

# Getting Behind the Headlines: Families Leaving San Francisco

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## PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom's Policy Council on Children, Youth and Families is in the process of forming policy to address the problem of families with children leaving San Francisco. The Policy Council has asked the Public Research Institute at San Francisco State University (PRI) to assist in gathering and analyzing data to address the objectives of their September 2005 meeting, entitled "Getting Behind the Headlines: Families Leaving San Francisco." The objectives of the meeting are to

- 1) compile as much data as possible regarding child population trends in San Francisco, including demographic information about which families are leaving and why;
- 2) place these trends in the context of the greater Bay Area and other urban communities; and
- 3) based on these data, a) suggest a framework for Policy Council work going forward and b) identify any further research needs.

The recent decline in the number of families with children in the city is part of a trend that has continued since 1960, when a quarter of the city's population was under the age of 18. This paper examines the recent decline in the population of families with children in San Francisco, and possible reasons for it. The first section analyzes changes in the household population and composition from 1990 to 2000

using US Census data, and where reliable data are available, changes that have occurred since 2000. Next, we compare the city to the Bay Area, other urban areas, and the state as a whole. The third section uses data from two recent citywide surveys to examine what San Francisco parents say about living in San Francisco. The fourth section suggests a framework for developing policies and practices to keep San Francisco families in the city. Finally, we list some needs for additional studies.

## HOW HAVE THE CITY'S FAMILIES CHANGED IN RECENT YEARS?

**A**lthough the number of households with children in San Francisco has remained relatively stable since 1990, the number of households with children as a percentage of total households remains at a relatively low level.

- ◆ The overall number of San Francisco households grew in the past decade, but the number of households with children has remained relatively constant. From 1990 to 2000, the proportion of San Francisco households with children decreased from 21% to 19%.

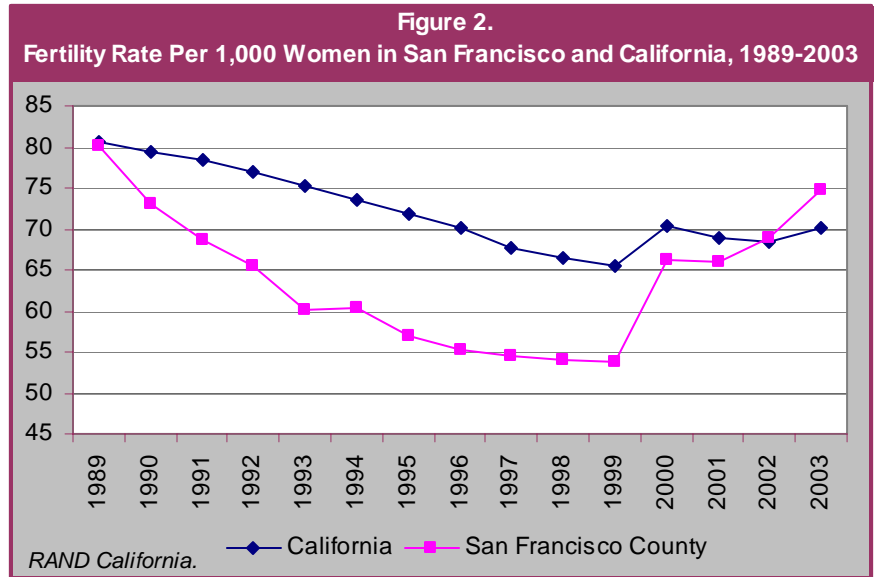
**D**espite stability in the number of households with children, the number of children in the city, particularly young children, declined in the 1990s.

- ◆ There were 3% fewer children in the city in 2000 than in 1990. More significantly, the number of children under age 5 dropped

15% over that period. According to the SFSU Urban Institute, “If all the children who were born between 1995 and March 2000...had stayed in the city...there would be 42,866 children age five and under as of Census Day...Instead, in 2000, the US Census Bureau counted 31,633 children five years of age and under...a difference of 11,233...It appears that families with children age 5 and younger...are not staying in the city.”

**N**umbers of children under 5 appear to be rebounding since the 2000 Census.

- ◆ Since the 2000 Census, the Census Bureau’s estimates of San Francisco’s population show a decline in the number of residents over age 5 and an increase in those under 5. Children in the under 5 age group comprised 4.1% of the population in 2000, and an estimated 4.9% in 2003, with a 14% increase in absolute number (Figure 1). The estimated number of children under 5 in 2003 was still 3% fewer than in 1990.

