



Findings and Recommendations from Community Conversations about Restorative Practices

May 2012

Executive Summary

From 2006-2011 the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) led dozens of community conversations related to school quality and student assignment. During these conversations many parents shared concerns about lack of communication, bullying, unfair disciplinary practices, and the urgent need to improve the learning environment in their children's schools.

It was clear that most families didn't know about the Board of Education's 2009 resolution embracing Restorative Justice as a way to reduce student suspensions overall, and to address the disproportionately higher rates of suspension for African American and Latino students.

This year the PAC decided to conduct community conversations to inform families about these strategies, hear their questions and concerns, and identify ways to strengthen implementation of Restorative Practices across the district. From February to May 2012 the PAC facilitated 20 conversations at school sites and community centers to talk about these issues. We heard from nearly 300 people, most of them parents, as well as middle and high school students, school site and afterschool program staff, and community members.

Participants reflected a broad diversity of the district's families across differences in language, ethnicity, geography, types of schools their children attend, and socioeconomic background. They had a lot to say about student suspensions, school climate, and Restorative Practices, including suggestions for how to support these strategies to be effective in their schools.

Based on what we've learned through this process, the PAC believes strengthening Restorative Practices will support better outcomes for all students, as schools engage more families, improve learning environments, and provide students better access to the curriculum.

Summary: Key Themes from the Community Conversations

- We found that **people were very receptive**, and most participants in the conversations **supported the goals, concepts, and general strategies of Restorative Practices**.
- **Participants had many questions** about how Restorative Practices work and ideas about how to expand these strategies to more schools, and more deeply within schools.
- **Some people questioned whether this approach would be effective**, wondered how to ensure students would participate sincerely in the process, or pointed to the need for clear guidelines and careful, ongoing evaluation.

- Most concerns people expressed were about **the importance of engaging families and community partners in the process** of implementing Restorative Practices, and **the need to provide training and support** for all school staff, as well as parents.
- Participants also pointed out the need to **set clear standards** for a positive school environment; **improve communication** between schools and their students' families; **support schools to effectively engage families**; and **create structures that support** and encourage sharing information among schools about strategies that work.
- We found that **many schools struggle to build community** across differences in their students' ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and home language. This is a growing challenge, because the district's student demographics and enrollment are changing, while increasing diversity within schools is an explicit district goal.

Based on what we learned through the community conversations, the PAC identified several recommendations to strengthen implementation of Restorative Practices across the district, and to address the ongoing issue of improving communication with families.

Summary: The PAC's Recommendations for District Staff and School-Site Leaders

1. **Establish the clear expectation that schools will use Restorative Practices, in a way that is relevant to their school community. Engage families at every school *now* to support implementing Restorative Practices**, wherever a school is in their process.
2. **Develop an action plan to improve communication and strengthen relationships among students, staff and families** - at each school, and in the district as a whole.
3. **Foster collaboration among the district, community groups and city agencies to help provide training for parents and other adults working or volunteering at schools**, including yard monitors and afterschool program staff.
4. **Encourage and support opportunities across schools for principals and other site leaders to learn from each other** about what's working, and identify best practices that can be shared across the district - about Restorative Practices, family engagement and other needs - especially for schools without family liaisons.
5. **Acknowledge and address the challenges in building community that many schools face.** Provide tools for principals and school leaders to support this important work, develop parent leadership and give voice to all families.

In these conversations many parents expressed their commitment to the success of all children, and ideas for how to support positive changes in schools across the district. We look forward to working with our many community partners to help implement these ideas, and strengthen the implementation of Restorative Practices across all of San Francisco's public schools.

REPORT OF FINDINGS FROM COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

I. Community Responses to Information about Restorative Practices

Overall, the response we heard from families, students, and educators was strongly positive. We found widespread support for the concepts and strategies of Restorative Practices.

Participants did have many questions, and described some of the challenges inherent in these approaches. Parents asked how Restorative Practices have worked in other schools, and **wondered about the district's ability to evaluate, support and sustain** these efforts.

We had anticipated hearing more concerns or skepticism about Restorative Practices. We know that most families don't know what "Restorative Practices" mean, and it's possible that people who might have more concerns or opposition didn't participate in the conversations.

"I think it's so important to bring these Restorative Practices questions into schools, the classroom and meetings parents have in the district. I used the questions to resolve a situation (concerning my granddaughter)." Grandparent of high school student¹

"At dinner we'd always hear about the drama, what happened at school today. What's great now is we hear the beginning, the middle and the end, how things get worked out. So we know it's safe - that conflicts are being resolved." Parent at Rosa Parks ES

"I think this is good - because when students are suspended and they're in the street, they get into a different kind of trouble. I think it's good for students to go through this process, to have to think about the consequences of what they do and who is affected by it." Parent at Flynn ES

"Being suspended is not about being sent on vacation - it's not in their best interest - they need to be here." High school parent

"What I wonder is how sustainable is this work around Restorative Practices...? Will it be given time to see what results we can have? Or after just a couple of years be abandoned and then it's on to the next thing?" PAC member

At many schools, **participants pointed out the need for adults to treat each other - and students - with more respect**, to model the kind of behavior they expect from children and reinforce the school's expectations for behavior and a positive learning environment.

