.”

The parents we talked with believe quality schools are defined by engaging and challenging material, committed and caring teachers, a strong and visible leader and instruction modified to meet each child's needs.

Engaging and Challenging Material

Parents talked about the ideal curriculum as lessons that are “fun and engaging” and “dynamic enough to keep [students] interested in learning.” Parents often mentioned

“innovative” lessons, and a parent from Burton HS was not alone when she talked about schools as “places where kids are interested.” For many people, an ideal school would “somehow catch [students’] imagination” and offer a “creative curriculum.”

When parents offered suggestions for *how* to make curriculum engaging, they often mentioned **hands-on learning experiences and building connections between subject areas**. Parents at Grattan ES want their children’s lessons to include “more . . . hands-on, more projects and practical applications.” The desire for more hands-on or project-based instruction was echoed across the city by parents at Gordon J. Lau ES, Sherman ES, Galileo HS and Lowell HS, among others.

The parents we talked with also want their children to receive a **strong foundation in core subjects** like math, reading and writing, and they want their children to be rigorously prepared for the next level of education or life - high school, college or the “real world.” One Excelsior parent, for example, felt that the “focus should be on reading, writing and quantitative skills,” because they are “considered the foundation of learning for the rest of the child’s life.” But many parents also shared the belief that subjects like science, art, music, technology and athletics should be part of that core foundation and not treated as extras. Many parents mentioned that a school’s curriculum should help develop **well-rounded students with critical thinking skills**.

Programs

Parents were clear that they want the District to focus on developing well-rounded, inclusive offerings at every school more than on specialized programs at specific schools.

Parents imagined that a well-rounded school would offer art, music and sports as part of its daily program, but parents had other ideas as well. They asked that daily foreign language instruction be offered from an early age as an alternative to more specialized immersion programs, though immersion appeared to be a draw for parents considering private schools. Parents would also like to see support programs, including mental health, college counseling and academic tutoring, become a part of meeting each child’s needs.

When parents considered high school, the importance of specialized programs increased. When it comes to these older children, most parents are willing to sacrifice location for special programs that “could keep a disgruntled teenager interested” and ones that stimulate and better prepare their child for the future. Parents seemed particularly interested in arts and technology programs.

High school students asked for schools that offer a wider array of electives and after school enrichment programs from which they can choose and in which “you can find a space for yourself.” Many students are interested in technology and athletics, but they also want schools to expand supports such as peer advising and college counseling programs. Many students indicated that they would be willing to travel to a school with high-quality programs that interest them.

“[Schools need to] support students to achieve—those who need more help and those who do well.”

Parents of students in bilingual programs want assurance that their children are also learning English. Parents of students in special education programs want more cooperation and coordination between special education and general education. These parents also want **opportunities for inclusion** during non-academic parts of the day.

Instruction to Meet Each Child’s Needs

Parents want schools where “all kids learn” and where teachers reach students through personalization, “**not one size fits all**” methods. Parents believe **instruction should be “personalized”** to provide “high quality for all the various types of students.” Many parents, like one from Marshall ES, mentioned the particular needs of students in special education, of low performing students and of gifted or advanced students, noting that schools need to “support students to achieve—those who need more help and those who do well.” Parents also want instruction that will meet the needs of children with different learning styles and students from different backgrounds. Parents envision schools that “really tap into and realize everyone’s potential.”

Parents recognize the logistical challenges of individualized instruction for each child and believe **small classes** are key to making it possible. They note that with smaller class sizes, students will get “more individual attention,” and teachers might take more of a “personal approach, taking into account every child’s needs.” Parents appreciate that there are already small classes in the primary grades and want to extend that throughout elementary, middle and high school. Many parents, like those at Moscone ES and Sherman ES, indicated that they think “no more than 20 students” per class is an optimum number. Several parents suggested even lower ratios like 12 or 17 students to one teacher. We also heard parents suggest that support from paraprofessionals might accomplish the same goal.

Committed and Caring Teachers

Parents want teachers who are **caring and dedicated**. For example, parents expressed a desire for “teachers who really love to teach, [who] are really committed to teaching” and “teachers who really care.” One KIPP-Bayview charter school parent noted that KIPP is succeeding because of the unusual commitment of teachers to be available to students around the clock – the “energized teachers make a difference.” Parents believe teachers should be “nurturing [and] supportive” and should understand kids, especially the kinds of kids who are in their classes. Many parents said they want teachers and staff who are bilingual and able to work with students of different backgrounds.

In order to keep committed teachers from burning out or leaving the District, parents agreed **teachers need support**. Their suggestions included time to collaborate and share ideas with other teachers, time to prepare for classes, higher salaries, more opportunities for professional development and the knowledge that they are valued. At the same time, parents believe teachers should be **held accountable for student learning**, and it should be easier for schools “to get rid of bad teachers.”

Strong and Visible Leadership

Many of the parents we talked with believe that a “**strong leader**” provides the foundation for a great school. Parents at Presidio MS defined a strong leader as one with a “strong vision, conviction [and] purpose for kids.” To other parents, strong principals are **visible in the school and accessible to parents and students**, characteristics one Bayview parent associated with her own childhood principal. “She was hard, but she was everywhere. She walked the halls, she opened the bathroom doors, she ran the school; you didn’t have to ask if she was there, because you saw her.”

Parents also want the principal to **guide, support and inspire teachers** and have the authority to choose staff for the school. They want principals to have less bureaucracy to deal with so they can “focus on supporting teachers and students in classrooms.”

Students on Teacher Quality

Students talked in detail about wanting teachers who are energetic, caring and good at what they do. A Balboa HS student explained it as, “loyal teachers who come to work not just to work, but because of the students and their passion for teaching.” Many students talk about wanting to feel respected by teachers. At an Everett Middle School meeting, students pointed out that students need to be more respectful of teachers, and vice versa. Another Balboa student explained that teachers have stereotypes of students that make them afraid of particular groups in the school.

Students also want adequate individual attention and help from teachers. A Galileo HS student talked about how smaller class sizes or more teachers in each class would accomplish this goal. A Lowell HS student pegged it more on teachers’ ability to engage individual students in the classroom. “Everyone learns in different ways, so teachers should try to incorporate those different aspects.”

In nearly every meeting, students mentioned that they want to be involved in evaluating teachers and, using the same language as parents, want more opportunities to “get rid of bad teachers.”

“[A] school could be the best school, but if they are not safe, they aren’t going to learn anything.”

Safe Schools and Neighborhoods

Parents are concerned about their children’s physical and emotional safety.

Parents are concerned that their children’s schools, the neighborhoods where those schools are located and the transportation they use to get there are all safe. Beyond that, they want their children to be in a school where they are known and where they feel emotionally safe enough to express themselves and take academic risks.