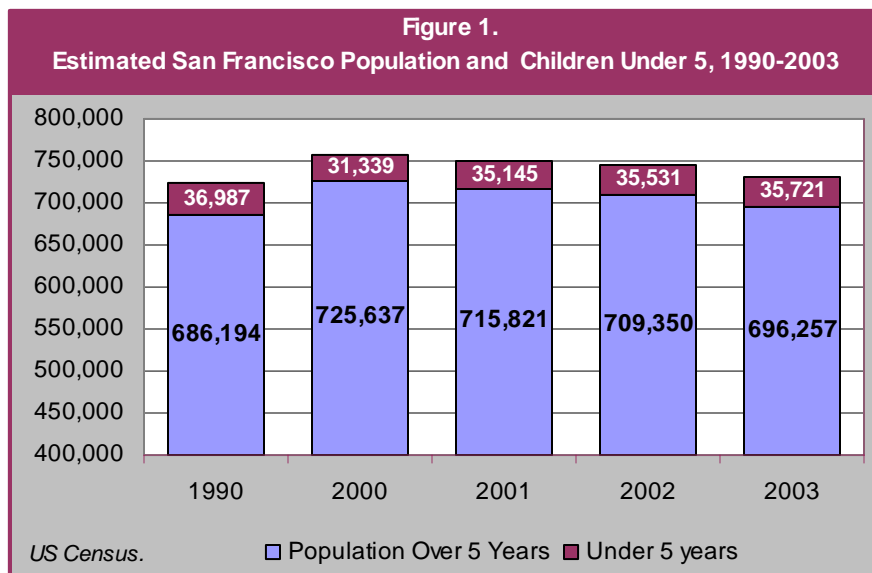


**T**he trend in numbers of young children can be explained in part by fertility rates.

- ◆ Fertility rates among San Francisco women declined steadily throughout the 1990s, to well below the state average, but have been on the rise since 2000 (Figure 2). The number of births in 2000 increased by 9%, from 11,494 in 1999 to 12,484. By 2003, the number had increased to 12,811.

**T**rends in San Francisco’s demographics coincide with the boom and bust of the dot.com economy.

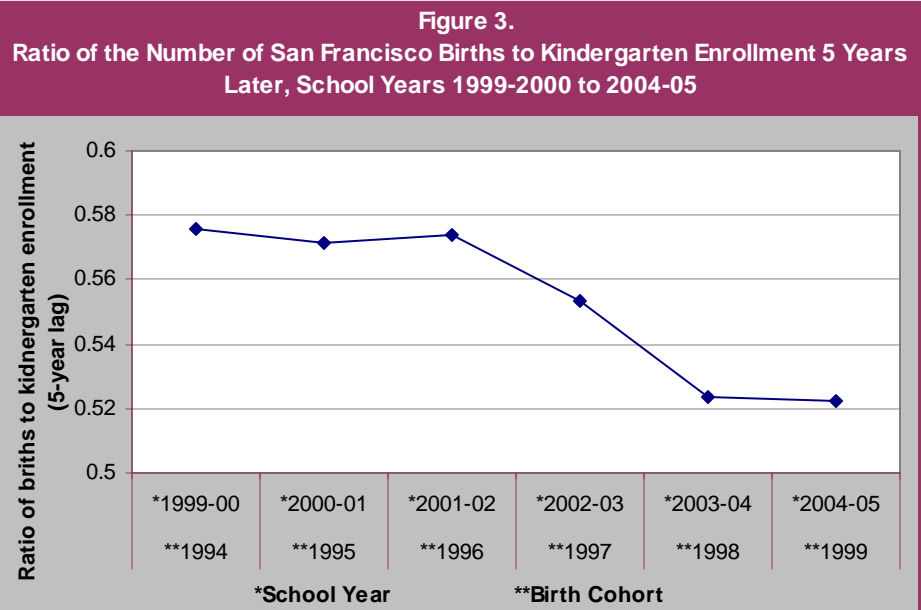
- ◆ The decrease in the number of children in the late 1990s and the sharp increase in births in 2000 coincide with the late 1990s dot.com boom and 2000 crash.
- ◆ Income patterns among families also correspond to the dot.com economy (see page 3).



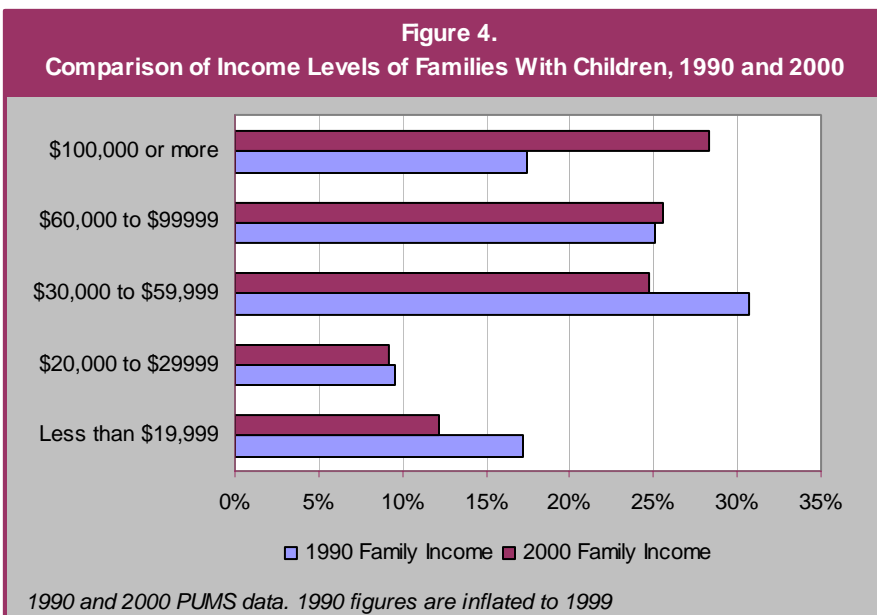
**D**espite the rebound in fertility rates, public and private school enrollment continues to decline.

