

## Student Enrollment: a Balancing Act

by Amanda Johnson

August 27 was a big day for our family. It was the day my husband and I took our daughter, Emma, to her first day of kindergarten in the San Francisco public schools. While all the families gathered on the yard to hear the principal's welcome, I looked around at the students. They seemed so much older and bigger than my daughter. I wondered what this new school would be like for her. Would it be hard to learn the new routine and make new friends? Would she be happy? Would she thrive? Did we make the right choice?

In SFUSD, student assignment is a choice-based system. Parents can tour the schools, talk with teachers and principals, and pour through websites and guides. Looking across all the public schools in the city, each parent can turn in

a list of choices ranked one through seven.

The student assignment system first "pre-assigns" any student with a sibling already enrolled at his first-choice school. The system then assigns each remaining student to his highest ranked school with available openings. If a school has more requests than openings then certain student characteristics are taken into consideration by the computerized system. A student living within the boundaries of the school's assignment area is slightly favored. Also factored in is how a student will contribute to the academic, socioeconomic and/or linguistic diversity of the school. Race and ethnicity are not a factor.

The current choice-based student assignment system has both fans and critics. Proponents of the system say that it gives each parent the oppor-

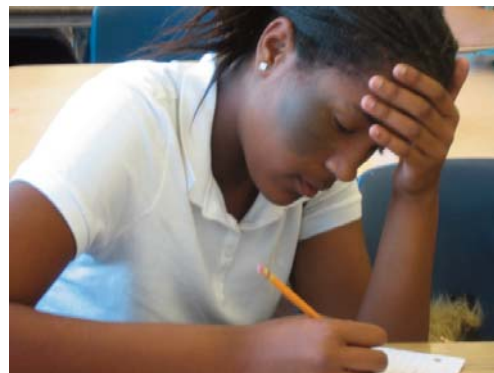
tunity to explore the wide variety of programs the district has to offer and choose the ones that would best fit her child. All schools are open to all children regardless of where they live in the city. And more and more parents are getting one of their choices each year. In 2007, 87% of on-time applicants got one of their chosen schools, and 67% got their first choice.

The current assignment system can also frustrate parents. Some parents may not have time to thoroughly investigate school options, and they may find themselves making important choices for their children's education with only limited information. In addition, the process involves some uncertainty. While each parent has a bounty of choices, she has no guarantee of being able to place her child in her neighborhood school, if that's what she really wants.

SFUSD hasn't always had a choice-based student assignment system. The current system has evolved over three decades, largely in response to various lawsuits. In fact, the national legal landscape continues to change. A June 2007 Supreme Court ruling severely limits how school districts can use race as a factor in student assignment.

Any student assignment system is, by necessity, a balancing act. In San Francisco, the district is looking at creating a new student assignment policy in the context of several concerns. Over the past forty years, the number of students enrolling in San Francisco public schools has steadily declined. Since state and federal dollars follow the students, the decline in enrollment results in lost funding for district schools. In addition, racial and ethnic diversity within individual schools is decreasing. Of

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**Freshman Bobbi Atkins in class at her first choice school, Phillip & Sala Burton High.**

## A New Step, a New Choice

by Bobbi Atkins  
 9th Grade Student, Phillip & Sala Burton High School

San Francisco is a city filled with choices. One important choice for 8th grade students involves selecting a high school.

Last year, as an 8th grader at Excelsior Middle School, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out which high school was right for me. At first I was surprised by how many schools

I could choose from and soon realized how little I knew about each one.

I wanted to attend a high school that had an arts program and an active Black Student Union. I wanted friendly teachers and a school where parents were involved. I wanted to write every day. And I wanted to be safe.

In 8th grade I learned about the high school application process through Calfee School Guide classroom presentations. I learned that I needed to get an SFUSD high school application and select my favorite seven high schools. I recom-

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## A Morning in the Life of a Preschool Teacher

by Oscar Chavez

I come to work every day with the belief that my strong and consistent relationships with students will help them grow in positive ways. I'm a teacher at the SFUSD Mission Child Development Center. Today is a typical Monday in mid-September. At this point in the year we focus on safety, building relationships, and developing healthy routines.