A Safe School Environment

When asked about how they choose schools, **safety trumped other factors** for some parents at Alice Fong Yu ES. At a meeting in the Bayview, a parent shared candidly that “a school could be the best school, but if they are not safe, they aren’t going to learn anything.” Parents at Hillcrest ES agreed that “safety is a main priority.” School safety was mentioned at virtually every community conversation.

Middle and high school parents seemed most concerned about bullying, fights and weapons. Elementary school parents focused more on keeping doors closed to outsiders who don’t belong in the school. Parents **overall wanted more supervision** – at crosswalks, on the yard, at recess, at lunch, by the bus stop and in the hallway. While all parents wanted their children to feel and be safe, they didn’t always agree about how to get there.

An Excelsior parent asked for supervision more “like the security [she’s] seen at other schools.” But a Burton HS parent acknowledged that while she thinks, “security at the front gate is really important, some people are alarmed by the number of security guards.” Among those people were a group of parents at a Mission District conversation who wanted there to be “No police, unless they need to be called in, because hopefully the safety aspects are supported by the community.”

Emotional Safety

The parents we talked with want more than just physical safety. A Thurgood Marshall HS parent shared that it is “important that a school feels safe for students, not just physically, but also emotionally and socially so kids can speak out and express and develop themselves.” Balboa HS parents agreed that schools should be places where students “**feel safe to take risks**, have a sense of belonging.”

When parents talked about school size, they asked for ones that are “small enough that everyone knows each other.” For one James Lick MS parent, small school size is one way of making sure students are emotionally safe. “You get to know everybody and **it’s like a family**. At those bigger schools, your kid falls through the cracks there; at the small schools the principal knows all the kids by name.” At Moscone ES, parents also talked about “small schools with small classrooms, where students and families are known.” Parents at Sherman

ES were especially “nervous about the transition from elementary to middle school, from attending a small elementary school to a ‘giant’ school for middle school and even high school.”

A Safe Neighborhood

At a community conversation in North Beach, one parent concluded that the safety of our children is so fundamental that “it’s not just a school issue, **it’s a community issue.**” For many of the parents we spoke with, the neighborhood itself was the issue of concern. Parents also worry that their children are kept safe before and after school hours, especially on their way to and from school. They often were concerned about the safety of areas surrounding schools they were considering.

Parents look for “less busy streets,” “low crime rates” and an absence of “drugs and gangs.” For some parents, leaving the unsafe neighborhood they live in is not an option. For others, a concern for safety could override interest in a program or the fact that a school is nearby. At a meeting of Presidio CDC parents, one made clear that even though she was looking for a Mandarin immersion program, her child “won’t go to Starr King” because she “[doesn’t] like the neighborhood.” A SOMA parent was attracted to the new Bessie Carmichael building and its proximity to her home, but noted that she “didn’t know if [she’d] feel comfortable having [her] child take the bus there.” In the absence of reliable information for making comparisons about safety, parents relied on their own perceptions and assumptions.

Students on Safety

Students in every school we visited told us that they want to go to schools that are safe and in safe neighborhoods. Some students talked about not wanting to have to worry about gangs or violence. A student at a Chinatown meeting shared that feeling safe was essential to learning: “How are you going to do well academically when you feel unsafe and worried about yourself?”

Many students shared that they look to adults—teachers, principals and security guards—to supervise students and maintain order within the school. When students envision safe schools, however, they do not envision schools with lots of security devices, which many students say are more disturbing than comforting. Balboa HS students told us that they didn’t want “gates or jail bars” in their school. While some students expressed a need for more security guards at the school, students in a Lowell HS meeting shared that security guards make them feel uncomfortable—as if “there’s something going on that you should be worried about.”

At a Balboa HS meeting, students agreed that school safety is connected to programming. “If a school has a lot of programs that students like, there shouldn’t be a lot of bad stuff going on, and kids should be out of trouble.”

Students also shared that it is important for them to feel safe on their way to school and in the neighborhood surrounding the school. A John O’Connell HS student felt that some areas of the city are not safe enough for students to attend schools there: “Students who live in bad neighborhoods shouldn’t go to those schools.”

Strong School Communities

Parents think of their children's schools as small communities. They want to support and be supported by them.

We listened in each conversation as parents struggled to put into words how they know when a school is warm and welcoming, and when it is that they feel they and their children belong. Parents talked about schools that are nurturing and engaging, about schools that encourage their involvement, and about schools that work hard to communicate frequently and effectively with all parents.

Parents also talked to us about who they want in their school community. Parents exposed tensions between their desires for schools that represent San Francisco's diversity, for schools that are truly inclusive, and for schools where they feel comfortable with other families and the experiences and values they share.

San Francisco parents want schools driven by a shared goal: student achievement. And most parents think students learn best when they're at the center of a joyful, nurturing community.



Warm and Welcoming Schools

When we asked parents what they look for in a school, they often talked about a "feeling." Not quite able to put her finger on it, one parent at a conversation held by Parents for Public Schools told us, "I don't know that it can be reduced to a formula. I knew it was my first choice just by walking in the door."

Parents want a school community that is **warm and welcoming** to both them and their children. One pre-school parent, for example, shared that she's "been looking at preschools and talking about this a lot. Even if there were good academics at one place, I would choose another school if we felt more comfortable there." We heard from many parents who look for this feeling when they're visiting schools. They look to see if parents are in the classrooms, leading tours and participating at the school. They look for principals who come out to meet them on a school tour. They look for classrooms with "art on the walls," "fun programs going on" and "**dynamic, vibrant, engaging**" teaching. They look for staff that can understand and support their children. And they look for facilities that are "clean," "colorful" and "well-maintained" to send the message that there is **community pride in the school**.

Students agree. They want to "feel comfortable," "respected," "happy" and "motivated" at school. A Lincoln HS student, for example, imagines schools that are "colorful, warm and accepting when you walk in." Students were also adamant that school buildings be "clean" and "repaired." Even students at Lowell HS, who recognized their building is nicer than

some others, asked for bathrooms with better ventilation, greener school grounds and wider hallways to avoid traffic jams between periods. An O’Connell HS student wanted graffiti to be painted over, and in nearly every conversation, students called for cleaner buildings and updated equipment.

Parent Involvement

Many of the parents we talked with want to be partners in their children’s education. They see an opportunity for parents, community members and schools to **work together to support children**, and they look for schools where this is already happening or for schools where principals and teachers welcome and support it.

Some parents pointed out that their most important role is as partners at home. These parents feel they can provide their children and the schools with better support when teachers communicate with them about what their children are learning. At Guadalupe ES, for example, parents asked for a “system where if the child is behind, they **tell us how we can help** him do better,” since “many times we don’t know what they’re supposed to be learning in each grade [or] how they’re doing if they’re behind, so we can get more involved.” Another parent at Safe Haven House in the Bayview District “would like a school that teaches parents how to teach subjects like math... so they can help their children.”

