



San Francisco Board of Education Parent Advisory Council

Report to the Board of Education

November 10, 2009

This report gives a brief update on the PAC's work in recent weeks (in addition to arranging community conversations about student assignment), and describes our intention to conduct broad community engagement addressing the budget cuts we know our district will be suffering over the next few years.

PAC Outreach

Last week PAC members and staff attended all the principals' meetings. We gave a brief presentation about the PAC's role to represent parent perspectives and inform Board policy discussions, and let them know about the community conversations on the student assignment redesign process. We answered their questions about how we recruit PAC members, and how to contact us if they'd like us to come and speak with their parent communities.

It was a complicated process to deploy ourselves to three separate meetings of elementary school principals, and one each for K-8, middle and high school principals – but well worth the effort. We appreciated the time and attention given the PAC by the principals, and the support of the SFUSD staff who put the PAC on their agendas and coordinated times that worked for us.

PAC members also attended the Enrollment Fair in force, and staffed the PAC's table over the whole day. We answered many questions, handed out PAC brochures and information in three languages, and connected with hundreds of parents who were looking for a school for their child, and representing schools their children already attend.

Finally, PAC members made connections with other parent leaders in the district who are concerned about the pending budget cuts from the state of California, and who want to start organizing our communities in response to this crisis.

Community Engagement in Addressing the Budget Crisis

Last week the PAC attended a gathering put together by a new "working group" including the PTA and Parents for Public Schools, where SFUSD staff explained how the district's budget works. Next week we're meeting to strategize on what community engagement in the budget process might look like, and identify our next steps. In our conversations so far, we're hearing many questions – most of which we haven't been able to answer. These include:

- What's the Board's timeline to make decisions about cutting the budget?
- When will the cuts go into effect?

- What will happen with school bus transportation?
- What about the federal stimulus money? Can any of that be used to avoid cuts?

The PAC has begun discussing how we could approach this issue, and our role in bringing community voices to the Board's decision-making process. In these initial conversations we've identified several key goals:

- Inform parents/guardians, students, and our communities about how serious the situation is – and how bad the cuts are going to be
- Help connect families to state-wide advocacy efforts aimed at reducing the cuts to public education, pre-K through college
- Bring parent voices and represent parent perspectives to the Board of Education and SFUSD staff, to make the district's budget process more transparent, and to inform the Board's decision-making process around the budget.

We have also identified concerns about people's reaction to news about the budget situation, and the importance of **framing the discussion to prioritize equity** in strategies to support our students. For example, the immediate response of many people at the school-site level will be, "We need to increase our parent fundraising!" We know that parent fundraising at individual schools is not an equitable solution to the crisis, even as we welcome the additional resources.

Another concern is that parents who can afford it are going to consider moving their children to private schools. More than ever, we need to mobilize parents and our communities **to support our city's public schools**. In addition to providing clear and transparent communication about the budget, the district on the whole and each school site needs to welcome and encourage families to be engaged in their children's education – in a variety of ways.

We feel the best way to confront this crisis is to be clear about the district's priorities, and to talk creatively about how to support these priorities. Although we are deeply concerned about the impact of budget cuts on our district's most vulnerable students, we look forward to working with our community partners and district staff to develop a plan for community engagement in the budget process.

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