"I think we need to see this happening not just with the children but with the adults. We need to model what we want the children to do. You see people yelling at children, yelling at each other - what kind of an example is that? I really think our school needs restorative justice. I hope we can make this happen." Elementary school parent

¹ Where comments are sensitive or might identify an individual, we simply state the role of the person quoted.

"I'm also concerned about how people talk to children; you can talk to your own child however you want, but in school we need to show better models and standards for how adults talk to children." - Elementary school parent

"When students have conflicts with teachers and the teacher is in the wrong - it can be hard for the facilitator of the group, with a colleague, to get the adult to accept responsibility. It seems harder to do with adults than with students." Middle school parent

"My daughter has a hard time understanding why the adult is getting away with something a student would be suspended for. We need clear protocols about how this applies to adults." Middle school parent

A few people anticipated that some other parents might not support Restorative Practices, while other expressed concerns that Restorative Practices might be insufficient, or vulnerable to students manipulating the process to get out of trouble. In many conversations, other participants responded directly to those concerns.

"My concern is, how are we going to scale it up? But also people can resist it, think it's 'too soft' and to work it needs to be embraced by the whole school community." Parent at Grattan ES

"This sounds like a good thing but everyone has to be on board." Parent at Samoan Community Development Center

"I'm a work in progress because I do want to see this work, I want people to feel there's a pathway to peace. But at the same time I do not want a serious incident to be treated lightly, to allow bullying to go, or for students to come in and say a few carefully chosen words to get out of trouble." Former middle school principal

"It's important to find some middle ground, so that it's not about 'kumbaya circles' but an opportunity to really look at why things are happening and how to stop it from continuing. It's about training people who are running the process to understand when kids are being manipulative and when it's authentic." Community member, Carver ES

"Sometimes a person might feel so hurt they can't accept or trust the other person's apology. It can take time and we can't let it go too long. So sometimes it doesn't work but nine times out of 10 it does." Middle school principal

"Sometimes it's a safety issue. That's a dilemma for me. Generally if we get to a suspension it's the fifth or sixth time with that behavior. When you go to Restorative Practices and you're intervening and trying to repair harm but the next day it's the same thing... The question is, how do you meet those students' needs and keep other kids safe? Kids maybe need more services." Elementary school principal

"I come from 'old school' ways, where they beat your ass if you messed up. This year seems worse than last year to me - there's no respect, no one is teaching them respect." Middle school parent

"From where I sit, four years ago things were infinitely worse, and I think Restorative Practices is helping." Middle school principal

Parents, school staff and community members pointed out the **need to make the language and approach of Restorative Practices relevant to students and their families**, across different communities, cultures, and educational needs. Some suggested tailoring specific practices to be responsive to students' diverse contexts, cultures and needs.

"If you look at students of color being impacted by suspensions...those are communities that have really different approaches to discipline." Elementary school parent

"At some point adults have to become peaceful too. It becomes increasingly difficult for us to tell kids 'this is how it should be' when it doesn't follow into their lives outside the school." Middle school principal

"My concern is, living in this neighborhood - and I grew up here - some parents teach their kids survival skills, how to survive in the street. Then you come to school and there are rules that don't match what you're taught at home." Elementary school family liaison

"For Special Education students who might have a hard time understanding how the process works - it needs to connect with their IEP." Middle school parent

"Is this just happening in schools? Is there a time the district will collaborate with community-based organizations to implement Restorative Practices? Sometimes kids hear better from people they understand. Kids might really listen to people in their community." Parent at Samoan Community Development Center

"One thing that's been apparent to me is that we need to engage leaders in different communities to work with us in this effort. We need to learn how to make Restorative Practices more culturally relevant for different communities, for it to work." PAC member

Many people pointed out the need to try and **get at the root causes of conflict and students' negative behavior** at school - to support the students, and **provide additional services** to address and **resolve these problems**.

"You don't want to suspend a student, but some of them are repeating the behavior - so how do we get at the root cause of that behavior?" Elementary school principal

"There are different groups of students with different needs and different situations. Some are very serious and they need to be suspended. But they also need services to address their problems." Elementary school principal

"Sometimes things are happening at home and children feel they can't talk about it. They're afraid they're gonna lose their families if they tell. Sometimes what they're going through is really deep, and you have to sit down with them and listen between the lines. You have to catch on to what they can't say straight out." Elementary school parent

“When you talk about ‘restoring what’s been harmed,’ I think about the children you would say are causing harm - because they’ve been harmed too. It is about the consequences and the harm, but we also have to think about why they’re doing it, so you can help get to the bottom of that and help them.” Parent at Flynn ES

A number of people addressed the issue of disproportionate, **higher rates of suspension for African American, Latino, Samoan and Special Education students**. Participants expressed the **urgent need to interrupt this pattern**, and a hope that Restorative Practices will help.

