



San Francisco Board of Education
Parent Advisory Council

Report to the Board of Education

May 25, 2010

This report describes the PAC's findings, research and proposed action steps related to teacher and administrator standards, support, and accountability.

Over the past few years the PAC has spoken with over a thousand parents and community members in discussions about student assignment, access to afterschool programs, and the district's budget crisis. Across the city, no matter what the main topic of the conversation was, we heard parents emphasize how important teacher and principal quality is to their children's educational success.

Some parents described the positive relationships they have with their children's teachers and principals, and noted the love and dedication these educators demonstrate for helping their students to be successful in school.

At the same time, however, many parents wondered why their children were falling behind, or why their school's API score was so low. Others had concerns about teachers or principals that did not seem to know how to meet their students' needs - or who didn't seem to care.

In addition to our findings from these community conversations, a team of PAC members has been doing research to become more familiar with the district's process to resolve parent concerns, to better understand systems such as the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program, and to learn about the district's plans to implement new high school graduation requirements.

Through this research, the PAC has found some major issues to highlight:

- Many parents don't know what their children should be learning, what should be happening in the classroom, or what their rights are.
- Even parents who do know what the standards are often don't know what they should do if they have a concern. Many parents tell us that no one in the school or district will take responsibility to resolve problems, and that no one is held accountable for this.
- Many principals don't seem to effectively evaluate what classroom teachers are doing to help their students reach grade-level standards. Some principals seem reluctant to give teachers a negative evaluation or refer them to the PAR program - which means that problems aren't addressed, and children continue to fall behind.
- In researching the district's standards, we couldn't find systems to ensure that basic curriculum or expectations are aligned across different schools.

It is clear to parents that schools are not equal - and that not all students are being prepared to meet the new A-G graduation requirements. This is a fundamental part of the achievement gap, and is unacceptable.

Over the past two years the PAC has made recommendations to the Board and district staff addressing teacher and principal standards and accountability, including our support for the 2008 parcel tax to fund teacher support and expand the PAR program. In the context of the current budget crisis we have expressed concerns about cuts to school site staff that support student achievement and to the Academics and Professional Development department.

We know that Deputy Superintendent Richard Carranza has been presenting his vision for the next steps in the district's strategic plan, and we appreciate he is being so direct in naming his concerns about standards, data, and accountability. We want to make sure that the initiatives the district takes on will actually be carried out - and sooner, rather than later.

What Needs to Happen Next

- *Communication and transparency:* The district needs to make sure parents understand grade-level standards, know what their rights are, and have a clear set of steps to take when their children aren't getting what they need. The proposed district Parent Engagement Plan - which is on the agenda for the Board's Budget Committee on May 27 - is one place where these issues are being addressed as policy.
- *Standards:* Academic standards need to be consistent across classrooms and schools. The district needs to make sure that teachers in every school are teaching to these standards - which is not to say they must teach in exactly the same way, because we know that all children learn differently, and that educators bring individual creativity to their teaching.
- *Support:* Teachers and principals need to be supported to meet the district's standards - especially in schools with large populations of under-served students. The PAR program needs sufficient staff to providing coaching to teachers referred to the program. Despite the cuts to paid professional development time, the district needs to ensure that principal and teacher coaching remains a priority.
- *Accountability:* Teachers and principals need to be held accountable - and so do central office administrators. Principals need to be held accountable for making sure that teachers are able to teach to standards, and if they are not, that they're referred to the PAR program. We also recommend that parent feedback be included in the teacher and principal evaluation process, much as the district has begun including student feedback in high school teacher evaluations.

The PAC's Action Steps

In the new school year, and with the new members who will join us in the fall, the PAC will continue to work on these issues. Specific action steps will include:

- Working with district staff to ensure that specific plans are developed to implement the new district-wide Parent Engagement Plan, at school sites and district central offices
- Continue doing research on how the district's standards and curriculum are being aligned, especially as new budget cuts impact school sites and central departments
- Meeting with individual Board members and district staff (including members of the Board's Personnel Committee) to discuss how to specific elements of the district's strategic plan are moving forward - and inform this work from a parent perspective.

It is important to us that these concerns are not framed in a hostile, "parents vs. teachers" way. We know that being a classroom teacher or a principal is an incredibly difficult job, one that many educators perform with love, commitment, and brilliance.

At the same time, we have heard from many parents - as well as teachers, principals, and district staff - about the lack of effective systems for communicating standards or holding educators accountable for meeting them. The PAC is dedicated to addressing these issues, because they are fundamental to the most important priorities of the SFUSD - and to the future of our district's children.

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 visit us at www.pacsf.org