**7:58** I enter the classroom where all the children are checked in by our staff. Children stream into the room with their parents. "Good morning teacher Oscar!" One of our new students looks me in the eye and asks, "My

mommy says you love me, right?" I smile. "Of course I do!"

**8:06** We start the day. I call out, "Rooms 3 and 4, get in line." After a few minutes of bustle, I and two other teachers bring the 14 children to our building across the yard. As we near our classroom I find myself making the first safety call of the day, "Wait please! You all need to walk behind me." This might sound a bit harsh, but if I let them run toward the room, one might fall and end up with a scraped knee or elbow.

**8:10** Each day at this time I must ask all the children if they've eaten breakfast. Some might say, "I already ate" but if I ask what they had, sometimes I can tell they really didn't eat. Today one child answers, "I had chips and soda." I send him off to breakfast in the next

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Help your child thrive in a school *best suited* for them.

**You have the power,  
 THE POWER TO CHOOSE**

**SFUSD Enrollment Fair Oct. 27**

**Bill Graham Civic Auditorium**

(near City Hall)

**9:00 AM - 3:00 PM**

# Anniversary of the Arts Education Master Plan

by Antigone Trimis

Veteran SFUSD arts coordinator and Arts Education Master Plan Advisory Committee member, Andi Wong, testified before the Select Committee of the Board of Education and the Board of Supervisors on September 27, 2007. She expressed her excitement at seeing that the arts are being offered in all SFUSD schools.

"To know that every student has the opportunity to find out exactly what they're capable of, this is democracy in action."

For more than two years the SFUSD engaged in a collabora-

tive process with the San Francisco Arts Commission and community arts providers and allies to develop the Arts Education Master Plan (AEMP). Completed, launched and Board approved last year, the Master Plan's goal is to bring equity and access in arts education during the curricular day to all SFUSD students.

With funding from the voter-approved Public Education Enrichment Fund, each school community, no matter the neighborhood or academic emphasis, is called upon to embrace the notion that each and every student must be provided with the arts as an inte-

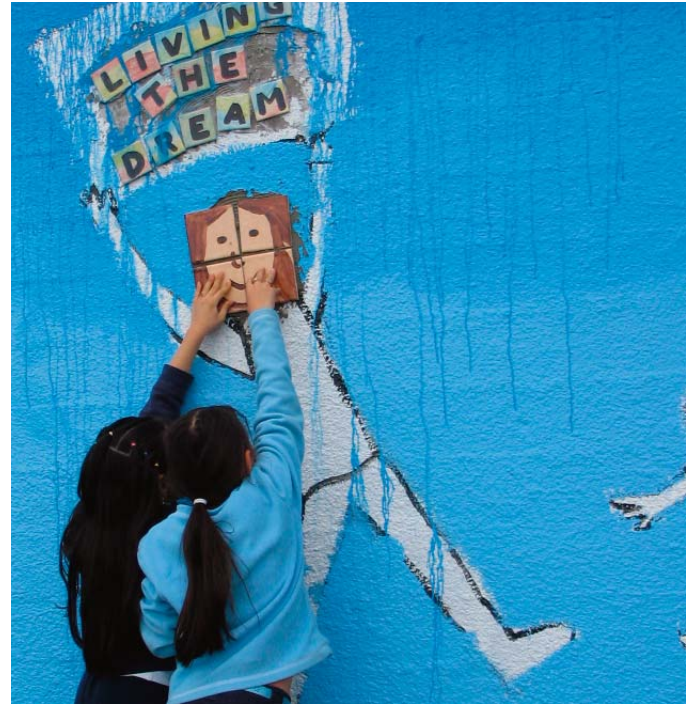
gral part of the academic day.

The Arts Education Master Plan is a ten-year plan for incremental growth that will eventually impact all students K-12. The Master Plan addresses administrative leadership, professional development, resources and staffing, curriculum and instruction, partnerships and collaborations as well as assessment.

