

QUESTIONS FROM DENMAN MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY FORUM ON THE SFUSD PLAN FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Asked by parents and answered by SFUSD staff

MARCH 1, 2011

Group #1 Question/Comment addressed in Large Group

Question: Concern about rationale and proximity and the environment. How do you justify having a neighborhood school for elementary and then ask families to criss-cross town for middle school? This group was in favor of choice.

Answer: Proximity was neck-in-neck with language pathways. Population is not distributed evenly around where middle schools are located. There are a limited numbers of middle schools. Some places have small school population with excess building capacity, and other places have more population than capacity. Some schools that would have fed into Willie Brown have to be reassigned to schools in other parts of town. We also need to reduce racial isolation, consider proximity, and prioritize language pathways. It doesn't always come out pure proximity.

Question: How did the map change from first iteration to the second iteration?

Answer: There were problems identified with first iteration. The rationale for changing each school was individually identified. They will answer afterwards if people have questions about individual schools. Willie Brown & Bayview neighborhood children need to go somewhere. There is also an academic piece. Changes in terms of dual-immersion from Aptos to Vis. Valley. Team of 12 people from multiple disciplines working this out

Group #2 Question/Comment addressed in Large Group

Question: Why are we going to a feeder pattern model? According to EDSource community pathways is only one method and not a very significant one to achieve academic outcomes. What data are you using to show that what is being proposed will actually improve academic out comes. It doesn't feel like this will address making middle schools high quality. How will the feeder plan build quality middle schools?

Answer: When you look at this demographic bubble, performance sometimes takes a dip in middle school. Transition from elementary to middle and middle to high schools transition is where this dip happens. The transition needs to be more articulated. As the population bubble grows in the coming years, many kids will not get the middle school of their choice. We can either plan for this and make every middle school a high-quality

middle school, or just let it happen. That was the thinking behind creating seamless pathways.

Question: What is the plan for making quality middle school?

Answer: There are Six categories identified in handout (with little school house) – academic and through the eyes of parent. They are 1) Academic Performance, 2) Staff Composition, 3) Program Quality and Range of Programs, 4) Student Support Services, 5) Family Engagement and Supports 6) Safety and School Climate, 7) Physical Environment. The district is now analyzing quality and programs in middle schools. If you're going to reduce choice, this is the investment we need to make to make every quality. Academic performance is improving district wide. What will it really take? Parents need to commit to making middle schools great together.

Question: Will data supporting feeder patterns be made public?

Answer: Yes, the data will be presented to the BOE, with PPS/PAC feedback and a feasibility study. District staff will make a recommendation to the board with as much information about the feasibility of the idea as possible. We can't have a feeder pattern without considering concerns of parents. The district is now making that connection.

Group #3 Question/Comment addressed in Large Group:

In this group there were really mixed feelings about feeder patterns. The common theme was concern about feeders that don't make sense for location and transportation. There must be an opt-out mechanism because students have different needs. Not all of the schools are exactly the same. – ie Honors/Gate, electives, teaching quality, etc. What would be the means to meet needs of individual students, and what are plans for an opt-out mechanism? Recommend phasing in feeder program, and only use feeder as tie-breaker. Opt out, and students can request. Given capacity issues, will there will be less flexibility to opt out as time goes by?

Answer: The recommended option right now is for parents to be able to choose. The feeder school is one of the tie-breakers. (See the presentation to the Board of Education from February 1, page 13 http://www.ppsf.org/Issues/San_Francisco.html)

Group #4 Question/Comment addressed in Large Group:

Language for all would be great if we could fund a 7th period. Dual language is two languages in the target language. If we can afford 7th period, we should offer language to general ed students. It appears that there are many resources going to expand language

pathways. Is the 7th period realistic financially? What will this mean for GE kids? What language options exist for GE kids?

Additional questions:

Q. One thing we never hear district talk about is the possibility of parents opting out of SFUSD altogether. Can you really improve school by manipulating assignment system? That can't work alone. We need to have some feeling that schools meet your child's needs.

A. District is not saying that feeder patterns will improve middle school quality by itself. We are aware that parents have choice with private and charter schools. There are multiple ways to improve schools. A collaborative process shifts thinking and we are hearing from parents. We're asking you to trust the process.

Q. Why remove neighborhood priority and why is that not a viable option moving forward?

A. It may be. There may be multiple tie-breakers – siblings, CTIP, neighborhood. Tie breakers may be changed. We are in draft and discussion.

Q. We are hearing a lot about 7th period, what possibility is there with school budgets being the way they are. On a scale of 1 to 10, what is the possibility?

A. If 7th period, board has to make some trade-offs. Partial fundraising from private or foundation sources? If funding is limited, this is a serious issue and will have to look at different options.