Though schools rely on parents to help fundraise for valuable programs and staff, parents at Sherman ES told us they want parent involvement to mean more than fundraising. The more involved parents are, they tell us, the better able they are to **help hold schools accountable**. Many of the parents we talked with want to be included in decision making. At their ideal school, parents “give their input, they’re listened to and a plan is developed that meets their needs.” But as one Spanish-speaking Excelsior parent argued, “I realized when I was on the SSC [School Site Council] that they don’t send parents information about what money comes in, how it will be spent, how it will get divided up – they don’t give that information to parents. Sometimes that’s why they’re not involved. Because **they don’t give us enough information**, or sometimes they give it but in another language.” Inadequate translation was often cited as “a huge barrier to communication” between schools and parents.

Parents also offered suggestions for schools wanting to encourage participation. They want schools to communicate before crises develop, to communicate in multiple languages, to educate parents, to be more accessible during hours that are available to working parents, to provide multi-lingual parent liaisons, to operate as community centers (with longer hours and community activities), to offer parent-friendly spaces and to send out more information about school policies and spending. Many parents felt that providing culturally competent support and information in languages other than English would increase parent engagement in their school.



“The society is diverse so why should a school not be? [Young people] need to be prepared for when they come out into the real world.”

Diversity

Most of the parents we talked with **want their school communities to reflect San Francisco’s diversity**. Many parents talked about wanting schools that are “economically diverse;” others looked for racial, ethnic and cultural diversity. For some, diversity meant that a school has gay, immigrant or special education students; for others it meant the school has students with different interests or abilities. Those that value diversity want their children to be exposed to other cultures, to learn from their peers and to get along with people who are different from them. According to a parent at Gordon J. Lau ES, “the society is diverse, so why should a school not be? They need to be prepared for when they come out into the real world.”

Parents are clear that schools **can’t be diverse on paper only**. Parents want to see “students teaching other students about their culture,” an “effort made to honor differences,” “an inclusion program for special education students to be in general ed classes” and an “approach for dealing with diverse parents.” For many, this means schools also need to have diverse and culturally competent teachers.

But the parents we talked with acknowledged that diversity is not so simple.

While many parents want student diversity, many also **want to be around others like them**. Parents recognized the tension with their desire for diversity when they talked about “feeling comfortable” around other parents, about sharing “aspirations and goals for being there” and about having “something in common.” A parent at a community meeting in the Marina District, for example, wants a school with “like-minded families, who value education, [and] care for their children’s futures.” And African American parents with children at Sunset ES, Ortega ES, Drew ES and Bayview-KIPP charter school want their children to connect with other African Americans. For some, this preference had to do with being “protected from the outside world, [and] learning about themselves in a positive way;” for others it is the only way they feel they can find the **cultural and academic support** that the “best schools” don’t provide them.

Diversity was also only an easy choice for parents when the schools were the same in every other way. Most parents who considered diversity a very important part of school quality told us they would choose diversity **only if the schools were of the same academic quality**. When we presented parents with a forced choice between two elementary schools, one conveniently located where all students are from families similar to their own and one that is representative of the whole city but is significantly more inconvenient to reach, parents - from SOMA, from West Portal, and from the Bayview, for example - most **often chose convenience**. Parents recognized this as a difficult challenge that they and the District face: “[it’s] ironic because we want our kids in neighborhood schools in a city that is segregated, but then we want our schools to be representative of our city and diverse.”



Choosing a School – Students’ Perspective

When choosing a school, students consider whether schools have high-quality, interesting programs and whether or not schools—and neighborhoods surrounding them—are safe.

Students also told us that they want those “good” schools to be nearby and easy to get to. Several Balboa HS students said that they chose their school because it was close to home and therefore a “more realistic” option. A Lowell HS student argued that it “shouldn’t take an hour and a half to get to school.”

Students also wanted to attend a school with at least a few of their friends. A Balboa HS student told us that he chose Balboa because he “had friends who went here, so I knew I would have support.” That said, many students didn’t seem willing to sacrifice quality or safety to be with their friends.

Schools’ reputations also weigh heavily in students’ opinions about which school to go to. Across conversations, students told us that they get a sense of schools’ reputations from what they hear in the media and through word of mouth between students, parents, community members and school staff. Some students also pointed out that they were open to changing their minds: “People said that Balboa was bad, and it’s not bad at all once you get here.”

A System that Works for Families

Parents want to feel that the District is on their side.

We were struck in conversation after conversation by parents' intense commitment to getting their children the best education possible; however, the parents we talked to also made it clear that they resent unnecessary hurdles. Parents want information, support and services that make choosing the right school a bit more manageable. A system that works for families would provide a good school close to home for every student; quality information and communication around the enrollment process; and access to quality after school programs.

They also helped us see that when information is difficult to find, when the enrollment process is hard to navigate and time consuming, and when schools are hard to reach, it's the parents with the fewest resources and fewest options that stand to lose the most. Fortunately, parents shared not only frustrations but their ideas for the kind of support they'd like to see.

A Good School Nearby

Parents, particularly elementary school parents, talked often about **wanting a quality school close to home or work**. Parents envisioned their ideal school as one their children could walk or bike to or one that requires "less travel time for the parents and the students so that both the parents and students can spend time on more important things than getting to school." Parents also recognized that not everyone has a quality option close to home.

"There shouldn't be a school system where finding the good schools is a scavenger hunt."

The importance of **convenience was in many cases about safety**. In a Hillcrest ES conversation, one parent shared that "because my sister is just a few blocks down... I have somebody to get them whenever there's an emergency." But parents' concerns weren't only about safety. A convenient location was seen by some parents as a **support for their engagement** at the school: "I think if you want to involve parents you have to make it easy for them to get there."

While some parents expressed an unwillingness to drive across town, many parents do not even have the option. At the Jewish Community Center conversation, for example, we heard that many children are being picked up by grandparents, who often do not drive and **must rely on public transportation**. We heard the same concern from many lower income families. Parents talked about looking for MUNI accessible options, but they had more questions than answers when it came to buses operated by the School District. "Do older kids have access to school buses?" and "Who can take the yellow bus?" parents asked at a

Student Assignment - A Brief History

Many parents told us that they do not understand or trust the District's student enrollment system. The confusion and mistrust is in part the product of a number of changes that have been made to the system in the years since our current high school students first started kindergarten.

In 1983, SFUSD began a court-supervised effort to desegregate the City's schools. Attendance areas were drawn and students were automatically assigned to their attendance area school unless they requested a school through the Optional Enrollment Request (OER). In an effort to increase diversity, attendance areas were not necessarily near their assigned schools. For example, the attendance area school for part of the Mission neighborhood was in Chinatown. No more than 45% of the students at a non-alternative school or 40% at an alternative school could be of the same race or ethnicity. For a few years, students who lived in lower income zip codes received priority in the OER process.

