

Discussion with Mayor Gavin Newsom: “How Can the City Help Our Schools?”



Findings from the Parents for Public Schools Annual Meeting April 22, 2006

Background

In September 2005, the Mayor's Policy Council on Children, Youth and Families released a research report by the Public Research Institute of San Francisco State University to understand the problem of families with children leaving San Francisco.

The City survey showed that nearly half the families in San Francisco with preschool children intend to move out of the city in the next three years, citing the lack of affordable housing and the state of the public schools as their primary motivators. When asked “What would make San Francisco a better place for children?” school quality topped the list of unprompted suggestions for how to improve San Francisco for families.

As input for the Mayor's Policy Council, Parents for Public Schools used the gathering of parents at our Annual General Meeting to discuss, share and develop a statement of priorities on how the City and Mayor can assist public schools to help stem the tide of families leaving San Francisco.

Overview

Over 150 parents, including Spanish-speaking, Cantonese-speaking and English-speaking public school parents, participated in a brainstorming activity to generate ideas for a discussion with the Mayor about how his office and the City in general can help public schools.

Prior to the Mayor's arrival, Margaret Brodtkin, the Director of the City of San Francisco's Department of Children, Youth and their Families, facilitated a group discussion on general areas where our City, and other cities, could apply resources to the public schools. The parents then broke down into smaller groups to generate a list of specific ideas; each group narrowed those ideas into one top priority. These top priorities were presented to the Mayor and parent group, followed by a question and answer period to allow PPS members to share individual concerns.

Below is a summary of those top priority ideas, as well as an addendum that lists *all* the concerns, ideas and suggestions generated during the day's activity.

Summary of Parent Recommendations to the Mayor:

Top priorities identified at the meeting fell into three broad categories of actions:

1. ASSIST WITH FUNDING AND INCREASED RESOURCES

Most common recommendation: The City should work with the district to pass a real-estate parcel tax for additional school funding.

Several groups stressed the need for a real-estate parcel tax; a number discussed the need to lobby for funding at the state level (particularly restoring funds previously guaranteed under Prop. 98). Groups also mentioned the need for the city to fund affordable housing for families and teachers. Expanding city-funded preschool, after-school and tutoring programs could also support students and their families and encourage higher achievement.

2. PROMOTION AND LEADERSHIP ON THE VALUE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN SAN FRANCISCO

Most common recommendation: The City should strongly promote our schools and the benefits of a strong, diverse public school system.

Members overwhelmingly felt that the Mayor's personal popularity and ties to the business community were a valuable asset that should be used to articulate the huge contribution thriving public schools make to the vitality and economic health of the City. Members urged a city-funded public relations campaign and felt the Mayor could use his office as a "bully pulpit" to highlight the successes and achievements of our public schools. Our "Education Mayor" could use his ties to the business community to encourage partnerships that would steer more private resources to the schools. Businesses and other organizations in San Francisco could be encouraged to fund summer professional development for teachers. Finally, the Mayor could create a monthly or weekly "Mayor's Award" to honor the successes of individual schools, teachers or students.

3. USE EXISTING CITY SERVICES CREATIVELY TO SUPPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Most common recommendation: The City should coordinate its resources with the school district to help shore up threadbare areas (maintenance, health programs and personnel, safety of streets around schools).

There are many things the City already does that public schools need – but parents felt more could be done so that school district budgets and resources could be focused on academic services. Agencies like the San Francisco Police Department, Department of Parking and Traffic, Department of Public Works and Muni could work with schools to address safety, gang prevention, traffic, beautification and transportation concerns. The Department of Public Health could help get more nurses and counselors in the schools. City grant writers could share their expertise and help the schools secure available grants. City translators could help schools communicate with non-English speaking parents. The City could forgive rent for city buildings occupied by SFUSD and offer help from its own facilities departments to maintain and update school buildings. To manage this process, the City could create a "Project Public Schools Connect" to coordinate needs with services available from the City and private businesses. Public employees could be encouraged to volunteer in schools a few hours a month and given release time for doing so.

Members did not suggest major changes in the current system of school governance. One group suggested increasing the pay for Board of Education Commissioners, to bring the compensation for the job more in line with the hours it actually takes to perform.

Addendum:
Detail by Category

Prior to breaking into groups, participants in the meetings were encouraged to think about potential City contributions to public schools in the following categories:

- Funding
- Safety
- Transportation
- Family Services at School Sites
- Professional Development/Recruitment of Teachers
- Public Health and Nutrition
- Affordable Housing
- Partnerships Among Schools to Help Each Other
- Partnerships Among Businesses
- Preschool
- School to Work
- Promote Schools
- Governance
- Facilities
- Recruiting Volunteers to Schools

Funding

- **Parcel tax (5 groups)**
 - Tax 1% - Create the 1% solution for schools
- **Coordinate City resources with school district; use in-kind services from the City to fill in gaps (health, facilities and maintenance, technology, transportation, strategic planning) (5 groups)**
 - Non-monetary: materials, training, etc.
 - Program planning for Special Ed – get the policy wonks involved
 - Donate translation services to district
 - Afterschool sports
 - Eliminate territorial issues between district and city agencies
 - Bring child/youth development expertise of DCYF to schools (especially teachers and paraprofessionals)
- **Advocate for funding from the state and federal governments (4 groups)**
- **Help schools and district take advantage of available grants; train grant writers and make City grant writers available to help/advise (3 groups)**
- **Fund after-school programs with a qualified curriculum and instruction (particularly computers, art, music, sports) (3 groups)**
- **Fund summer programs for families, kids (2 groups)**
- **Centralized fundraising help; form a charitable foundation for district (2 groups)**
- Host a city-wide bake sale to support schools
- Where's the lottery cash?
- Ask for donations from the community