“I’m new to this country and, looking at this information, it seems really strange to me. I wonder why African American students are suspended so much - it doesn’t make sense to me what’s going on.” High school parent

“I have opinions about that - it’s discrimination and it’s one-sided. Something fishy is going on.” High school parent

“There are a lot of power struggles in classrooms - and often it’s white teachers with African American and Latino students. Teachers need training on how, instead of escalating a conflict, how to de-escalate it. The solution - I don’t know - but teachers need training about this.” Elementary school parent and educator

“This conversation was really powerful; people across differences of ethnicity, age and gender were participating. People really do participate when they feel safe to speak up. But these patterns of racism exist in our schools and Restorative Practices doesn’t change that by itself. White teachers need to learn to deal with students in different ways.” PAC member

“Restorative Justice is a big buzz-word right now. I hear it on NPR, on the news, but when it comes down to brass tacks - this is our whole student population. We need to implement it right now. This disproportionate suspension (of African American, Latino and Special Education students) is not OK. It’s not OK.” High school parent

In a number of conversations parents said they **weren’t clear what the school rules and policies** are. Others felt that **discipline and punishment are handled inconsistently**.

“Now it seems like certain things that just weren’t acceptable before are commonplace - like cursing in school. It seems we tolerate just about anything.” Elementary school family liaison

“The way discipline works now it isn’t fair - for example, if someone is messing with my son then they both get in trouble even though he didn’t do anything - what’s he supposed to do?” High school parent

"Teachers in different classrooms seem to have different standards." Elementary school parent

"The teacher didn't realize the one who makes trouble is telling lies. The victim got in trouble - the teacher didn't see that the student was being provoked, and then he was the one who got punished. He's still very unhappy because the teacher didn't give him a chance to explain. Now he doesn't believe the teacher is fair and that's had a negative impact on him." Parent at Community Youth Center

"I think sometimes a person's pride gets in the way - the teacher can over-react to a slight thing a student has done. Somehow they just straight-up send the student out. It's worse this year - their patience seems to have worn thin this year, especially with new students." High school student

II. Questions, Concerns and Challenges of Restorative Practices

Participants in almost every conversation raised questions about how to expand Restorative Practices to schools across the district, and implement them more holistically within each school.

In some schools people indicated that many conflicts and other problems occur when students are out of the classroom. In many conversations people pointed out that **all adults at the school need access to the trainings** - including afterschool program staff, yard monitors, cafeteria workers, and parent volunteers, in addition to the classroom teachers and counselors.

Many people expressed **concerns about finding the resources needed** to do this, as well as the necessity - and the challenge - of **setting clear expectations, providing adequate training, carefully evaluating and holding schools accountable** for implementing effective strategies.

"I'm concerned about the supervision of children when they are not in the classroom - because it's when they have the most free time and space, that the people responsible for them have the least training." Elementary school parent

"I'm one of the people who supervise in the yard. It's one thing to supervise and another thing to help resolve conflicts." Elementary school staff

"Parents see bullying in the yard after school - so, is the afterschool program staff being involved in this? How does this work outside the classrooms, in less structured times, especially after school gets out?" Middle school parent

"Can the district provide training to teachers and the yard monitors and cafeteria workers, too, and parents, and the afterschool programs?" Elementary school parent

"How are we going to maintain our Restorative Practices work if our budget keeps getting cut, smaller and smaller?" Elementary school parent

"Many of our kids don't just see things but experience them. They can't always articulate what they're feeling but they come to school and act it out. The staff gets yelled at, kicked, spit on - the staff needs more training on how to deal with this and to support the kids." Elementary school principal

"I've prioritized putting resources to have a behavior support coach, who meets with students and parents. But that's really expensive; we can only afford to have them here part time." Elementary school principal

"We have more families in crisis and fewer resources to address that or support them." Elementary school principal

"How do we build buy-in for this? Professional development is a huge part of that - but in public schools PD is being cut... Without the PD how can we make it happen if it's not pushed for every school, and for people to know what the expectations are, how to actually use this approach?" High school teacher

"I think you build buy-in by not forcing people to do it, and by hearing from other teachers it's working for them - that's how it's building for us, and becoming successful." Middle school Learning Support Professional (LSP)

"My concern is about where Restorative Practices are supposedly happening, but in reality they're not. So if the leadership at the school doesn't take that on - then what do you do about it?" PAC member

Parents and teachers in many schools pointed out the **difficulty when students and the community don't see what the consequences or restorative actions are**, after they've seen the problem. They wanted it to work, and wondered how to address this challenge.

"There are some parents who haven't been satisfied with Restorative Practices because they don't see what the consequences are." Elementary school principal

"People need to know that there are consequences when there's been a problem... If you only know what the consequences are for your child, if the other children don't know what the outcomes or consequences are when they've seen there was a problem - then what do they learn about it?" Parent at New Traditions ES

Some parents were concerned that **less vocal children, or students who feared retaliation, might not bring issues to adults to get help** resolving the problem, while others might resist participating in the process. Most people who raised these concerns also tried to think through how to address those challenges.