- ◆ Between 1997 and 1999, the number of births in San Francisco leveled off. However, rates of kindergarten enrollment in San Francisco public and private schools among those birth cohorts (2001-2004) declined by 6%.
- ◆ The ratio of number of births in San Francisco in a given year, to the number of children enrolled in kindergarten 5 years later, approximates the proportion of children born in the city who eventually enroll in San Francisco schools, holding constant other factors that support school enrollment numbers (mostly immigration). In the 1999 school year, the ratio of births in 1994 to kindergarten enrollment was .575; by the 2004-05 school year, the ratio had dropped to .522 (Figure 3). This suggests that an increasing number

of families with children born in the city are choosing to leave before their children reach kindergarten age.



**B**ased on several indicators of socioeconomic status, San Francisco's families with children are, on the average, better off in 2000 than in 1990. However, we cannot tell from these comparisons whether the trend is due to improvement of the circumstances of families with children or selective out-migration of families with fewer resources.



- ◆ San Francisco's median household income increased by about 22% (in 1999 dollars) between 1990 and 2000, while the statewide median household income actually decreased by 2%. The proportion of households with incomes over \$100,000 increased from 1990-2000, while those with low and moderate incomes decreased.
- ◆ San Francisco had 24% fewer poor families with children in 2000 than in 1990, and 32% fewer with children under 5.

- ◆ In 1990, about 29% of householders with children had a college degree. This figure rose to 37% in 2000.
- ◆ There has been an overall increase in the number and percent of householders with children who are homeowners, from 41% in 1990 to 48% in 2000.

**The distribution of families with children has shifted from the Mission, the Presidio, and Treasure Island to South Bayshore and South Central.**

- ◆ The distribution of families with children varies spatially, with the greatest density of children in the southern districts of the city.

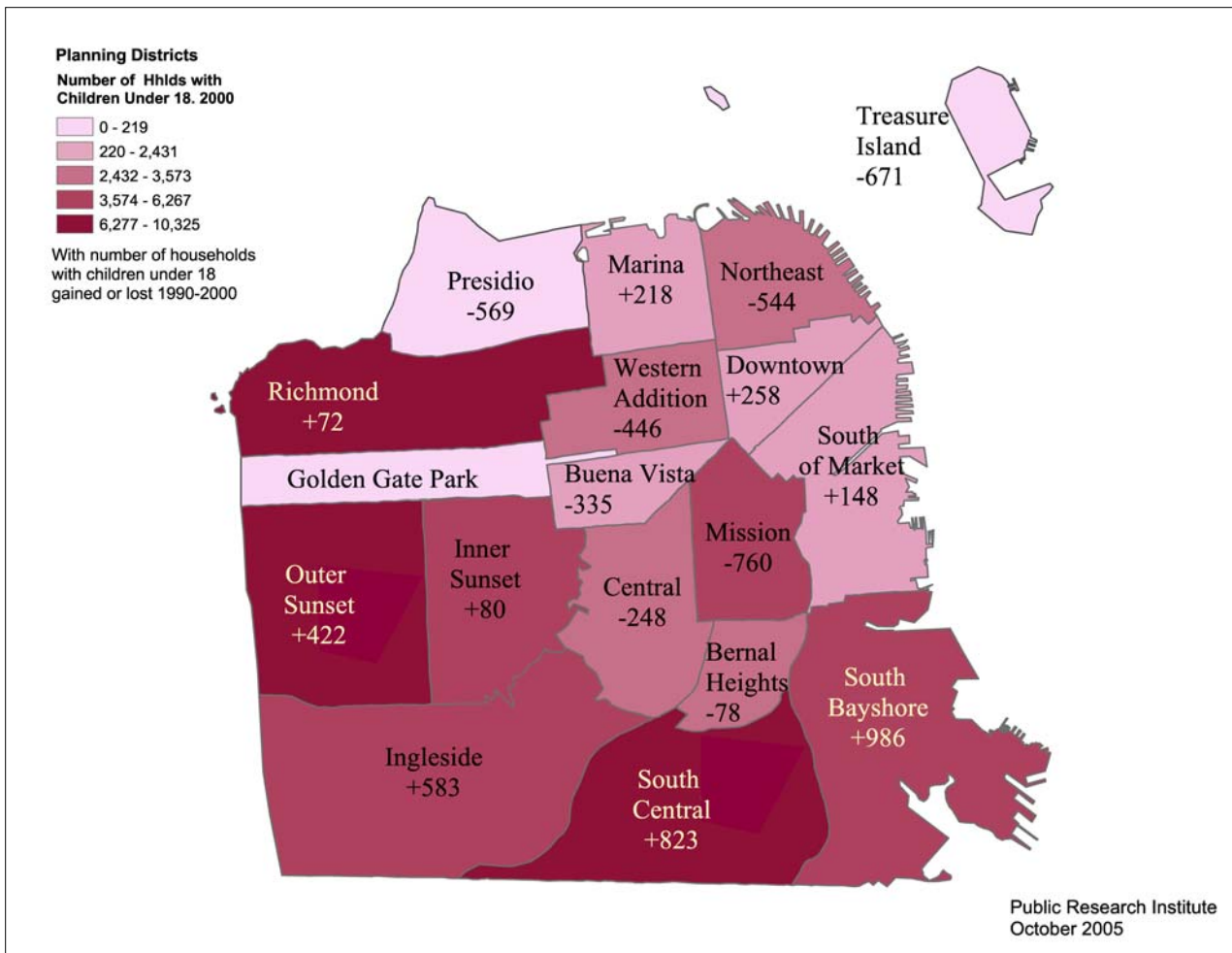
In South Bayshore and in South Central, more than one-third of households have children. On the other end of the spectrum, in Buena Vista, Downtown, the Marina, and the Western Addition, fewer than one-tenth of all households have children.