In response to the 1999 Settlement Agreement prohibiting the use of race or ethnicity in student assignment, the District created a race neutral student assignment method. For the 2001-02 school year, families could list up to 5 schools. Assignments were made through a random computerized process that did not use race or any other factors. Siblings and attendance area students received a priority in the lottery. If a student did not get assigned to their first choice, the lottery attempted to assign them to their second choice and so forth until all of their choices were exhausted. Students who did not get assigned to any of their choices through the lottery were offered an assignment to the school closest to where they lived that still had openings.

In 2001, the parties stipulated that the District should use a modified version of its assignment method, called the Diversity Index Lottery, starting with the 2002-2003 school year. Student assignment under the Diversity Index Lottery incorporates parent choice, sibling priority, access to programs that meet specialized learning needs, where the student lives, and five diversity factors including home language, socioeconomic status, extreme poverty, academic rank of sending school, and academic achievement. Race and ethnicity are not considered.

In the early years of the Diversity Index, many parents heard or suspected that other parents were cheating or pushing their way into the best schools by lying about the diversity factors or pressuring school officials. Although many believe the system is better now, parents' distrust of the system persists.



meeting in the Richmond. Many parents expressed a willingness to travel to reach particular schools or programs, but shared that they often can't make these choices work without the support of District- and City-run transportation that is reliable, safe and convenient.

A Parent-Friendly Enrollment Process

We found that while many parents are happy with their child's school, they are convinced they "got lucky." Even when they get schools they like, they don't understand or trust the process. Parents need support in order to find, choose and enroll in a school that is a good fit for their child. We heard parents saying, "I don't want my child's education to be a lottery."

Parents describe the District's enrollment process as "stressful," "confusing," "exhausting" and "unclear." Parents often do not understand the process or assignment criteria and parents at the Samoan Community Development Center argued that the lack of **good information and communication** was the single greatest barrier to their active involvement in the enrollment process. While some of the frustrations parents shared about enrollment in the past have been resolved, most were unaware that progress has been made. Parents who are frustrated with the process today asked for more transparency, materials that are complete and easy to find and assignment criteria that are clear and consistent from year to year.

Parents also imagined and had suggestions for a school district that would **support parents through the application process**. Some parents asked for an automated or web-based process and for the opportunity to email staff with questions. Others suggested making applications and support available through satellite offices, local enrollment fairs or community based organizations. Some parents thought that earlier notification would keep families from falling back on private schools. And, still others felt they needed to be able to communicate about these important decisions with Educational Placement Center (EPC) staff that speak their native language.

In addition to finding quality information about the process, parents have a difficult time finding **information they trust about the schools and their programs**. Many of the parents we talked with are happy with their child's schools, but unhappy with the hard time they had finding it. One Richmond parent, for example, expressed frustrations with "the whole hidden gem thing...there shouldn't be a school system where finding the good schools is a scavenger hunt." Parents do turn to the District for school information but frequently find that information in the enrollment guide and website is outdated, inaccessible or incomplete.

To compensate for gaps in District information, **parents rely heavily on information from other parents** when they're choosing a school. They trust "word of mouth," "parents on the playground," "parents experienced with the process," "conversations with our friends," "personal recommendations" and the "general grapevine" to help them gauge which schools are a good fit for their children. In most cases parents are relying on information from parents they live near, share a language with or feel comfortable with socially.

School site visits are also priceless learning experiences for parents, but many parents mentioned that they needed more school visits to be more accessible. At a meeting in the Western Addition, one parent expressed frustration that "You have to go during the day, you have to take off work – it's really geared to a middle class parent who's not clocking in and clocking out, people who have access to transportation, or it takes 3 hours... I just don't think most parents can afford to do that." Parents suggested the District provide **transportation and translation** and that schools provide tours or hold **open houses during non-school hours**.

After School Programs

Many of the parents we talked with expressed an interest in after school programming – **for some the programs were a non-negotiable, while for others they were an added draw**.

Parents from all corners of the city shared that "good after-care programs where the kids are safe are **really important for working parents**." Those who felt many families are leaving the city because of the high cost of living also thought that flexible, extended day programming might tip the balance in the other direction. "It's so expensive to live in the city,

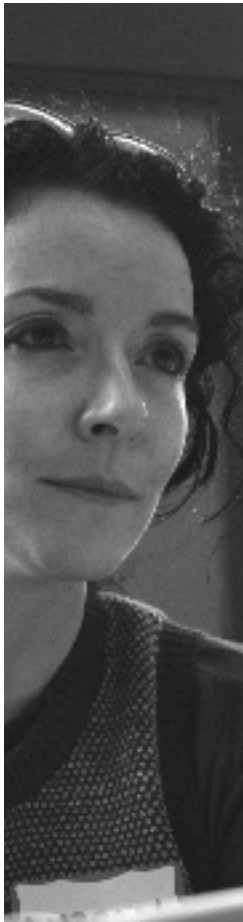
“It’s so expensive to live in the city, and both parents may have to work a lot, so maybe [the ideal school would have] extended after school programs, making it manageable for parents to stay here...”

and both parents may have to work a lot, so maybe [the ideal school would have] extended after school programs, making it manageable for parents to stay here...”

We heard from many parents who rely, out of necessity, on their child’s school for this support. One parent at the Bakar Community Center shared her frustration at not being able to choose a school without an extended day program: “I don’t have that kind of flexibility – I’d have to change my job or career and don’t have that freedom.” A parent at a Balboa HS conversation shared a similar need: “We had to have an after-school program – even if [it’s] just basic childcare, because we work and needed a place for our child to be after school.”

Parents see after school care as a way of **keeping children safe and off the streets, but they also see it as an opportunity for much more than that.** In a community conversation at Visitacion Valley ES, parents cited help with homework, exposure to music and sports and friendships with a broader mix of students as advantages of their after school program. A Sunset parent added that “most would say they want after-school because they get free babysitting, but my child really likes the Beacon Program, and the enrichment she gets there; it’s an important part of her learning.” At a conversation with special education parents, one shared that the after school program at her school also offers her child an integrated environment for socialization.

Parents who stated they could rely on other forms of after school care included those parents who do not work outside of the home, who have the support of extended families or who live in neighborhoods with community-run programs. Moscone ES parents lean heavily on family; parents at Marshall ES cited the Boys and Girls Club; and many others thought this could be an area of improved partnership with the City’s Recreation and Park Department. For many parents, these programs are **only an option when safe transportation is provided.**



A Fair System

Parents want consistency, predictability and equity.

Not surprisingly, every parent we talked to wants the best for his or her own child. But most parents were worried about other people's children too. They want all children to have access to a good school.

When we talked with parents about current conditions in the District, they reacted strongly to evidence of an achievement gap. Closing the gap was a priority for most of the parents we talked with. They want the District to learn from the schools, school leaders and programs that are doing well, to make sure resources are distributed fairly and to focus honestly on teacher quality.