"It seems easy for adults to help when the problem is overt and you can see it. How does it work if they don't tell an adult that's going on? With this system it could help - but only if my child lets me know something's going on." Parent at Grattan ES

“Restorative Practices only works when everyone’s having the conversation. Are there recommendations for how to engage kids in it who won’t do it?” Parent at New Traditions ES

“It seems like this works well for kids who are not conflict-averse - but how does it work for kids who want to get away from conflict? Who try to hide? We need to take into account that some kids would need additional support (to be able to engage in this).” Parent at Lakeshore ES

“Did I hear you say students would go to a teacher to ask for help...? I’m thinking a lot of students wouldn’t do that. What if the teacher said at the beginning of a class that if a student is having a problem or concern, they could step out and go to the counselor, or whoever, to get some support? That might help prevent disruptions when a student is feeling unable to be there.” Parent at Burton HS

As in previous conversations, **parents from different schools and communities shared concerns about communication.** They voiced a desire for better communication between the district, schools and families, and pointed out the challenges that families and children face in trying to articulate their needs.

“Very often the parents have no information about where to go, especially in middle or high school - because there are so many different teachers. Who is responsible for doing this, how do we know who to talk to?” Parent at Wu Yee Children’s Services

“In my experience communication with families is very broken. That aspect has been very difficult. I also feel we’re missing the opportunity - our school doesn’t take full advantage of SchoolLoop.” High school parent

“When the school calls us it’s always in English and we can’t understand.” Cantonese-speaking elementary school parent

“I have to say that as a parent I don’t see teachers or staff being held accountable. And about parent engagement - it really needs work. Back to School Night is the one time parents really come here.” High school parent

“It’s difficult for us to get language support for engaging families in restorative conversations - not just someone to interpret so I can tell a parent something, but that they feel comfortable to say what’s really on their mind, when speaking through an interpreter.” Behavior support teacher

“In this wacky world we live in, we just don’t have enough time to spend with our kids.” Parent at New Traditions ES

“But we need to connect with the kids. Life here is just working, working - we don’t have time to play soccer or go to a movie maybe with our kids, but that’s so important.” Parent at Burton HS

“I see that (children’s ability to) communicate is a big problem - it’s better this year, but we really need to improve this - for students to really learn how to express themselves and to communicate.” Parent at Webster ES

III. Community Suggestions to Improve School Climate and Strengthen Restorative Practices

Participants in every conversation had suggestions about what schools, the district, and our whole community could do to improve school climate and strengthen implementation of Restorative Practices. A few clear themes for suggestions emerged from these discussions.

- **Each school needs to clearly state their school's values and expectations for how students and adults should conduct themselves and treat each other.** They need to explain the process for resolving conflicts and the consequences of not living up to expectations - and communicate this clearly to all students, families, and other adults in the school community.

"People need to be on the same page - at school, and also between school and families. I want us all to have the same, rich, high expectations for the kids." Parent at June Jordan HS

"The school handbook needs to have information about our rules and school values, and information about Restorative Practices. We need to have more language and ways to talk about this - I didn't know what 'Restorative Practices' even meant." Parent at New Traditions ES

"Before the new school year starts, as new families come in, we need to set expectations for them - that's huge. We can set those and it very much includes an orientation about Restorative Practices, and how community circles work." Parent at SF Community K-8

- **It's important to bring people together and build community in schools. We need to engage families in this process - both to help shape and support implementation of Restorative Practices at school, and to provide access to training, so parents can use these strategies with their own children, at home.**

"My question is, is the parent perspective or community being brought into this? It would be a tremendous help to build the community among staff and parents, to build trust to help resolve conflicts. So, what can we do, including me, to help make that happen?" Parent at SF Community K-8

"I know there's a lot to talk about at Back to School Night but this (Restorative Practices) is a huge priority... You could get 'sub-groups of excitement' of parents who want to learn more about it, and do the training." Parent at New Traditions ES

"I wish parents were here when we had our training in June. I think Restorative Practices is great but it's about all of us working together... I would like parents at our staff training in August so then you can help train other parents. I'd like to see where parents are included at the beginning, not after the fact." Elementary school student advisor

"I would love information from the district about strategies for kicking off the school year - for example, having a Restorative Practices parent day before the school year starts. We need support to figure out how to do this and to bring parents into it." Middle school counselor

"As a parent I'm wondering how I can bring it into my home?" Parent at the School Planning Summit in February, and at nearly every conversation after that

"I wish this kind of meeting had happened when I first started here. It is useful and touching. I'm a quiet person but I've been through a lot. It is very useful to have parent meetings." Parent at Denman MS

"Do you plan on doing a presentation in advisory? It would help to have students understand, not just staff. If students were doing it themselves it would help more." Middle school student

"My suggestion also is to open up this training to students, maybe 10-15 at a time, or to all of them. That way they can be aware of these strategies." Parent at Burton HS