As the curtain went up on the first year of the plan in the fall of 2006, elementary and middle schools received a \$10.00 per student allocation, while high schools received \$20.00 per student to be used for arts supplies and materials, artists-in-residence, field-trips and/or to pay a partial credentialed arts specialist teacher salary. As planned, this year elementary schools receive \$15.00 per pupil and middle and high schools maintain the same per pupil allocation levels.

For academic year 2007-08, twenty-four full-time credentialed arts specialist teachers have been assigned to middle and high schools, and all elementary schools have arts coordinators.

The Visual and Performing Arts Department has coordinated arts leadership training for secondary principals as well as arts specialists and coordinators. Trainings have been presented in partnership with the Arts Education Funders Collaborative, the Museum of the African Diaspora, the San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum, the de Young Museum and the San Francisco Symphony, among others. □



**ART IN ACTION** – Launched and Board approved last year, the Master Plan's goal is to bring equity and access in arts education during the school day to all SFUSD students.

## Why I Chose My Public School



**Monica Bradford**

I chose public schools for my children years

ago when I saw the parent involvement, which I feel is key to student performance. My youngest is at Cleveland Elementary and I just love how the staff and students are ethnically diverse and so willing to learn from each other. We have more in common than I'd thought.



**Sharon Ohlson**

I started learning about San Francisco's

public schools when my twins were three years old. I heard about several good schools to choose from. George Peabody Elementary was my third choice when I enrolled, but I'm glad I didn't get the first two because our family just loves Peabody. The older kids are true mentors for the younger ones.



**Vali Govier**

You can get an excellent education in public schools.

I toured about 25 in San Francisco - public, private and charter- and I learned that private schools here do not have Spanish Immersion programs, but SFUSD has seven at the elementary level. One of the most surprising things I discovered as a parent at Flynn is how fast you can get new ideas implemented.



**Alejandro Sweet-Cordero**

My wife and I both went to public schools,

and we feel it's the best way to be educated and promote a democratic society. My girls were in Spanish Immersion when we lived in Massachusetts, so when we moved here we found Buena Vista Elementary and loved it. When it came time for middle school, we chose James Lick because my children could continue Spanish Immersion and it was close to home.



**Amy Rosenhaus**

When I started looking for a school for my child, I heard a lot of reasons to not choose public schools that turned out to be mis-

nomers. My son goes to SF Community, which is a small, project-based kindergarten through eighth-grade school. He is actively engaged. It's reinforcing what I know to be good about public education.



**Leslie Straw**

My daughter actually knew she wanted to go to New Traditions

Elementary when she was a kindergartner. The arts, drama and music instruction there are far beyond what I ever had when I was young. Both my daughters are getting an education that encourages compassion and the ability to think and act independently. □

## Return of the School Librarian

by Rachelle Resnick

After years of cutbacks and under-funding, SFUSD elementary school libraries are being revitalized. As of this fall there is funding for every elementary and middle school to have at least a part-time librarian.

The program began in 2005 when five library media teachers worked in 25 elementary schools. This year, kindergarten-5th grade schools are getting more librarian time, and funds are available middle schools to do the same. By the school year 2008-2009, high schools will be able to increase their library staff.

The expansion is due to 2004 voter-approved Public Education Enrichment Funds (PEEF). Before PEEF, only a handful of SFUSD's elementary schools had librarians.

One of the many schools without library staff was McKinley Elementary. The library area was used mainly as a thoroughfare and storage for years. Also, according to McKinley's library media teacher Ren Volpe, over half the book collection was from the 1950's and 60's.

Now the library has been transformed with an updated book circulation system, comfortable seating, computers, and of course, new books. There is room for whole classes to meet for weekly lessons.

A "Magical Garden" theme runs throughout the space, beginning with an arbor gate and finishing with large decorative hanging leaves, silk plants, and stone lions.

"We're working to make this a vibrant classroom - a place for discovery and learning," says Volpe, "a school library is so much more than just a room full of books."

The rebirth of school libraries means the district needs to find qualified school librarians.