Access to High-Quality Schools

Almost every parent we heard from wanted a **good school nearby**. And a lot of the parents we talked with argued for using assignment criteria – neighborhood, class or ability, for example – to create a system where access to a quality school is more fair. Some of the parents we talked with argued that fair is getting to send their children to a school “in the neighborhood where they've chosen to live.” Others argued that fair is giving priority to families in the school's neighborhood, but leaving some spots open for those who may not want to attend their neighborhood school. Only a few parents steered away from neighborhood criteria altogether, arguing, like one Presidio MS parent did, that “parents and children cannot be penalized for where they can afford to live.”

We also heard from those parents who wish their neighborhood school were a better option. Parents at Balboa HS see families leaving their neighborhood and argue that the District “**needs to fix the schools in this area of town**, so that they don't want to leave.” At the community conversation at Safe Haven House in the Bayview, parents expressed impatience about the fact that they “deal disproportionately with schools that don't serve our students.” They also want and feel they deserve access to good neighborhood schools.

We also heard many parents argue that if there were more quality options, there wouldn't be so much tension around the enrollment process. One Inner Richmond parent argued, for example, for “consistency in quality so we're not all trying to fight for one school.” Another community member argued that, “**we're focused on the wrong problem...** if all schools were high quality schools then I don't believe people would focus on the problems of enrollment. There wouldn't be those problems.”

Doing Here, What They're Doing Over There

A lot of the parents we talked with had questions about inconsistency. They don't understand why, if some schools are working, the District doesn't figure out how to replicate **that**

success. “If some schools are doing well,” parents argue, “they should be using strategies at other schools.” Parents at Hillcrest, for example, want to know what E.R. Taylor is doing. “Why can’t they find out why they’re doing so much better than this school? You know, whatever they’re doing there, do it here?” At an Ed Fund conversation, parents also urged the District “to look at what can be replicated in other places [and] have an **honest discussion of what is really working.**” Another community member added, “We do know how to educate poor kids of color in our District... We know how to do it but we don’t have a strategic, uniform way for this to be shared.”

Many parents pointed out that “what’s working” is having enough resources to succeed. Parents at a North Beach meeting pointed to the recent move of the former Lowell principal to Marshall HS as an example of resource-sharing within the District, adding, “Hopefully, that will help equity a little bit.” Other parents, at Clarendon ES for example, suggested that when the District relies so heavily on parents to fundraise for enrichment activities, programs and staff, schools with poorer parents lose. Some parents would like to see “**a little more balance between the schools** so that schools that can’t fundraise can still have the programs that schools that can fundraise have.”

What does “neighborhood school” mean?

The phrase “neighborhood school” is used regularly in conversations about education in San Francisco. In every part of the city people talked about wanting a “neighborhood school.” But what do they mean?

As we listened and asked questions, the following two sets of definitions emerged:

- 1. Neighborhood School as Proximity – For many people the phrase “neighborhood school” means “a school close to where I live.” For some that means a school very close – that they can walk to. For others it is a short bus ride away. In these instances, neighborhood is really only about distance.**
- 2. Neighborhood School as Sense of Community – Others started with the phrase “neighborhood school” but then talked about characteristics of their relationship to the school. Definitions like: “a place where I am welcome,” “a place I can be involved in” and “a place where kids can be connected,” were common. For these parents, the idea of neighborhood school is really about a place to belong and connect with each other. Some tie this to geography so they use the term “neighborhood,” but their interest is in the nature of the relationship they want to have with the school and the other families in it.**

“There’s always one star teacher that everyone wants, one that’s okay, and then one that no one wants. How can we get it so that it’s more even?”

Other parents, like several at Grattan ES, see it as the District’s responsibility to **distribute resources more fairly** by focusing on students who are eligible for free lunches. Balboa HS parents agree. But parents’ definitions of what is “fair” varied. Instead of focusing on any particular school, for example, some parents talked about “all schools having the same” resources. Parents asked a lot of questions about how the District spends the money it has and wanted to see proof that resources can be linked to results. A **lack of transparency** seemed to contribute to parents’ perception that the current system for distribution of resources is unfair.

An Honest Conversation about Distributing Teacher Quality

Parents talked a lot about teachers being the most important ingredient for success. And many of the parents we talked with are concerned that **teachers aren’t getting enough support**. At meetings across the city we heard calls for more professional development, higher pay and greater independence. But along with support, parents asked for **more accountability**. Parents are clear that they want only the best teachers in their schools. In a community conversation at James Lick MS, one parent connected the two concerns. “Not to be anti-teacher,” she said, “but I think we need to have a really honest conversation about teacher quality. I think that until we have this conversation with the teachers’ union, we’re not going to be able to pay teachers what they deserve. We need high-quality teachers.” To ensure quality, parents at several different schools imagined having principals who could control which teachers they hire and fire.

Parents who are concerned about the achievement gap also asked questions about **how the best teachers are being distributed throughout the District**. According to one community member, for example, “there are so many first-year teachers, and they’re concentrated in the lower-performing schools. The connection to the achievement gap is really clear to me.” In other conversations, parents echoed the thought. At Clarendon ES, one parent said, “We need a balance of teacher experience in schools instead of putting a lot of young people in more difficult schools,” and in SOMA, one said, “There are concentrations of the most experienced teachers in the highest performing schools.” Other parents, like one at a conversation in the Richmond, are concerned about the distribution of teacher quality within their children’s school. “There’s always one star teacher that everyone wants, one that’s okay, and then one that no one wants. How can we get it so that it’s more even?”

For parents of color, the achievement gap is also related to whether teachers have high expectations for and can relate to their kids. At the Samoan Community Development Center we heard that the District “needs to **recruit teachers from the community** – kids don’t see themselves and no one steps up to deal with it.” At Guadalupe ES parents asked, “Why, if this is a bilingual school, aren’t there more bilingual teachers?” At Charles Drew parents argued that culturally sensitive teachers and principals with high expectations are the key to closing the gap.

Effective Leadership

Parents want the District to have a proactive, clear, long-term plan.

Parents also told us they want the District's plan to be driven by an ambitious, student-centered vision and that they want to see the plan implemented. As the District confronts challenges in the years ahead, such as the growing achievement gap and declining enrollment, parents want the Board of Education to rely on this shared vision and to be committed to ongoing and respectful communication and collaboration. They see effective, focused and cooperative leadership from a permanent superintendent and school board as the necessary preconditions for facing these significant challenges.

A Long-Term Vision, Concrete Results

When asked about current conditions facing the District, parents often turned the tables and asked us questions. Parents at Cobb ES asked why the District would build a new school, Dianne Feinstein ES, in the same year it had to close schools. Parents at Hillcrest asked why, if there is so much extra space, classrooms at their school feel overcrowded. Parents want to know what the plan is.

Some parents, like those at a meeting of special education parents in the Mission, feel “challenges in the District are big” and think the District needs to “**have a more visionary discussion.**” A Marshall ES parent agrees that the District needs to think big and “focus on a very radically different future, not just modifying the past.”