- ◆ South Bayshore and South Central have seen the greatest increase in number of households with children, while the Mission and Treasure Island have lost the greatest number (Figure 5).

**There are fewer Hispanic White and African-American families with children in 2000 than in 1990, and more Asian and immigrant families.**

- ◆ A minority of San Francisco's families with children are non-Hispanic White (31%), while Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander households make up the majority of families

**Figure 5.**  
Households with Children in 2000, and Change in Number of Households with Children-1990-2000, by Planning District



with children (56%). Between 1990 and 2000, the number of families with children decreased among non-Hispanic Whites and African Americans, and increased among Asian and Pacific Islanders. However, among Asian households, the percentage with children declined.

**The number of African Americans in the city declined between 1990 and 2000, with the decline especially pronounced among children, youth, and those of child-bearing years.**

- ◆ Between 1990 and 2000, African American households declined by 6,197, or 20%. Families with children experienced a proportionally larger decline of 2,960, or 43%. In addition, numbers of African Americans in all age groups below 40 years have declined.

### HOW DOES SAN FRANCISCO COMPARE TO OTHER PLACES?

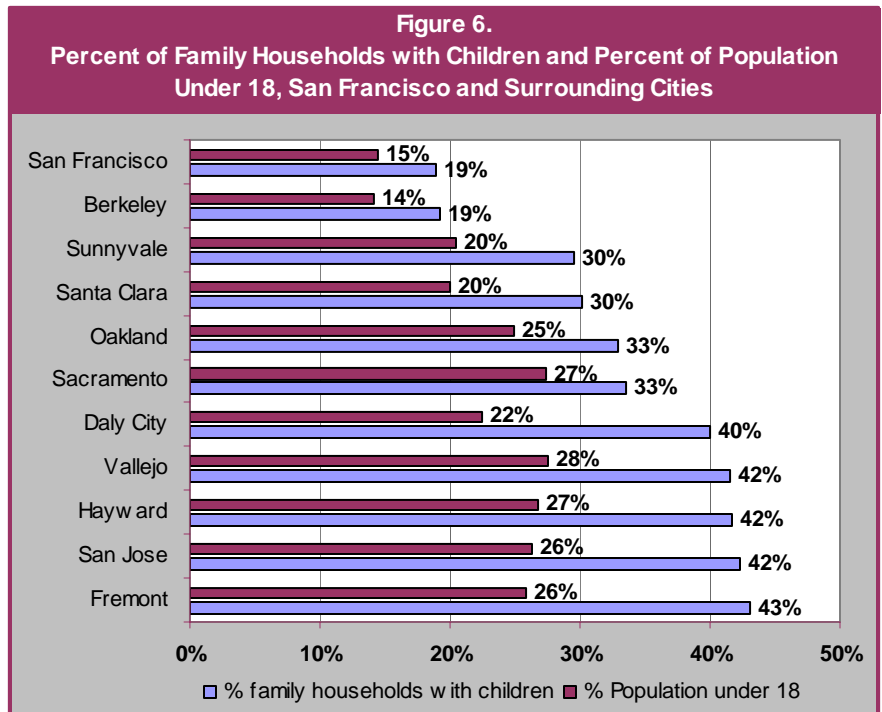
**San Francisco's child population is small in comparison to national and statewide figures.**

- ◆ California has some of the most child rich communities in the nation, with 28 southern and central valley communities ranking in the top 50 most child-dense communities in the country. In contrast, 15% of San Francisco's population is under 18.

**San Francisco has proportionally fewer households with children than its surrounding cities.**

About 1 in 5 households in San Francisco have children, compared to 1 in 2.3 households in San Jose, 1 in 2.4 in adjoining Daly City, and 1 in 3 households in Oakland. Berkeley has a

similar proportion, but Berkeley is an atypical city with a very large university population.



**San Francisco is not alone as a growing and vibrant urban area confronting proportionately small numbers of children and decline in child population.**

- ◆ While Portland, Oregon has a child population slightly higher in proportion to the national average, Portland has struggled to retain families, despite affirmative efforts to do so. From 1990 to 2003, the city added more than 90,000 people, growing to an estimated 529,121 residents. According to demographers at Portland State University, the number of school-age children grew by only three between the census counts in 1990 and 2000.
- ◆ On the other side of the country, Burlington, Vermont has seen a loss of child and family population as well. Families with children under 18 comprised 45% of the city's population in 1960 and only 21% by 2000.

**S**an Francisco ranks well among other large cities for family-friendly planning.

- ◆ San Francisco ranks 4th among major cities according to “Kid Friendly Cities: Report Card 2004,” prepared by Population Connection. When compared to other major cities, San Francisco receives an A- in family friendliness, based on criteria including population, health, education, and community.

**S**an Francisco compares relatively well with other large cities on policy and indicators related to child well-being, particularly health insurance provision and percentage of children living in poverty.