Safety

- **Create safe zones around schools, boost police presence near schools in higher-crime neighborhoods (4 groups)**
- **Gang prevention through partnerships between City, schools and neighborhoods**
- **Police presence at buses**
- **After-school programs help keep kids safe when school is out**
- **Crossing guards**
- **Work with district to improve emergency procedures**
- **Committee on crime rates**
- **Security cameras at school sites**
- **Parents help check backpacks**

Promote Schools

- *City-resourced PR campaign that supports achievements, promotes positive things that happen (like the VH-1 award to James Lick MS) (5 groups)*
- *Be the "Education Mayor": Make it a priority to advocate for and promote public schools on all levels, to all families (5 groups)*
- *Stress the contribution of schools to quality of life: high real estate values and a quality educated work force (3 groups)*
- *Change the perception that schools aren't safe (2 groups)*
 - *Infiltrate preschools and playgrounds*
 - *Address fears directly*
 - *Leadership on the benefits of diversity*
- *Promote immersion programs (2 groups)*
- *Start an "Adopt-a-School" program encouraging participation from businesses, non-profits, City employees, politicians and other leaders, school alumni (2 groups)*
- *Monthly or weekly "Mayor's Award" to schools honoring achievements*
 - *Mayor should get out in schools more*
- *Recruit families back from private schools and from outside the district*
- *Work for support from families/households without children*
- *Solicit celebrities who are City residents to help promote schools*
- *Promote academic achievement*

Partnerships Among Businesses (and Non-Profit Organizations)

- *City coordinate private-sector funding opportunities and partnerships (5 groups)*
- *Project "Public Schools Connect" or other initiative to coordinate available resources and needs (2 groups)*
- *Ask businesses/non profits to run and to fund instruction in computers, art, sports*
- *Ask businesses to fund after-school programs in the neighborhoods where they operate*
- *Give businesses tax incentives for supporting schools*
- *Create "give-back" incentives for businesses*
- *Coordinate arts programs for schools with city arts agencies and non-profits*
- *Seek resources from real estate companies*
- *Promote ties between DCYF-funded community-based organizations and schools*
- *Pursue technology companies to upgrade technology at school*

Professional Development/Recruitment of Teachers

- *Fund professional development opportunities for teachers (4 groups)*
 - *Non-salary perks like education, sponsoring teachers to get national board certification, awards for teachers*
 - *Partner with City and community resources like CPMC, Schwab Learning, Lindamood Bell; fund differentiated learning training*
- *Give teachers money for living/working in the City*
- *Joint professional development (e.g., on child and youth development) for preschools and Kindergarten teachers, or teachers and youth workers.*
- *Fund summer job opportunities for teachers*

Transportation

- *Express buses from schools to neighborhoods; express buses at the end of the school day (3 groups)*
- *Muni fare increase or other opportunities to fund transportation (2 groups)*
- *Muni free to youth*
- *Increase Muni routes*

Public Health and Nutrition

- *Nurses and counselors in schools*
- *Nutrition programs in schools*
- *Legislation for public health and nutrition*
- *Vision and dental care in schools*

Affordable Housing

- *Housing for teachers (2 groups)*
- *Housing for families (2 groups)*

Partnerships Among Schools to Help Each Other

- *Help propagate programs that work*
- *Coordination and partnering between schools*

School to Work

- *Partnerships with businesses (funding, volunteers) for vocational training, summer jobs for youth*

Governance

- *Enhance accountability/management ability of district leadership*
- *Mayoral slate for Board of Ed elections*
- *Parent representation in district leadership*
- *Commissioners paid more than an honorarium*
- *Restructure*
- *Transparent district budget: everyone should see where money goes*

Facilities

- *Facilities support for schools; help with maintenance (4 groups)*
 - *Greening the City, Clean Sweep: include schools and areas near schools in priorities.*
- *Forgive rent on City properties occupied by school district*

Recruiting Volunteers to Schools

- *Cultivate volunteers for schools (2 groups)*
 - *Individuals with special experience (retirees, non-profits, arts)*
- *Give city employees release time to volunteer at schools (2 groups)*
- *City support and coordinate S.F. School Volunteers program (2 groups)*
 - *Agencies receiving City funding should contribute staff hours to volunteer in schools*
- *Tutoring: partnerships with City College, S.F. State*
- *Tutoring: English language and foreign language*
- *Encourage parents to go regularly into the classroom*
- *Community service programs for youth (e.g., high school students tutor and mentor younger students)*

Miscellaneous

- *Develop information about best practices in other cities (2 groups)*
- *Staff should have the right to have their child(ren) attend school where they work (2 groups)*
- *Keep Newcomer HS separate*
- *Make it easier to rent out school sites for income; the rent should go to individual school sites, not the district's general fund*
- *Develop measure of school success/quality other than test scores*
- *If you work for the school district, why have your children in private school?*
- *The district has too many chiefs/too many layers*
- *Advocacy against "No Child Left Behind"*
- *Muni should allow strollers*