



San Francisco Board of Education Parent Advisory Council

Report to the Board of Education

October 13, 2009

The PAC and other members of the Parent Involvement Coalition have been working with SFUSD staff to support developing the district-wide parent involvement plan that the Board requested in your resolution last spring. From the PAC's perspective, some of the key aspects of this plan are to support parent leadership and advocacy, set goals and standards for engaging families, and hold school site and district staff accountable for meeting parent involvement objectives.

The Parent Engagement Summit

District staff and community partners worked to organize a half-day Summit at Horace Mann Middle School on Saturday, September 26, to bring more parents and the community into this process. Many PAC members participated in the Summit, as did many Board of Education Commissioners and other district leaders.

The PAC members who attended found it to be a positive and effective event: they were impressed with the diversity of participants, especially compared with most district events they've attended; and they felt listened to and respected, as individuals and parents.

Some key points about the Summit include:

- Over 175 people signed in for the event; 63 were district employees
- More than 100 people indicated a connection to a specific school; of these, over 70% listed a STAR school or one of the district's newcomer schools
- Over half of the parents who attended signed up to stay involved in the process of developing the district's parent engagement plan.

After spending almost two hours in small-group discussions, participants gathered in the school's auditorium to share key ideas that had emerged in their conversations. One key theme repeated several times during this share-out was the critical importance of **communication between schools, families, and the district.**

This wasn't a surprise to us – it's something the PAC has often heard from parents, and reported to the Board – but poor communication from schools remains an obstacle for all too many families who *want* to be more involved, and who struggle to get information about what's happening in their children's classrooms and across the district overall.

For example, although all principals were given the flyer about the Summit to send home with their students, we found among members of the PAC that some parents received the flyer from their child's school only days before that Saturday, while others got it weeks earlier – and several PAC members never received the flyer from their children's schools.

Communicating through School Loop

One system for improving communication that we know the district is working on is School Loop. Parents and school staff in some of the small-group conversations at the Summit spoke about how effective School Loop is for their schools, and shared ideas for helping more parents access the School Loop system to learn about their children's work and progress at school.

At the same time, people talked about challenges in making this system work. Many people wondered whether it will become mandatory for teachers to participate in this program. We've heard that at some schools the teachers are not willing to use it, while at others, teachers don't have access to internet-capable computers they need in order to use School Loop.

Another major concern is making sure that parents know about School Loop, understand how to use it, and are able to actually access the information. Many families don't have internet access in their homes, and many of our students' families don't speak English. Even among those parents who do speak English and who are "tech-savvy," we've found that many have never heard of School Loop – even when it's available at their child's schools.

We understand that the district is still working on training teachers, and the official "roll-out" to families is planned for later this month. We believe there are ways to address concerns about accessibility, and look forward to working together to make sure this great resource is made accessible to all teachers and parents.

Next Steps in Developing the Plan

The PAC continues to support the development of the written plan, which should be presented to you in draft form within the next month. The PAC is helping district staff work with community organizations to conduct focus-group conversations with parents who weren't at the Summit, to ensure many perspectives are included in the process. We are also helping to compile the findings from all the community discussions, identify key themes, and develop specific objectives for parent engagement standards. We look forward to the presentation of a draft plan in the next month, and welcome any questions or direction you might have for the PAC in this 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