- **We need the structures, support and materials to help make Restorative Practices work in our schools.**

"We're starting from the ground up and asking teachers to do it, and there's an enormous number who want to - but we lack the organizational structures to support that. Last year we did planning for this year that didn't quite get off the ground." Learning Support Professional

To move it forward at the site level is really challenging. We need support - maybe an implementation plan. It's good that training is available, but there needs to be a stronger message from the district about this being the expectation. There needs to be a stronger message if we're going to make this fly." Principal

We need those big posters (with the Restorative Questions) - laminated. Can we get those right away? Elementary school parent

Can they send a big bunch of posters with the questions with the packets that are sent to schools at the beginning of the year? Elementary school parent

- **The district needs to partner with families, and with other organizations and agencies in the city, to expand Restorative Practices. Schools need to have training for not only teachers and counselors, but all the other staff and adults at the school.**

"Could we leverage support and help from agencies that do lead parent education classes, to do these kinds of trainings or workshops for families?" Parent at SFUSD's School Planning Summit

"There are some agencies that are really working to help children. First Five is starting to do this kind of work in different schools - they help a lot and offer workshops. This should be coordinated better with the school district." Parent at Flynn ES

- **Schools need to create the space for Restorative Practices - figuratively, and literally.**

"It's all connected. School culture and climate is all about academic success - students' ability to take risks and embrace an academic identity depends on their teachers' ability to lead the classroom and to create that space." Teacher at June Jordan HS

"If there's an actual space for us to go to on the yard - a Restorative Practices space - then we could ask the kids to go there, and get a teacher to lead them through it."

Parent at New Traditions ES

"Maybe we need an in-house place for students to be able to go and cool off - we need a teacher who can do that." Parent at Carver ES

"Is there a space at this school for students to go...?" Parent at Burton HS

"The school needs places where we can do things like this. We're suffering for lack of a comfortable safe space. The classrooms are not set up for this sort of thing—having the space to talk in a large circle." Counselor at Denman MS

THE PAC'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The PAC believes that strengthening the implementation of Restorative Practices will support improved outcomes for all students, as families become more engaged in school communities, learning environments are strengthened, and students have better access to the curriculum.

Based on what we learned through the community conversations, the PAC identified several recommendations to expand and strengthen the implementation of Restorative Practices, and to address the ongoing issue of improving communication with the families of students in schools across the district.

The PAC recommends that central school district staff work with school-site leaders, to:

1. **Establish the clear expectation that schools will use Restorative Practices, in a way that is relevant to their school community. Engage families at every school *now* to support implementing Restorative Practices**, whether the school hasn't started yet, has just begun, or is well on its way.

Schools should include families to identify challenges and set goals for improving school climate, communicate school values and expectations, and plan training. The district should support these efforts by providing information, materials, and guidelines.

Each school should build this conversation into their school-year orientations, Back to School Night presentations, and discussions among the School Site Council, English Learner Advisory Committee, and other parent organizations.

2. **Develop an action plan to improve communication and strengthen relationships among students, staff and families** - at each school, and in the district as a whole. The district's overall Family Engagement Plan needs to be completed, and should emphasize strategies used within restorative approaches to build and strengthen school communities. Schools need to be supported to implement these approaches, and held accountable for doing so.

Each school needs to clearly state their values, rules and expectations for students and adults in the school community, and to communicate these clearly to students, families, and all adults in the school. Schools need to explain the guidelines for using Restorative Practices to resolve conflicts and address behavior problems, including serious problems that require specific consequences.

3. **Foster collaboration among the district, community organizations and city agencies to help provide training for parents and other adults working or volunteering at schools,** including yard monitors and afterschool program staff.

Because the SFUSD's resources are limited, we should work with the district's many partners to leverage the resources that exist in the city. We should bring together city agencies, community-based programs, and parent advocacy groups to develop a collaborative plan that connects the parent curriculum needs of school sites, including Restorative Practices, to the training and support that these organizations have the expertise in providing to families.

4. **Encourage and support opportunities across schools for principals and other site leaders to learn from each other** about what's working, and identify best practices that can be shared across the district. These Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) could focus on Restorative Practices, as well as school climate and family engagement in general - especially for schools that don't have family liaisons.

5. **Acknowledge and address the challenges that many schools face to build community among different family populations.** Provide tools for principals and school leaders to support this important work, to give a voice to all families and develop parent leadership across different communities.

Identify schools that have been successful at building community among their students and families, the strategies that have worked, and ways to share these practices with district staff and other schools.

Some Reflections about the Community Conversations.

- As the PAC has experienced in previous community engagement initiatives, we found that some schools have a harder time getting parents to come to events. In many schools, our contacts felt the event didn't get the attention of families because parents didn't know what "Restorative Practices" are. Many schools expressed their hope that we could come back next year, and hold another conversation with more families in their community.

- Overall we heard from participants who strongly reflect the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the SFUSD, from all grade levels (see Appendix I for more information about participants). However, many conversations themselves did not reflect their school's student population. Many schools - especially those without family liaisons - are struggling to engage families.