- ◆ San Francisco’s children are comparatively well-off in terms of health indicators. The city received an A on the Kid Friendly Cities Report Card rating of health indicators, with a low teen birth rate, a low percentage of children without health insurance, and a low infant mortality rate compared to the 20 other major cities rated.
- ◆ Relatively few of the city’s children are being raised by single parents.
- ◆ The proportion of children living in poverty is also low, so the city receives a high ranking on that indicator in both the Kid Friendly Report Card and the Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Book. As noted

previously, the percentage of children living in poverty fell from 18% in 1990 to 14% in 2000, which may reflect a higher cost of living that pushed poor residents out of the city rather than any city policy that reduced poverty.

**A**lthough affordable housing is a major issue, it does not appear to affect low-income families disproportionately compared to other major U.S. cities.

- ◆ While San Francisco has the second highest rent levels in California, second only to San Mateo county, the proportion of low income families in the City who spend more than 30% of their income on housing is comparable to the average of major US cities.

**W**hile more of the city’s parents were college educated in 2000 than in 1990, there are still a significant number of children being raised by a householder who did not finish high school.

- ◆ The city ranks toward the middle of large U.S. cities in the Kids Count Data Book for its rate of children living with a householder who is a high school dropout, at 27% compared to the large city average of 20%. On the other hand, it ranks favorably on the Report Card for its relatively high percentage of all residents (81%) with a high school diploma.

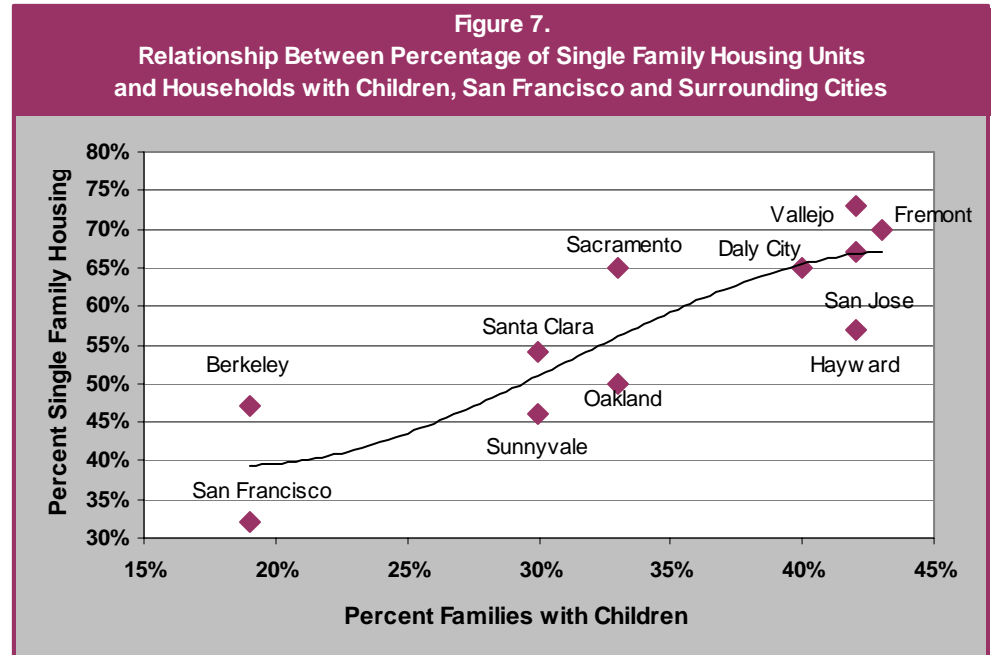
Kids Count Data Book Child well-being indicator	Percent in SF	Average percent of 50 largest U.S. cities	SF rank among 50 largest U.S. cities*
Children living in single parent families	24%	37%	2
Children living in poverty	14%	26%	5
Of children in low-income families, the share spending 30% or more of income on housing	64%	65%	20
Children living with a household head who is a high-school dropout	27%	20%	22

Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004.

\*A higher ranking is more favorable.

Compared with other Bay Area cities, San Francisco has proportionally little single family housing available, and units are typically smaller than in surrounding cities.

- ◆ Among Bay Area cities, San Francisco has the lowest percent of single-family housing available (32%) and the lowest median number of rooms per housing unit (3.8). Both characteristics are positively correlated with the percent of households with children (Figure 7).



## WHAT DO SAN FRANCISCO PARENTS THINK?

Parental perspectives on family living in San Francisco can help to explain and to add context to the demographic and economic data. PRI has conducted two recent surveys of San Francisco parents: the 2005 San Francisco City Survey (“City Survey”), which included a random sample of 738 San Francisco parents, and the 2002 DCYF Parent Phone Survey (“Parent Survey”), which surveyed a sample of 404 households with children under 18. Results from both surveys are highlighted below.

