



San Francisco Board of Education Parent Advisory Council

Report to the Board of Education

March 9, 2010

This report addresses community engagement in the district's budget process, and adoption of a new student assignment system.

Community Engagement in the Budget Process

The Parent Advisory Council and Parents for Public Schools are working with SFUSD staff to convene two more community forums this week about the budget process. They both start at 6:00pm, with childcare and interpretation provided:

- Wednesday, March 10, at Thurgood Marshall High School
- Thursday, March 11, at Francisco Middle School

Flyers for the forums are posted in English, Spanish and Chinese on the district's website, as well as on the websites of the PAC and PPS.

We will report our findings from the forums at the Board's meeting next Tuesday, March 16th, so that community concerns, questions and suggestions can inform your decision-making process. We also encourage Board Commissioners to attend the forums – so that you can hear directly from the students, parents, and educators who participate.

At the last Board meeting, Commissioner Wynns asked us to be more specific about our questions when we ask that the district be “more transparent” in this process. We have been sharing those questions with district staff working on budget issues, and working with them to try and communicate this complicated information in a way that makes sense to community members. A few major questions that come up frequently - and remain unanswered - include:

- What are the guiding principles for deciding what programs to cut, and which to keep? How are funds being identified to support the district's overall priorities - engaging students and closing the achievement gap? How are you going to protect services that effectively support student achievement as you make these difficult decisions?
- How does “central office” funding support student achievement? The pie chart in public materials shows main categories for expenses paid out of the central office, but many people have asked to know more about what those expenses really mean - including how many are staff positions serving students directly, which positions support student achievement (for example through supporting teachers or curriculum resources), and how many support schools directly (for example, custodians at school sites).

The PAC is hearing many parents ask these questions, and believe they need to be answered clearly before the Board can approve an “action plan” to address the budget crisis.

For example, at the Bayview Empowerment Summit at Thurgood Marshall HS this past Saturday we heard many questions about impending budget cuts. The Summit brought parents, teachers, district staff and community members together to talk about what’s happening at Bayview schools and ways that people can be involved to support students in these schools. Parents expressed their concerns that programs that are working will be lost with the proposed cuts - and they want to know how their children will succeed without these services.

Student Assignment

On the agenda for this evening is adopting a new student assignment system. We were glad to see the Board made some changes to the proposal, to more strongly support opportunities for under-served students to access higher-performing elementary schools. Seeing these changes after the last Ad-Hoc Committee meeting made us feel you did hear and respond to the priorities expressed by parents in many different communities, and we appreciate that.

At the same time, we remain concerned about placement for students in Special Education, and hope to see specific guidelines for how Special Education students will be assigned to schools based on the needs defined in their Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

We think a strong feature of the proposed system is that different elements of the assignment mechanism can be emphasized in different ways - what the researchers referred to as “dialing up” or “dialing down” different aspects of the algorithms for determining placement. We are happy that this proposal recognizes the need to evaluate and adjust the system over time so it continues to work well.

We also know that once you adopt a new assignment policy there is an enormous amount of work for the staff to do, to not only develop the infrastructure to implement the new system, but to make sure parents, district staff and the community understand how it will work.

It’s clear to us that what connects these two different issues - the budget and student assignment - are the overriding need to maintain high expectations for our students, ensuring we have high quality programs in schools in all our communities, and having high standards for our teachers and administrators. The PAC believes it’s critical to make these connections across all the issues we’re working on right now - and hopes to see the Board of Education do the same as you make your difficult decisions throughout the rest of this year.

If you have any questions or comments about this report, or the PAC’s work in general, please contact the PAC at (415) 355-2201, or at pac@sfusd.edu. You can also visit us at www.pacsf.org