"We went a long time without any library openings in our district," says Ann Dalton, who is supervisor of libraries and media services for SFUSD. "Now we're getting the word out to certificated library media teachers so they know we're hiring."

According to Dalton, school librarians reach every student with read-alouds and activities to increase reading skills. They collaborate with teachers on projects and research to deepen student knowledge and engagement. Most importantly, school librarians create an environment that paves the way to a lifelong enjoyment of reading.

To expand the district's cadre of librarians, approximately 35 SFUSD credentialed teachers have enrolled at San Jose State University to earn an additional full library science media credential. With their new skills, they will be teaching students the research and information evaluation skills needed in today's Internet age, and working closely with other teachers to support classroom lessons. □



**Librarian Ethel Vanderwater reads to students at Dr. Charles R. Drew Alternative School.**

# Viewpoints

## Board of Education President Mark Sanchez



**Sanchez** This is an exciting time to serve on the Board of Education for SFUSD. Since Carlos Garcia began as our new superintendent in July, the Board of Education and Mr. Garcia have had several retreats to discuss our shared vision and priorities for the district. We are in agreement that all of our actions should address student achievement, accountability and access and equity. We have discussed the action

steps that we need to take and will begin prioritizing these action steps through the development of a strategic plan. I look forward to sharing more about where we are headed in the near future.

Starting in November, SFUSD will have another visionary leader as part of our team – Dr. Tony Smith. For the past three years, Dr. Smith has led the Emery Unified School District. As the new Deputy Superintendent for Instruction, Innovation and Social Justice at SFUSD, Dr. Smith will advance our small schools initiative as well as other important strategies to assure that every child in our district is successful.

Finally, I am happy to announce that we began our

school year with a contract with our teacher's union. As a teacher myself since 1992, I understand the challenging work that our teachers do everyday. Yet due to declining enrollment and the rising cost of employee and retiree health benefits, the district can't afford to pay teachers what we would like to pay them. Why should teachers be paid any less than other important public servants such as doctors, police or firefighters? In 2008, the voters of San Francisco will be asked to consider a parcel tax that will help significantly in sustaining our dedicated teacher corps.

Let's work together to support our teachers. □

## Superintendent Carlos A. Garcia



**Garcia** The school year is off to a great start with many beautifully renovated schools under the Proposition A Bond program; classrooms teeming with bright students learning and teachers delivering top notch instruction; and parent and community members contributing to the vibrancy of our schools.

Even with all the great things happening, I have found that our district is lacking in a lot of resources. Our technology is sorely outdated. In fact, it looks strikingly like it did when I left SFUSD in the early 1990s. SFUSD must become

increasingly paperless; it is both environmentally and economically sound practice. Parents should be able to check their students' homework and grades online. Students should be able to get their food in the cafeteria using an automated swipe card system. High schoolers who need to make up a class to graduate on time should be able to take classes online.

While the district keeps making steady growth in student test scores, some of our students are still not proficient in core subject areas. If a child is not reading at grade level by 3rd grade, it can have a profound negative impact on his or her future. We are going to make sure that all SFUSD preschool through 3rd grade teachers are trained as literacy specialists so all students who begin in SFUSD in kindergarten are reading at grade level by 3rd grade.

We need to consolidate our resources to better

serve our children. We simply cannot afford to keep almost as many schools open today as we had 40 years ago when we had a much larger population of school age children in San Francisco. The process of consolidating our resources will be challenging and we must learn from our past mistakes. No school community should be displaced without getting something significantly better than what they are losing.

But we cannot do more with less; we need to bring in support from both private and public sectors to create schools that reflect this century. Most importantly, to create schools that are worthy of all of our children, we need your active involvement and support. Join me as we strengthen our city's schools for our city's future. □

## SF Examiner President & Publisher John Wilcox



**Wilcox** We have a new superintendent of schools in San Francisco. Carlos Garcia, a former principal of Horace Mann Middle School, is back to lead the district. During his three years at Horace Mann the school was designated a California Distinguished School and a National Blue Ribbon School. Now The City is banking on Mr. Garcia accomplishing for the San Francisco Unified School District what he did for Horace Mann. It will be one of the great challenges of this decade in public education. He will have to find a way to attract more middle-class families to San Francisco public schools and reduce the achievement gap among ethnic groups. And he'll have to work with the school board to determine whether to close some schools while reinvigorating others.