Parents also want to see the District's vision **translated into concrete goals** for student achievement. At the Dianne Feinstein ES community conversation, parents argued that “We should have a track for more quality schools – we need the District to have a timeline to have quality schools in every neighborhood, or we're never going to get there.” And, finally, parents want to see these plans come to life. “Does the board understand that we need to make a commitment to quality?” one Sunset parent asked us. “If they make a decision, they need to **follow through in a concrete way.** I don't know if they connect what they say with what results we expect to see.”

Trust and Communication

At a conversation held at the Ed Fund, community members hoped the District has a plan: “They probably have a long term plan, but we just don't know about it.” But the assumption that the District might fail to communicate something as important as the long-range plan was highlighted as a problem of its own.

Many parents, particularly those who are happy with their child's school, want the District to do a better job of **marketing its successes while it continues to improve.** Parents often



shared the frustration that, despite the fact that they see positive changes, many parents continue to hold a negative impression of the City's public schools. One Richmond parent, for example, thinks that as a recruitment measure, "we need to better market what schools offer. We have great art and music programs. People talk about wanting something, and it's already there." They want parents to continue to generate "buzz" about public schools but they also want the District to be more proactive about reaching out to parents to share positive stories.

When we presented statistics about the school assignment process, many of the parents we talked with were surprised to learn that over 84% of applicants get a school on their list of choices. Others doubted the District-provided information was true. Parents want to rely on the District for more information, and **they want to feel like they can trust the information they get.**

Collaboration

With so many challenges ahead, parents want to see Board members working collaboratively with each other and with the District Superintendent and staff. We heard from Presidio Middle School parents that fights between the Board, the superintendent and the labor unions have made them feel insecure about staying in the system. Pre-school parents at an Inner Richmond meeting are "worried overall about the leadership," and a Grattan ES parent stopped attending Board meetings because of the tension. Another community member wants to see "constant battles between the school board members and superintendent" replaced with "**a strong, cohesive leadership**, with a cohesive vision and philosophy."

Parents also want to see the **City and School District working together to support children**, families and schools. Parents attribute some of the decline in enrollment to school quality and a stressful, unpredictable enrollment process, but according to many parents, families are leaving the city for reasons that are outside of the District's control.

At the Potrero Hill Family Resource Center, one grandparent shared her concern that "they're building [new housing] all around, but I have a job and I can't afford it. The reason we don't have as many children is because there's no place for the parents. Even if you have two parents that are working, the food, PG&E, clothes, you're broke. You can't make ends meet." Parents frequently identified **affordable housing, reliable transportation and neighborhood safety** as areas where the District needs to seek support from the City. "There is such an emphasis on schools, but it's beyond the schools, it's the City. It needs to be **driven by the City or community at large** because schools have so much responsibility placed on them. There needs to be a partnership and vision."

A Note on Excess Building Capacity

When we presented parents with the challenge that SFUSD has enough space for 90,000 students but has only 57,000 students enrolled, parents overwhelmingly saw this as an opportunity, not a problem.

- “Why do the classrooms seem so crowded?”
- “Why are they closing schools? Can’t they use these buildings to reduce class size?”
- “Rent out the space and use it to generate revenue.”
- “[Create] multi-use facilities – what other things are needed in a community? Can SFUSD find a partner to rent to – to help create community?”
- “[It’s] misguided and a short-term solution, to close schools.”
- “SFUSD is not using space wisely.”

Parents outlined creative options including: using excess building space to reduce class size, generating rental income and providing space for adult education and community meetings. Parents are very aware that the District has been closing schools, but we were surprised to find that only a small number of parents recognize and understand the financial challenges that result from excess space or see a relationship between the school closure decisions and a larger vision for the District.

What We Heard: A Summary

Quality Schools

Parents and youth use test scores as shorthand for evaluating academic achievement, but their demand for quality and what it takes to help children learn is much more complex.

- 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 a 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.
- Parents want all teachers to be committed, culturally competent and capable of delivering engaging and challenging instruction to meet each child's individual needs.
- Parents want small class sizes at all grade levels to support more individualized instruction and strengthen relationships between students and educators.
- 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.

Safe Schools and Neighborhoods

Parents, youth and community members are concerned about children's physical and emotional safety.

- 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.
- Parents want to ensure that their school neighborhoods and the transportation used to get to their school are safe.

Strong School Communities

Parents, youth and community members want schools to be strong communities.

- Parents want their schools to be warm and welcoming.
- 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.

- 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.
- Parents want the Board of Education, District staff, principals and teachers to communicate more effectively with current and potential public school families, at the District level and at school sites.

A System that Works for Families

Parents, youth and community members want to feel that the District is on their side.

- 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.
- 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 and random.
- 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.
- Parents want to participate fully in the enrollment process, but many encounter significant language, time and information barriers.
- 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.

A Fair System

Parents, youth and community members want consistency, predictability and equity.

- 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.
- Parents don’t understand how resources are distributed across the District and feel that access to resources is not equal.
- 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.

Effective Leadership

Parents, youth and community members want the District to have a proactive, clear, long-term plan.

- Parents want the Board of Education and the District to adopt a long-range plan to assure quality schools for every child.
- Parents want the District to publicize its strengths 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Where We Should Go From Here: Our Reflections

During this engagement process, we spoke to over 900 people from across San Francisco. Through conversations held in Cantonese, English and Spanish we heard an enormous range of needs, priorities, values and suggestions. In this report, we identify where patterns emerged, and where we found agreement among many different people. We also identify choices that parents, youth and other community members struggle to make, and point out where we heard different perspectives and priorities. We believe that what we heard has implications for how we move forward.

The District asked the Ed Fund and PAC to partner in conducting this public engagement effort as part of a comprehensive process to develop a long range plan that addresses declining student enrollment – the Student Enrollment, Recruitment and Retention Initiative (SERR Initiative). Understanding community concerns is an essential part of a larger analysis of the conditions facing the District. We intend District leaders to consider community concerns carefully, along with educational research and other information that has been gathered in the process of creating the SERR plan. These community findings have important implications which should be considered as District leaders take action to address student enrollment and achievement.

First, parents, youth and other community members want us all – the Board of Education, School District staff, City leaders, principals, teachers and community partners – to focus our conversations, our policy deliberations and our actions on developing and supporting good and safe schools in every community. If we want to improve our public education system, we must be willing to work together for change.

Second, parents, youth and other community members want to be kept informed. They want the District to communicate clearly what it's doing, in both the short and longer term, to assure quality schools for every child. They want to hear more often about the District's successes and about its plan for tackling challenges. They want to have the information they need to support their schools and the District, and to hold them accountable.

Third, parents, youth and other community members alike want to be partners in the process of developing and supporting these good schools. They want to be heard. Most are not experts on what the research says about how children learn or on the long-term implications of certain policies. But they are experts on their own children and on their experiences with their schools and with the District. They want the Board of Education, School District staff and school site leaders to draw from lessons learned in our own District and beyond, to continue to learn from work that has already been started through the Community Advisory Committee on Student Assignment and the Community Advisory Committee on Student Enrollment, Recruitment and Retention and to integrate the rich voices and experiences shared in this report.