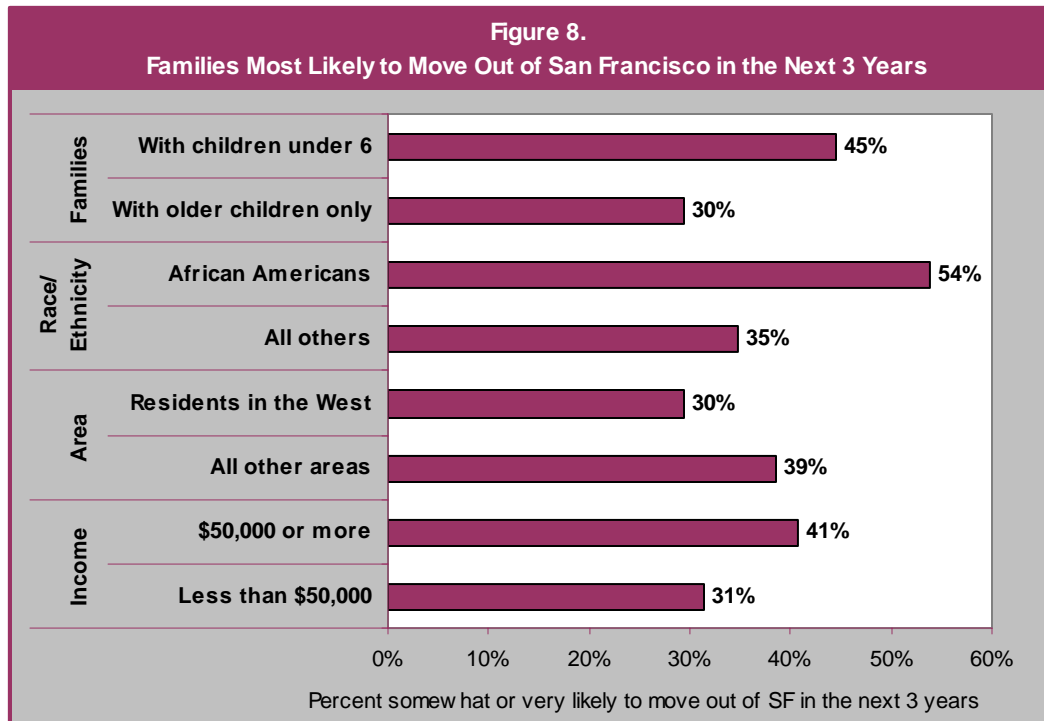
**Families with children under 18 are no more likely to want to leave than are other San Franciscans, but those with children under 6 are much more likely to want to leave.**

In the City Survey, when asked “In the next 3 years, how likely are you to move out of San Francisco?”, respondents with children under 18 in San Francisco did not answer differently than those without children. However, respondents

with children under age 6 were significantly more likely than other San Franciscans, including those with only older children, to answer that they were *somewhat likely* or *very likely* to leave the city within 3 years.

Which families are especially prone to say they will likely leave? *Among families with children*, logistic regression analysis shows that:

- ◆ **African Americans** are 2.5 times as likely as other families;
- ◆ **residents of the Western districts** of the city (Districts 1, 4 and 7) are least likely to want to leave;
- ◆ **families with moderate household income** (greater than \$50,000) are 1.7 times more likely than those with a lower income; and
- ◆ **families with children under age 6** are twice as likely to say they will leave the city (Figure 8).



**S**an Franciscans who want to leave cite similar concerns about living in the city whether they have children or not; affordability, homelessness, and safety are among the top concerns.

City Survey respondents were asked, “What are the main drawbacks to living in San Francisco?”

- ◆ **Affordability**, including affordable housing and general cost of living, was the most important concern among residents, both those with children and without children.
- ◆ A significant number also commented on **homelessness, dirtiness, and crime/safety** issues.
- ◆ Parents of San Francisco children commented on crime and safety at a higher rate than respondents without children, and mentioned homelessness at a slightly lower rate, although both issues were among the 5 most often cited by all respondents (Figure 9).

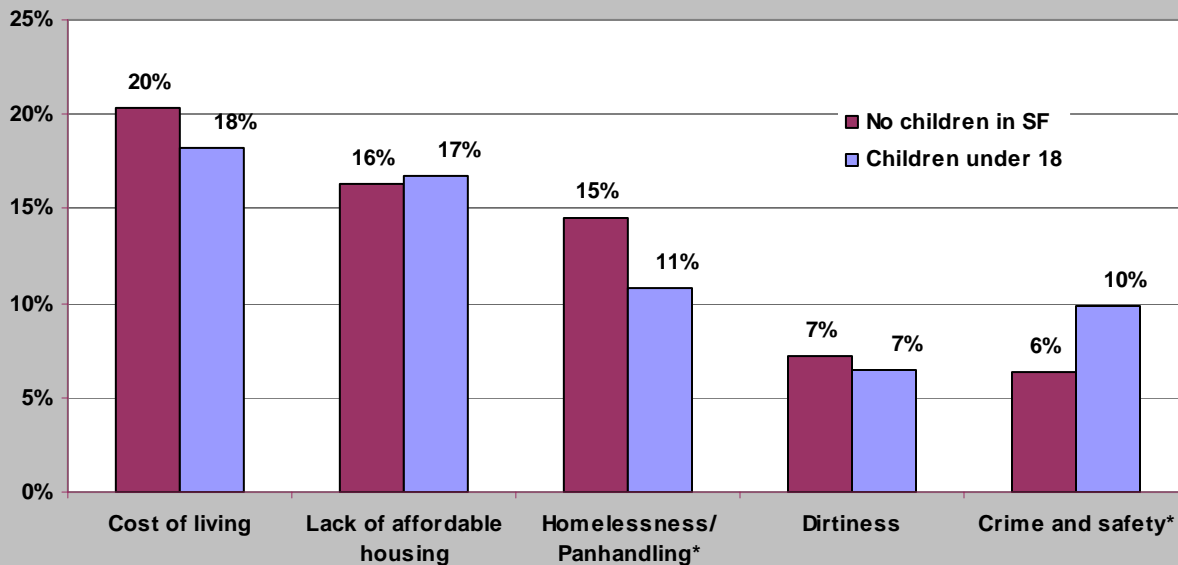
#### **What are the drawbacks to living in San Francisco? Parents say:**