That's just for starters.

His background indicates he's up for it. He's been a teacher, a public school administrator and a private in-

dustry executive. Most recently he was vice president of Urban Advisory Resources for McGraw-Hill Education. Before that he was superintendent for eleven years in three school districts including Clark County, Nevada, the fifth largest school district in the United States. Clark County is also one of the fastest growing districts in the country, averaging a new school opening every month during Mr. Garcia's tenure. Now, with our district, he's taking on the opposite challenge: an urban district that hasn't grown in recent years and may even face some school closures.

His experience in leading small and large districts, and working in both the public and private sector should give him a broad view of issues and a varied pool of experiences to draw from. He is promising to focus on only a few issues, believing that a shotgun approach will scatter the district's energy and result in failure. He's probably right about that.

Although San Francisco Unified has made progress, there is more to be done. Now we have a new leader promising to work on those issues that matter the most. He'll get a lot of input on what these issues should be. Let's try to make the discussion productive and in the

interest of the students the district serves.

Finally, let's welcome Carlos Garcia to this great city, and as citizens and parents, let's help him be a great superintendent. □

## San Francisco Unified School District School Times

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## A New Step from page 1

mend attending the SFUSD School Fair in the fall. All the high schools have students, parents or Principals there to talk about their schools. I asked each student if their teachers were friendly, what they liked about their principal, and if they felt safe at school.

After attending the SFUSD School Fair I narrowed down

my list of favorites. I then went on the Internet and read about the seven schools I had selected. I like the website [www.CalfeeSchoolGuide.org](http://www.CalfeeSchoolGuide.org) because it helps you learn about what programs students can get involved in at school.

Each school is very different in culture, classes and size, so I also asked my teachers

what they knew about the schools. All students should visit at least two high schools before submitting the SFUSD high school application, but more if possible. It is important to understand how different life is at each school and to know what classes, pathways and clubs are offered so that 9th graders can get involved as soon as possible.

I listed Phillip & Sala Burton High School as my first choice because it has all the things I want: art classes, interested teachers, a Black Student

Union (BSU), and a safe campus. I am really happy that I go to Burton High School. I am enrolled in Freshman Honors English, joined the volleyball team, and am a member of the Black Student Union. And I like Principal Kappenhagen.

It is often said that knowledge is power and I believe this is true – in both life and high school selection.

### BOBBI'S TIPS FOR 8TH GRADERS:

- Start asking questions about high schools early.
- Go to the SFUSD School Fair.
- Make a list of your top seven (7) favorite high schools.
- Learn about the schools online.
- Ask your teachers about the high schools.
- Visit at least two (2) high schools. □



Child Development Teacher Oscar Chavez assists his students during one of their morning activities.

## A Morning in the Life from page 1

room with others who have not eaten yet. It's important. Learning is easier on a full stomach.

**8:45** Large group time. I sing a song in English and in Spanish. Today the children are eager to go outside. We stand up and do a few exercises. Then I call them by groups to use the restrooms before they go outside. One child comes to me and says, "But teacher, I went to the bathroom at home." I send him to use the restroom anyway.

**9:45** Outdoor time. We set up the yard for play. Children help by bringing the trikes, wagons, and balls from the storage room.

**9:47** An accident occurs. A girl is sitting in the middle of the yard holding her leg and crying, "aaaayy, aaaay, mmmommmyyy!" I ask a teacher to bring an ice pack. I look at the girl's knee and see a small scrape. Others start to gather around. The ice arrives, plus a small bandage. She stops crying. Once the bandage is on she smiles. I take this opportunity to remind the whole group of our safety rules.