Finally, the parents, youth and community members we talked with see this community engagement process as a step in the right direction towards creating a focused, respectful conversation with District leaders about our schools. We heard from community members all over the city that they want to be part of creating good schools for all children. Many parents, like one at the Safe Haven House in the Bayview, were still hopeful and committed: “We want to be engaged in long-term visioning and building quality schools.” But if we want to harness this hope and keep parents’ commitment, “It has to show up in what [we] do, or we’ll even lose more parents. It really has to count towards making final changes.”

We must take responsibility and work together for change. We hope you’ll join us in our commitment to making the community’s voices count towards improving our schools.

Appendices

- A. Meeting Conveners, Facilitators and Transcribers
- B. Meeting Dates and Locations
- C. Participant Demographics and Survey Responses



A. Conveners, Facilitators and Transcribers

We thank the following individuals for their tremendous and invaluable work. They hosted, convened, facilitated and transcribed at least one – and, in many instances, many more – community conversation on behalf of this engagement effort. This effort would not have been possible without their support.

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Katie Albright	San Francisco Education Fund
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Carolyn Hutchinson	Parents for Public Schools
Cody Jang	Community Educational Services
Dwayne Jones	City and County of San Francisco
Cece Kaufman-Himmelstein	Parents for Public Schools
Matthew Kelemen	San Francisco Unified School District
Omar Khalif	Parent Advisory Council to the Board of Education
Kim Knox	Community Member
Jose Lam	San Francisco Unified School District
Winnie Lau	Chinese for Affirmative Action
Lisa Lee	Community Educational Services
Shirley Lee	San Francisco Unified School District
Milena Levitin	Parent Advisory Council to the Board of Education
Deborah Li	Community Member
Rong Li	San Francisco Unified School District
Rosalia Lopez	San Francisco Peer Resources
Leslye Lugo	San Francisco Peer Resources
Deborah Lynch	San Francisco School Volunteers
Marta Madrigal	San Francisco Unified School District
Jenny Mai	Parent Advisory Council to the Board of Education
Chi Mak	San Francisco Unified School District
Ramon Martinez	San Francisco Unified School District
Luis Mashek	San Francisco Peer Resources
Mollie Matull	Community Advisory Committee on SERR
Pat Mejia	Support for Families of Children with Disabilities
Raina Meyers	San Francisco Peer Resources
Lena Miller	Bayview Safe Haven
David Moore	Collaborative Communications Group
Suzanne Morikawa Madden	Parents for Public Schools
Emily Murase	Parent Advisory Council to the Board of Education
Meghan Neary	Collaborative Communications Group
Laurie Nelson	Parents for Public Schools
Monica Ng	Wu Yee Children's Services
Wilson Ng	San Francisco Unified School District
Rachel Norton	Parents for Public Schools
Amy Ottinger	Parents for Public Schools
Ethan Patchell	San Francisco Peer Resources
Christopher Pepper	San Francisco Peer Resources
Frannie Roche	Parents for Public Schools
Ellie Rossiter	Parents for Public Schools

Kathleen Ruffle	Community Educational Services
Tita Sevaaetasi	San Francisco Unified School District
Dedria Smith	City and County of San Francisco
Donna Smith	San Francisco Unified School District; Parent Advisory Council to the Board of Education
Dave Snyder	Community Member
Kate Steinheimer	Parent Advisory Council to the Board of Education
Vicki Symonds	Parents for Public Schools
Lisa Tafari Krim	Parents for Public Schools
Pui Ling Tam	Community Educational Services
Patsy Tito	Samoan Community Development Center
Diana Urman	Community Member
Luis Vasquez-Gomez	Parent Advisory Council to the Board of Education
Pauline Vela	Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth
Araceli Villalobos	San Francisco Unified School District
Aimee Vicencio	Community Educational Services
Shamman Walton	Potrero Hill Family Resource Center
Joanna Warrens	Parent Advisory Council to the Board of Education
Karen Weidert	Community Educational Services
Lorraine Woodruff-Long	Parents for Public Schools
Susie Wright	Parents for Public Schools
Valerie Yevtushenko	Community Member
Deena Zacharin	San Francisco Unified School District
Alice Griffith	Opportunity Center
	Buddhist Church Youth Athletic Association
	Jewish Community Center of San Francisco

B. Meeting Dates and Locations

For six months, from September 2006 through February 2007, we conducted 87 community conversations reaching out to 928 participants, including 184 youth. Conversations took place in the following schools, community centers, community-based organizations and private homes throughout the city (when multiple meetings occurred at the same location and time we only list the location once):

October 10, 2006	Marshall Elementary School
October 10, 2006	San Francisco Education Fund
October 16, 2006	Grattan Elementary School
October 17, 2006	Argonne Elementary School
October 19, 2006	Galileo High School
October 20, 2006	Visitacion Valley Elementary School
October 23, 2006	Rosa Parks Elementary School
October 24, 2006	Everett Middle School
October 24, 2006	Moscone Elementary School
October 25, 2006	E.R Taylor Elementary School
October 25, 2006	Sunset Elementary School
October 25, 2006	Visitacion Valley Middle School
October 25, 2006	Thurgood Marshall High School
October 25, 2006	Cesar Chavez Elementary School
October 25, 2006	Lowell High School
October 26, 2006	McKinley Elementary School
October 26, 2006	Lowell High School
October 26, 2006	Balboa High School
October 28, 2006	James Lick Middle School
October 29, 2006	Private Home (Mission)
October 30, 2006	San Francisco School Volunteers
October 31, 2006	John O'Connell High School
November 2, 2006	Alice Fong Yu Elementary School
November 2, 2006	Presidio Middle School
November 2, 2006	Gordon J. Lau Elementary School
November 2, 2006	Galileo Academy High School
November 2, 2006	Community Educational Services
November 3, 2006	Buddhist Church Youth Athletic Association
November 3, 2006	Community Educational Services
November 4, 2006	Jewish Community Center of San Francisco
November 6, 2006	Presidio Child Development Center
November 8, 2006	Miraloma Elementary School
November 8, 2006	Hillcrest Elementary School
November 8, 2006	Private Home (Richmond)