*“We may never be able to buy a house here. We are not making ends meet. We cannot afford \$600,000 to \$900,000 for our first home.”*

*“Parts of the city are dirty and unsafe. The homeless living on the street make it unpleasant...I have seen drug addicts shooting heroin on the public sidewalks. That is not a scene for our children to see and be exposed to.”*

*“Overpriced housing and rents and necessities such as household products...a 12 roll pack of Charmin ultra double averages around \$9.99 in San Francisco, but is only \$5.99 in Daly City/Colma.”*

Figure 9.  
Drawbacks to Living in San Francisco by Children/No Children, 2005 City Survey



\*Difference between groups is significant at .05.

**T**he good news: San Francisco's diversity and tolerance, cultural activities, and parks make the city desirable for families.

In the City Survey, among the myriad reasons given for living in San Francisco, families with and without children agreed:

- ◆ San Francisco's **weather, beauty, and surrounding natural environment** was the reason given by the greatest number of respondents, with or without children.
- ◆ Many said they live in San Francisco because they were born here or are long-term residents; interestingly, families with children were more likely to cite this reason than those without.
- ◆ Many families also appreciate the **urban lifestyle** too; 11% cited the quality of life, convenience and/or the lifestyle afforded by living in the city as a reason they live here (Figure 10).

#### Why do you choose to live in San Francisco? Parents say:

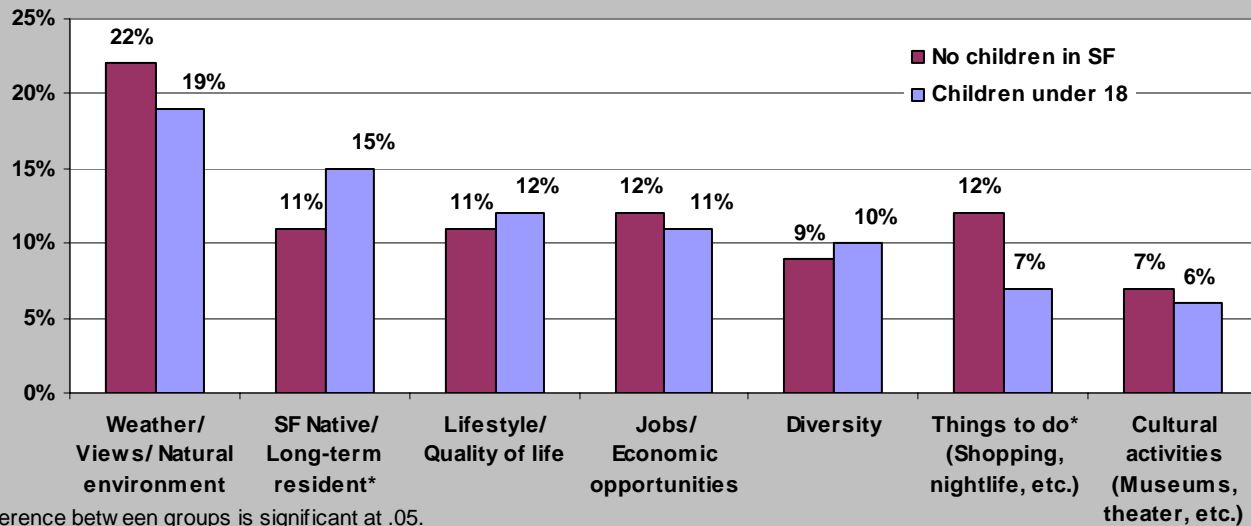
*"We value urban living and especially the natural beauty of San Francisco. We want to raise kids in a city, not the suburbs. Excellent conveniences like food, shopping, parks... [the] scenery."*

*"I love this city's beauty and spirit...I find the acceptance of diversity exceptional."*

When asked "What is the thing or two that makes San Francisco a good place to raise children?" in the Parent Survey,

- ◆ the city's **cultural diversity** was the number one response (57%).

Figure 10.  
Reasons for Living in San Francisco by Children/No Children, 2005 City Survey



- ◆ Although school quality was the number one answer for how to improve San Francisco for families, many in the Parent Survey (34%) also said that **educational opportunities** make the city a good place to raise children.
- ◆ **Cultural activities** (22%) and **parks/recreational opportunities** (22%) were also among the top reasons why San Francisco is a good place to raise children.

**Parents say better schools and affordable housing would make San Francisco a better place for children. Parents of children under age 6 and in the Southeast area want safer streets.**

City Survey respondents were asked, “What would make San Francisco a better city for families?”, and those in the Parent Survey were asked “What would make San Francisco a better place for children?”. Parents in the City Survey volunteered unprompted responses, while those in the Parent Survey were read a list of responses and allowed to add “other” responses.