"We don't have everyone in this circle that we need to hear from - it's awesome that we pulled this together in less than a week, and we need to do more so we can hear from everyone." Parent at Grattan ES

"There aren't very many of us here tonight. What can we do to help bring parents into it, and also to take it home and use it there?" Parent at SF Community K-8

"We don't have a parent liaison. I don't have great models of how other schools (are able to engage their families), but I know some are." Elementary school principal

"We could put resources into workshops for parents, but getting them to come is a different story." Elementary school principal

"We had a training for the parents who were volunteering to help on the yard but only a few people came... I don't know how to reach more parents." Elementary school principal

- This initiative was different from other community conversations the PAC has led about district-level policy. In addition to bringing information about the district, this time we also allocated time to address what was happening at the school hosting the conversation. General suggestions to improve school climate, and action steps to implement Restorative Practices in individual schools, came up in most conversations.
- Another new and unexpected aspect of this initiative was that principals, Learning Support Professionals and teachers contacted us, asking the PAC to lead conversations and help engage families in the process at their school. The PAC is excited to think about ways to maintain a district-wide focus, while supporting schools to engage families in a constructive process to strengthen implementation of Restorative Practices at their sites.

CONCLUSION

Working on this project has reinforced the PAC's understanding of how interconnected the district's different initiatives are, and that implementation of these initiatives needs to be integrated in order for them to be successful at each school. We also recognize the importance of including community partners in this process, to leverage the expertise and resources many agencies and organizations bring to our schools and students' families.

Through this project the PAC developed positive, working partnerships with staff at the district and in many school sites. We're excited to build on these relationships and look forward to working together to strengthen Restorative Practices in schools across the district.

Appendix I: How We Conducted the Conversations and Who We Heard From

Why and How We Conducted the Conversations

In 2009 the PAC was aware the Board of Education passed a resolution supporting Restorative Justice and alternatives to suspension. Many PAC members supported the concept of this approach, but we did not know much about proposed implementation of these strategies.

During community conversations about student assignment, we heard many concerns about lack of communication, bullying, unfair disciplinary practices, and the need to improve the learning environment in their children's schools. In the fall of 2011 the PAC decided to conduct a series of community conversations about these issues, and the district's approach to reducing student suspension and improving school climate through Restorative Practices.

Our original goal was to conduct 10-15 conversations and reach about 200 people, to inform families about these strategies; hear their questions and concerns; and identify ways to strengthen implementation of Restorative Practices across the district.

To our surprise, principals, counselors and classroom teachers began contacting us, asking the PAC to lead a conversation at their schools. We extended our timeline to accommodate as many of these requests as possible, but couldn't serve all of the sites who wished to participate. We plan to continue this work in the coming school year, to support these communities.

The PAC worked in close collaboration with SFUSD staff leading implementation of Restorative Practices, to learn more about these practices and how the district is implementing them. PAC members and staff attended district training on Restorative Practices, and two members are participating in the district's "training of trainers" course.

The PAC developed a discussion guide and information packet, which were translated into Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, Tagalog, Vietnamese and Samoan. In each conversation we presented information about why SFUSD has embraced Restorative Practices, the district's approach to implementing these practices, and some of the basic strategies that schools are using.

We used some of these strategies ourselves while facilitating the conversations, for example by having participants sit in a circle and using a "talking piece" when they were speaking, and in some conversations practicing the "restorative questions" used to address and resolve conflicts. The heart of each conversation was open discussion of participants' questions, concerns, and suggestions for strengthening the implementation of Restorative Practices across the district.

Conversations were conducted by PAC members, volunteers and staff from February through early May 2012. Most were conducted in the primary language of participants, while others had the support of interpreters. We also conducted a short paper survey to capture demographic information, as well as additional data about participants' experiences with suspension, bullying, conflict resolution and Restorative Practices.

Who We Heard From

We heard from 292 people in 20 different conversations. We held conversations at **13 different schools**, at **three different community centers**, during a workshop at the district's annual School Planning Summit and at a regular meeting of the Parent Advisory Council.

Based on survey data (from 211 written surveys):

- 78% of participants who completed a survey were parents of SFUSD students
- 13% were school staff (including principals, teachers, counselors, playground and cafeteria supervisors, and afterschool program staff)
- 7% were middle or high school students, and 2% were other community members.

Of participants who completed a survey, only about **40% had heard of “Restorative Practices”** before the conversation. About **23% had participated in a restorative circle** or conference to resolve a conflict and, of those, **90% found it was a positive experience**.

About **14% of the parents had a child who had been suspended** (or as a student had been suspended). Nearly **40% had been bullied** or harassed at school, and 17% had bullied or harassed another student.

Participants lived in communities across the city, in **23 different zip codes** and **all 11 electoral districts**. The top five zip codes, which made up 52% of the survey respondents, were: 94112 (the Excelsior, Mission Terrace and Sunnyside), 94134 (Visitacion Valley and Portola), 94110 (the Mission and Bernal Hts.), 94133 (Chinatown and North Beach) and 94118 (the Richmond).

