



# San Francisco Board of Education Parent Advisory Council

## Report to the Board of Education

September 22, 2009

Following the September 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the augmented Ad-Hoc Committee on Student Assignment, several Board commissioners asked the PAC to clarify the time needed to conduct a community engagement initiative related to a new student assignment system. This report addresses those questions, and the challenges of organizing community conversations before the Board has agreed on a model for the community to discuss.

### **Objectives for Community Engagement**

The obvious goal of this project is to inform your decision on a new student assignment policy – but the PAC’s approach to community engagement includes other, ongoing objectives:

- Build community understanding about SFUSD student achievement, the district’s strategic plan and initiatives such as changing high-school graduation requirements
- Hear community concerns and perspectives about how to support student achievement
- Strengthen relationships with families across the city, to deepen their engagement in their children’s schools and in the district.

Implicit in these goals is the need to build community trust in our public schools and the district’s ongoing work to support our children to succeed, across glaring inequities in opportunity and achievement.

### **Organizing Community Conversations**

The PAC has organized four community engagement campaigns over the past four school years – three of them focused on issues of student enrollment and assignment. Through these campaigns we have learned a lot about what it takes to convene parents and community members, the importance of presenting information in a clear and coherent way, and the time needed to synthesize what we have learned and develop a report describing those findings.

Several Board members have expressed dismay at the idea it would take a month to organize community conversations, so we want to explain this. Given the complexity of the options for a new system that we have seen so far, we anticipate it would take two weeks to develop a presentation explaining a new model and framing questions for community discussion. It would then take up to a week to translate that presentation, and another week to train people to facilitate the conversations in English, Spanish and Cantonese. (An important consideration is that many of the people working on this project are either volunteers or community group staff adding this to their already-full plates.)

In addition to developing the facilitation guide, we have learned it takes at least a month to convene community meetings. In part this is because most schools and community groups have a monthly calendar with many competing demands for time on their agendas, as well as School Site Council meetings, community events, and important holiday celebrations.

It is also very difficult to reschedule conversations once they've been arranged. After thinking more about what happened last spring – when we had to reschedule conversations due to the Board's need to review more data – we believe it does not work to set dates for conversations until we are certain the Board will have agreed on a model to discuss.

### **Timeline for Community Engagement**

In discussion with SFUSD staff and Parents for Public Schools, the PAC committee working on this project has developed a proposed timeline based on scheduled meetings of the Board's Ad-Hoc Committee, and on your commitment to adopting a new plan by early March 2010.

This plan includes a series of small, community-based conversations and a few larger, public forums. The PAC will work with PPS to convene parents by active outreach through schools and community organizations; SFUSD staff will publicize the forums, inform civic leaders of the process, and invite them to participate in additional conversations.

October 19	Ad-Hoc Committee meet; BOE agrees on a model for community discussion
November 7	SFUSD Enrollment Fair; hold one or two workshops on new SAS model
November 16	Ad-Hoc Committee meeting; include public forum/discussion
December 7	Ad-Hoc Committee meeting; include public forum/discussion
<u>Mid-Nov. - mid-Jan:</u>	PAC will work with PPS and other partners to lead targeted, small-group community conversations organized through schools and community centers (significantly interrupted by Thanksgiving and winter break).
January 25	Ad-Hoc Committee meeting; PAC and PPS present report of findings

While we believe that October 19 is an extremely ambitious goal for the Board to agree on a model for community discussion, we know if your decision is postponed until November 16 we cannot convene community conversations until after the winter break – which would severely limit the scope of community engagement in this important process. Even if you do agree on a proposed model in October, this timeline is very short and will be a challenge to implement.

Below is a table showing previous community engagement campaigns the PAC has organized, how many people were reached through community conversations, and how long each campaign lasted, to illustrate a typical timeline for this work.

<b>Campaign / Issue</b>	<b># of Conv.</b>	<b>Total # People</b>	<b># of PAC-led Conv.</b>	<b># Reached by PAC</b>	<b>Timeline/Length of Campaign</b>
Spring 2006 / Student Assignment	12	200	12	200	4 months (Feb - June)
School year 2006-07 / SERR	74	920	28	320	6 months (Sept-March)
2007-08 / Access to Afterschool Programs	10	160	10	160	Most conv. during 3 months in spring 2008
Spring 2009 / Student Assignment	13	270	11	170	3 months (early March - June)
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>1,550</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>850</b>	

The PAC is eager to move ahead and convene our communities to engage in these conversations, and we know that many parents are looking forward to participating in the process. We therefore urge you to do what it takes to meet your challenging timeline, to ensure there is time for community engagement in this important decision.

At the same time, we believe that your discussion and decision-making also needs to be methodical, thoughtful and transparent. We hope that as you narrow options for a new model, your discussions make it clear how any new student assignment system would meet your stated goals and priorities – since that will be the basis of the community conversations.

*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](mailto:pac@sfusd.edu). You can also visit us at [www.pacsf.org](http://www.pacsf.org)*