- ◆ **School quality** topped the list of parents’ suggestions for how to improve San Francisco for families.
- ◆ With the **cost of homes** in San Francisco ever more out of reach for many families, it is not surprising that parents mentioned cost of housing in increasing numbers from 2002 to 2005. In July 2002, the median home price in San Francisco was \$530,000; by January 2005, the median home price had risen to \$776,000, an increase of 46%. It is remarkable that while **affordable housing** was not a precoded response in either survey, it still emerged as a top issue for parents.

Logistic regression analysis shows that:

- ◆ Parents in the Southeast region were 2.6 times as likely to comment on **crime and safety** issues, compared with parents in other areas.
- ◆ Parents of children under 6 were 2.2 times as likely than those with only older children to comment on crime and safety.

Things that would make SF a better place for families	2005 City Survey	2002 Parent Survey
Better schools	20%	52%*
Affordable housing/ Cost of living	20%	13%
Safer streets	12%	21%*
More activities for children	9%	-

\*Response was selected from a list, not volunteered; the 2002 and 2005 results are not directly comparable

## A CONTEXT FOR POLICY DISCUSSION

San Francisco has an unusually low proportion of households with children in comparison with other Bay Area cities. Although this proportion, around 19% currently, declined only slightly between the last two censuses, there has been a much more pronounced drop in the number of young children and in the number of children enrolled in San Francisco schools, very likely indicating a decline over time in the average number of children in households with children. In addition, both the spatial distribution of families with children and their distributions by ethnicity and socioeconomic status changed between 1990 and 2000: there are a) proportionately more families with children in the South Bayshore and South Central districts of the city, b) proportionately fewer families with children headed by African-American and non-Hispanic White parents, and c) proportionately more families with children who are living above poverty, in families with college-educated parents, and in family-owned homes. As we noted above, socioeconomic differences from 1990 to 2000 can be interpreted as either improvement in the lives of resident families with children or selective out-migration.

San Francisco is not alone among American cities with its low and declining proportion of families with children. Furthermore, it is not “unfriendly” to children and their families with respect to indicators commonly used to compare cities. However, to the extent that affordable and relatively large single-family dwelling units attract and keep families with children, San Francisco is at a comparative disadvantage with respect to several other locations in the Bay Area.

Survey results confirm these findings and add some detail to possible reasons for the trends and differentials we observe. Families with young children and African-American families with children were among the most likely to say that they might leave the city in the near future. The cost of living and housing affordability are compelling problems for many San Francisco residents and likely reasons for what appears to be a loss of families with small children. Other concerns of particular interest to families with children are school quality and safety.

This summary, based on both demographic and survey data on families in San Francisco, suggests a dual approach to retain San Francisco families, an approach which promotes the benefits of family living in San Francisco while simultaneously tackling the drawbacks. Council efforts should consider actions and policies that address the major concerns voiced by San Francisco families, with attention to how these issues vary by district, ethnic group and socioeconomic status, including

- ◆ affordable housing,
- ◆ cost of living, and
- ◆ quality of public schools.

Policies should also promote the benefits of living in San Francisco, including

- ◆ parks and recreational opportunities and
- ◆ connections to “family friendly” services and information.

The Council for Children, Youth and Families should spearhead these efforts with recognition that demographic and economic trends will limit the extent to which local efforts can impact families leaving the City, and further recognize that extraordinary efforts to support children and families are already underway in San Francisco.

We also suggest that the Council's work over the coming year be organized by key drawback issue—with staff, community experts, and interested Policy Council members shaping, gathering, and analyzing data, and crafting recommendations between meetings.

Addressing each major issue area will entail:

- 1) conducting in-depth analysis of relevant data,
- 2) identifying promising practices and innovations from other communities,
- 3) assessing what is already in place and working,
- 4) recommending what could be changed or added in order to enhance efforts, and
- 5) selecting specific, simple accountability measures for tracking progress over time.

Each quarter, one key drawback should be analyzed in depth, and recommendations for action should be presented to the Policy Council—starting with housing in January 2006. This schedule will result in a comprehensive agenda to retain San Francisco families in one year's time. General recommendations could be crafted more quickly, but substantive work will require time to conduct careful analysis, build partnerships, and make recommendations that will have meaningful impact.

Simultaneous with Policy Council efforts to craft policy recommendations for the Newsom administration to tackle key drawback areas, the Council and the Department of Children, Youth

and Their Families will undertake efforts to proactively promote the benefits of family living in San Francisco.

## SELECTED TOPICS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- ◆ An important question to be considered in discussions of policies that favor keeping families of children in the city is the extent to which ethnicity and income are factors in the in- and out-migration of families with children. To thoroughly explore these relationship demographics will require additional analysis of data from the 2000 Census, HUD, and other public data sources.
- ◆ Projections of San Francisco's population composition by race, income, age of children, and, pending the availability of data, by neighborhood of residence, would be a useful background to policy discussions. We recommend that such studies be undertaken, using cohort-survival methods under a variety of assumptions, to construct projections to 2025.
- ◆ Based on the data presented in this report, we know that various factors such as affordability, housing stock, presence of other families with children, school quality, cleanliness, and parks are important to families with children. In order to better understand the specific factors that drive the decision to move out of San Francisco, we recommend a survey and/or focus groups of potential and actual emigrants ("leavers"). For example, if housing cost is an issue, we can obtain better information about the perceived costs and benefits of buying a home in San Francisco, and to what extent it affects the stay/leave decision relative to other factors. ◆

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