Where Conversations Were Held and Schools that Participants' Children Attend

Elementary schools: George Washington Carver, LR Flynn, Grattan, Lakeshore, New Traditions, Rosa Parks, and Daniel Webster ES. *Participants' children also attended* John Yehall Chin, Clarendon, Fairmount, Garfield, Guadalupe, Hillcrest, Gordan Lau, Marshall, Miraloma, Sheridan, Tenderloin Community, and Ulloa ES.

Alternative grade level schools: SF Community K-8. *Participants' children also attended* Rooftop K-8 and International Studies Academy, grades 6-12.

Middle schools: Denman, Everett, and Francisco MS. *Participants' children also attended* Marina, Presidio and Roosevelt MS.

High schools: Burton HS and June Jordan School for Equity. *Participants' children also attended* Balboa, Galileo, Lincoln, Thurgood Marshall, and Washington HS.

Community Centers: Community Youth Center (Tenderloin), Samoan Community Development Center (Sunnydale), and Wu Yee Children’s Services (Chinatown).

Of conversations at school sites, **33% were STAR schools.** (About 40% of the district’s schools are STAR schools; they are historically under-performing and receive additional support.)

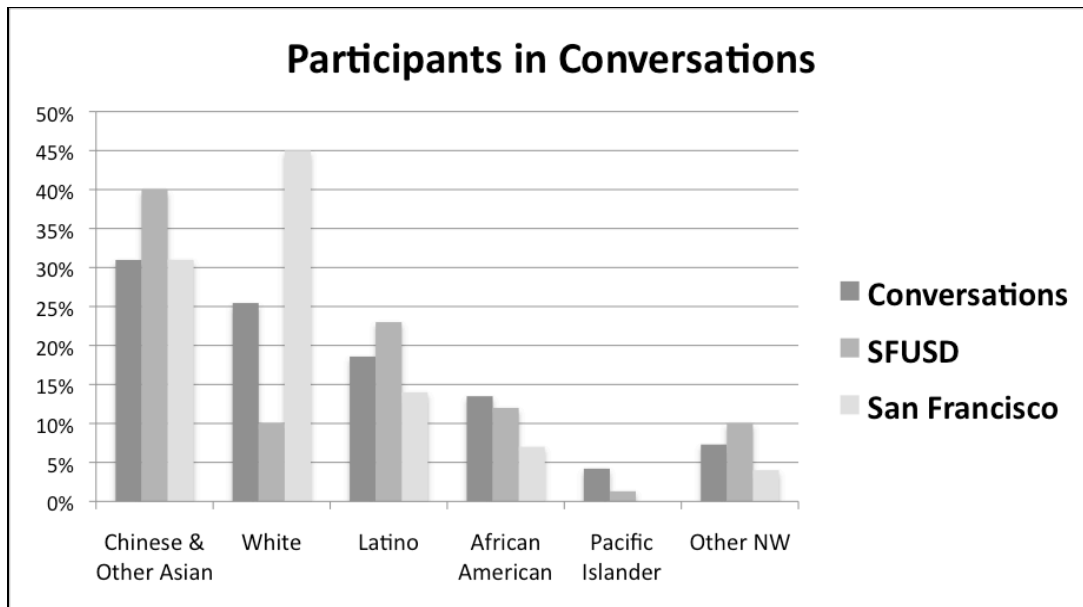
Conversations were also conducted at three schools in the Superintendent’s Zone.

Participant Demographics

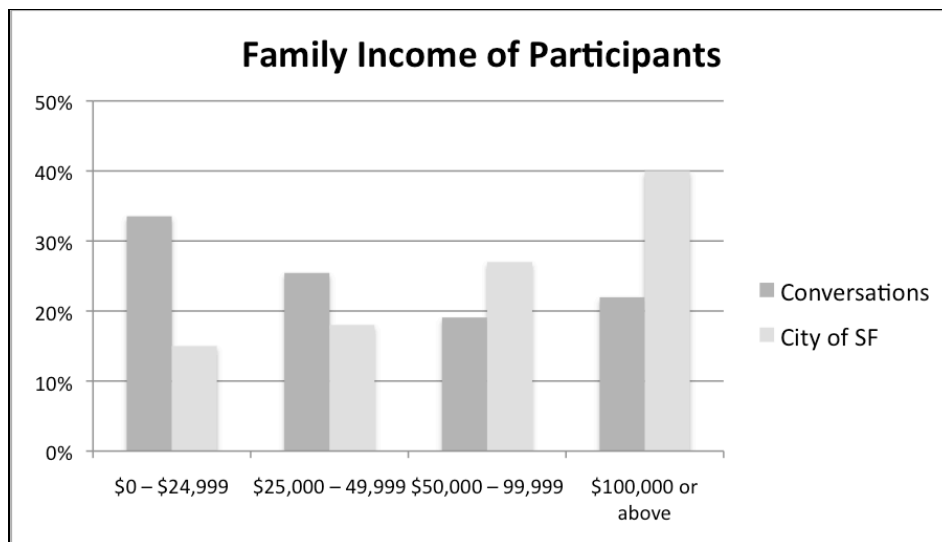
The PAC is committed to actively reaching out to hear from families who are often left out of education policy discussions. We are pleased that participants in these conversations reflected a broad diversity of the district’s families across language, ethnicity, geography, types of schools their children attend, and socioeconomic background.