**10:25** Indoor time. Children are making a collage with natural

materials: rocks, pebbles, and seeds. I give directions for pouring glue. As I'm talking, a three-year-old boy sitting next to me starts to put glue directly on his hands. He gives me a look that seems to say, "can I do this?" As I answer, I check the rest to make sure they are doing it correctly. The collage turns into a very gluey activity. In the end we have some beautiful collages and a mess to clean up. It's important that we give children the chance to explore, have fun, and learn with materials around them.

**11:15** I let the children know they have ten minutes left for art. When it's time, I flick the lights off and on to remind them it's time to clean up. Some start cleaning but others wait until I speak one-on-one with them. One boy hides under a table. I ask him, "Do you want to lose play time later today?" He thinks about this. His answer is no. "Then you need to be part of the clean up." His answer is still no. "Okay," I say, "you start to clean up before I finish counting to ten or you can't play this afternoon." I count aloud as I return to the rest of the group. I look his way briefly and continue counting. As I reach "four," he comes from under the table and starts to clean up. □

## San Francisco Public Schools Enrollment Resources

### San Francisco Unified School District Educational Placement Center

Provides multi-lingual guidance for families year round through every step of the SFUSD enrollment process. [www.sfusd.edu](http://www.sfusd.edu)

### Parents for Public Schools – San Francisco

Provides parents with information, news and parent-to-parent networking and develops parent leaders at the school and district level. [www.ppsf.org](http://www.ppsf.org)

### Calfee School Guide

Engages middle school students and caring adults in the process of selecting public high schools that best support their long-term goals. [www.CalfeeSchoolGuide.org](http://www.CalfeeSchoolGuide.org) □

## A Balancing Act from page 1

even greater concern, the achievement of African American and Latino students continues to lag behind the achievement of white and Asian students – a phenomenon known as the "achievement gap."

Any student assignment system must also consider the needs and concerns of parents – not just to stem the decline in enrollment, but also to better serve all district students.

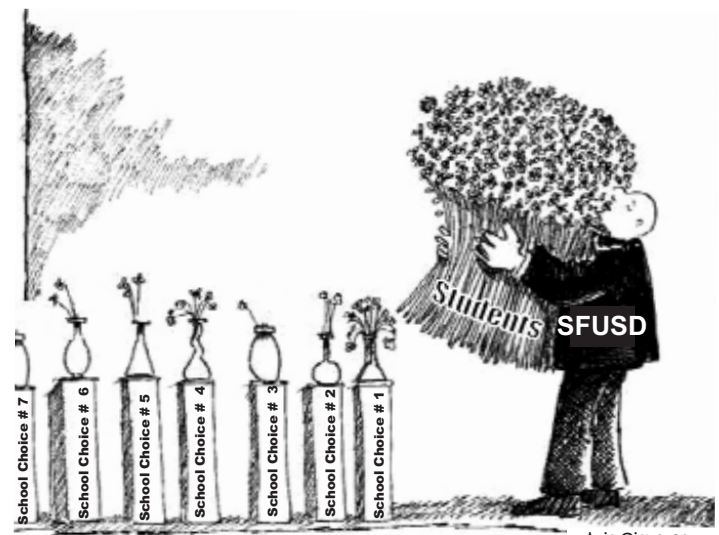
In a series of community conversations about schools last fall, hundreds of parents spoke out about what they wanted in the public schools and the assignment system. Among other things, they asked for access to quality schools in every neighborhood, so they could exercise school choice without sending their children across town. They also asked for a process that is fair, easy to understand, and less uncertain. Parents said they wanted their children to attend diverse schools, too, as long as those schools were safe, high-quality, and convenient.

At the end of the day, improving the student assignment system will be a challenge. Any new policy will require difficult tradeoffs.

As for my own experience with school choice, I think I was more nervous on Emma's first day of school than she was.

After the principal finished his welcome, my husband and I watched as Emma lined up with her classmates for the first time. As they started walking

inside, she looked over her shoulder and blew us a kiss. I am happy to report that Emma has loved her new school from Day One; she has made lots of new friends, and is thriving beyond my hopes. With her kiss, Emma was letting us know that we had made a good choice for her. And she was right. □



Aris Cisneros