November 8, 2006	Balboa High School
November 14, 2006	R.L. Stevenson Elementary School
November 16, 2006	Kipp Bayview
November 17, 2006	Tenderloin Community School
November 20, 2006	San Francisco School Volunteers
November 21, 2006	Alice Griffith Opportunity Center
November 21, 2006	Bayview Safe Haven
December 5, 2006	Private Home (Visitacion Valley)
December 14, 2006	San Francisco Education Fund
January 3, 2007	Parent Involvement Coalition, SFUSD
January 3, 2007	Sherman Elementary School
January 3, 2007	Northern Police Station
January 6, 2007	Parents for Public Schools
January 9, 2007	San Francisco Unified School District Central Office
January 10, 2007	School of the Arts
January 16, 2007	Private Home (Outer Richmond)
January 17, 2007	Parents for Public Schools
January 18, 2007	Guadalupe Elementary School
January 18, 2007	Private Home (Inner Richmond)
January 21, 2007	Private Home (West Portal)
January 22, 2007	Creative Arts Charter School
January 22, 2007	Private Home (Glen Park)
January 23, 2007	Bakar Community Center
January 24, 2007	Private Home (Sunset)
January 24, 2007	Private Home (Marina)
January 24, 2007	Private Home (Glen Park)
January 24, 2007	William Cobb Elementary School
January 25, 2007	Support for Families of Children with Disabilities
January 30, 2007	Dianne Feinstein Elementary School
January 30, 2007	Private Home (Potrero Hill)
January 30, 2007	Parents for Public Schools
January 30, 2007	Commodore Stockton Child Development Center
January 30, 2007	Clarie Lillenthal Elementary School
January 31, 2007	Clarendon Elementary School
January 31, 2007	John Muir Elementary School
January 31, 2007	Lincoln High School
February 1, 2007	Samoan Community Development Center
February 1, 2007	San Francisco Education Fund
February 13, 2007	Potrero Hill Family Resource Center
February 21, 2007	Charles Drew Elementary School

C. Participant Demographics and Survey Responses

The following demographic breakdowns are based on the survey responses of community members who participated in the community conversations. 814 attendees completed the SERR survey, though not all answered every question.

“Are you a: Parent, Educator, Community Member, High School Student or Middle School Student?”

Parent	64%
High School Student	22%
Parent and Educator	4%
Educator	4%
Middle School Student	4%
Community Member (non-parent)	2%

“If you are a parent, does your child or do your children attend: SFUSD Public School, Charter School, Private/Independent/Parochial School, Pre-School Age or Younger, Other?”

SFUSD Public School	80%
Pre-School Age or Younger	14%
Private/Independent/Parochial School	8%
Charter School	5%
Other	4%

“What is your race/ethnicity?”

	SERR	SFUSD	City
African American	10%	13%	8%
American Indian / Alaska Native	0.3%	0.6%	0.3%
Asian / Chinese	24%	40%	31%
Hispanic / Latino	24%	22%	14%
Pacific Islander	4%		0.4%
White (not Hispanic)	26%	9%	44%
Multiple	3%		3%
Other	9%	11%	

“What is your primary language?”

	SERR	SFUSD	City
Cantonese / Mandarin	12%	14%	22%
English	60%	71%	58%
Russian	1%		
Spanish	18%	12%	10%
Other	11%	3%	10%

“Other” languages identified included Arabic, French, German, Hindi, Ilocano, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Samoan, Tagalog, Turkish and Vietnamese. Several respondents who marked “other” did so because they speak English and one other language at home.

“What is your family income?”

SERR		City	
\$0-40,000	33%	\$0-34,999	24%
\$40,000-60,000	12%	\$35,000-49,999	11%
\$60,001-100,000	20%	\$50,001-99,999	29%
\$100,001+	35%	\$100,000+	36%

“What is your zip code?”

		SERR	SF Child Pop.*:
94112	Outer Mission/ Excelsior / Ingleside	13%	14%
94124	Bayview / Hunters Point	12%	9%
94110	Inner Mission / Bernal Heights	12%	12%
94134	Visitacion Valley	11%	8%
94122	Sunset	6%	7%
94116	Parkside	5%	6%
94127	West Portal / St. Francis Wood	4%	3%
94118	Inner Richmond / Laurel Heights	4%	5%
94132	Stonestown / Lake Merced	3%	4%
94131	Twin Peaks / Glen Park	3%	3%
94115	Western Addition	3%	3%
94121	Outer Richmond / Seacliff	3%	5%
94117	Haight / Western Addition / Fillmore	2%	3%
94114	Castro / Noe Valley	2%	2%
94103	South of Market	2%	2%
94102	Hayes Valley / Tenderloin	2%	3%
94107	Potrero Hill	2%	2%
94133	North Beach / Telegraph Hill	2%	3%
94109	Russian Hill / Nob Hill	2%	4%
94123	Marina / Cow Hollow	2%	1%
94108	Chinatown	1%	1%
94129	Presidio	1%	0%
94130	Treasure Island	0.4%	0%
94105	Downtown	0.3%	0%
94104	Financial District	0.1%	0%
94111	Embarcadero / Gateway	0%	0%

* 2005-2010 Consolidated Plan Application, updated Sept. 2006.

Survey Q1: How Important to You Is Each of These Factors in Choosing a School?

Survey respondents were asked to tell us how important each of seventeen school characteristics were to them when choosing a school. Overall, parents rated

- Reputation for Quality Principals and Teachers,
- Programs at the School,
- Safety of the Neighborhood, and
- Safe School Climate

as “Very Important,” though on average parents tended to rate all school characteristics as important. The following is a breakdown of characteristics identified as “Very Important” by one or more ethnic/racial group of parents. Those characteristics that do not appear were not “Very Important” to any group.

	African American	Asian	Hispanic/Latino	Pacific Islander	White	Parents Overall
Well-Maintained School Facility	●			●		
Academic Reputation		●	●	●		
Quality Principal / Teachers	●	●	●	●	●	●
Programs	●	●	●			●
Language Programs			●			
Safe School Climate	●	●	●	●		●
Safety of Neighborhood	●	●	●	●	●	●
Academic Performance of All			●	●		

Survey Q2: Please Mark the Three Factors Most Important to You.

As a group, parents identified

- Reputation for Quality Principals and Teachers (51%),
- Academic Reputation (39%), and
- Safe School Climate (40%)

as the three school characteristics most important to them. The following is a breakdown of characteristics identified as the three most important by one or more ethnic/racial group of parents. The characteristics that do not appear were not among the top three for any group.

	African American	Asian	Hispanic/Latino	Pacific Islander	White	Parents Overall
Convenience of Location	●			●		
Well-Maintained School Facility				●		
Academic Reputation		●			●	●
Quality Principal / Teachers	●	●	●		●	●
Programs				●		
Language Programs			●			
Safe School Climate	●	●			●	●
Academic Performance of All			●			

Survey Q3: If You Are an SFUSD Parent, Did You Receive a School That You Requested?

On average, 76% of SFUSD parents who filled out the survey received a school they requested when they participated in the enrollment process.

Survey Q4: Please mark the three (3) most trusted sources of information that you did (or would) rely on in choosing a school. Mark only 3.

When deciding what school(s) to request, parents identified

- School visit / tour (68%),
- Parents (50%), and
- Reputation of school in community (50%)

as the three most trusted sources of information that they did (or would) rely on.