The composition of the public school student population differs from San Francisco as a whole. Participants strongly reflected African American and Pacific Islander families, slightly under-represented Latino and Asian families in the district, and over-represented white families in the district, but not the city as a whole. (There is a higher percentage of white students in lower grades in the SFUSD, which is reflected in our conversations with elementary school families.)

Ethnicity of participants, compared to population of the SFUSD and city of San Francisco:



Compared to the population of San Francisco, participants over-represented families with incomes under \$50,000, and under-represented families with incomes over \$50,000. We don't have data on SFUSD family incomes, but we know they are lower than the city on the whole.



Who Conducted the Conversations: Facilitators and Interpreters

Facilitators: Cindy Choy, Ruth Grabowski, Miranda Martin, Amy Merickel, and Gloria Molt.

Interpreters and materials translation: Carla Cuevas, Maria de Colombia, Ray Lai, Ayad Kholafat, Rocio Soto, and the SFUSD translation and interpretation unit.

Appendix II: Information about the SFUSD’s Restorative Approaches

Comparing a Restorative Approach with Traditional School Discipline

Traditional Approach	Restorative Approach
<i>Schools rules</i> are broken	<i>People and relationships</i> are harmed
Justice focuses on <i>establishing guilt</i>	Justice identifies <i>needs and responsibility</i>
Accountability = punishment	Accountability = understanding impact and repairing the harm
Justice directed at the offender; the victim ignored	Offender, victim and school all have direct roles in justice process
Rules and intent outweigh whether outcome is positive or negative	Offender is responsible for harmful behavior, repairing harm and working positive outcomes
Limited opportunity for expressing remorse or making amends	Opportunity given to make amends and express remorse

Examples of Restorative Questions for Resolving Conflicts

San Francisco Unified School District: Restorative Questions
<p>When responding to conflict, a restorative approach consists in asking the people involved these key questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What happened, and what were you thinking at the time of the incident?2. What have you thought about since?3. Who has been affected by what happened, and how?4. What about this has been the hardest for you?5. What do you think needs to be done to make things as right as possible?

SFUSD's Principles of Restorative Practices

The following principles reflect the values and concepts for implementing restorative practices in the school setting. Under each principle are some of its important implications.

- 1. Acknowledges that relationships are central to building community.**
 - Restorative practices seek to strengthen relationships and build community by encouraging a caring school climate.
 - Every student, teacher, and staff member is a valued member of the school community.
 - Students should be involved in naming the principles to live by in their school community.
- 2. Builds systems that address misbehavior and harm in a way that strengthens relationships.**
 - Schools establish policies to provide a safe place for learning. Real safety comes from fostering and maintaining caring relationships.
 - Policies should reflect the values and principles agreed to by the school community.
 - Policies need to address the root causes of discipline problems rather than only the symptoms.
- 3. Focuses on the harm done rather than only on rule-breaking.**
 - Misbehavior is an offense against people and relationships, not just breaking rules.
 - The solution to the offense needs to involve all of those harmed by the misbehavior.
 - The person harmed is the center of the primary relationship that needs to be addressed. Other relationships that may have been impacted could include other students, teachers, parents, the administration, and the surrounding community.
 - Much misbehavior arises from a perceived injustice. Those who are victimized also feel they have been treated unjustly. Discipline processes must address these perceptions.
- 4. Gives voice to the person harmed.**
 - The immediate safety concerns of the person harmed are primary.
 - Those harmed must be given an opportunity to have a voice in the resolution of the harm.
- 5. Engages in collaborative problem solving.**
 - All of us act to satisfy our human needs (for belonging, freedom, power, and fun). Students choose behaviors to meet these underlying needs.
 - Family, students, and communities are encouraged to help identify problems and solutions.
 - Misbehavior can become a teachable moment if everyone is involved.
- 6. Empowers change and growth.**
 - In order for students to change and grow, we must help them identify their needs and assist them in finding alternative ways of meeting those needs.
 - Interpersonal conflict is a natural part of living in relationship with others.
 - Conflict presents opportunity for change if the process includes careful listening, reflecting, shared problem-solving, trust, and accountability structures that help to build relationships.
- 7. Enhances Responsibility.**
 - Real responsibility requires one to understand the impact of her or his actions on others, along with an attempt to acknowledge and put things right when that impact is negative.
 - Consequences should be evaluated based on whether they are reasonable, related to the offense, restorative, and respectful.
 - Some students resist change and need adults to make decisions concerning their accountability.