



SFUSD SAN FRANCISCO
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

PreK-3rd Grade: Building Community-Public School Collaboration

Summary of Project Accomplishments

Presented to the San Francisco Board of Education

April 24, 2012

Project Overview

The PreK-3rd Grade Building Community-Public School Collaboration project, spearheaded by San Francisco Board of Education President Norman Yee and jointly implemented by the San Francisco Child Care Providers Associate (SFCCPA), San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) and partners, was designed to strengthen and expand the District’s prekindergarten to third grade (PreK-3rd) approach to education. The project goals were to 1) strengthen relationships between the District and community-based preschool programs; 2) involve parents in the PreK-3rd discussion; and 3) bring together all early education stakeholders to strengthen a unified vision and PreK-3rd approach. This report provides a summary of the importance of the PreK-3rd work and the key accomplishments and findings of the project.

Importance of the Project

The PreK-3rd model holds much hope for improving student achievement; students’ experiences in the early grades deeply impact their opportunities and outcomes in the later grades. Educational studies and brain research indicate that quality preschool, reinforced by learning in proceeding years, can have a dramatic effect on young learners’ success. Children who come to kindergarten prepared and are educated in a system with an aligned, solid pipeline from prekindergarten to third grade achieve at higher levels.

“Now, if we are to prevent the achievement gap and develop a cradle-to-career educational pipeline, early learning programs are going to have to be better integrated with the K-12 system.”

-U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan
(Keynote address to the National Association for the Education of Young Children –November 18, 2009)

Implementation of a PreK-3rd approach not only raises the achievement of all children, but narrows the socio-economic achievement gap between groups of school children. This is an exciting and hopeful prospect for San Francisco, a community deeply committed to equality, but also one in which there is a pronounced achievement gap by the time that public school students are formally assessed in 3rd grade. By expanding access to quality preschool and distributing of responsibility for children’s growth and achievement across multiple stakeholders and grades (PreK-3rd), San Francisco early educators will be able to take steps toward preventing the achievement gap from taking root in the early elementary grades.

School districts throughout the country serving low income children have shown extraordinary results in student outcomes after implementing a PreK-3rd approach. SFUSD intends to become one of these leading districts by working with partners to implement an authentic PK-3rd system. This project, which culminated with a PreK-3rd Summit, represents a key foundational event falling within an ambitious five-year PreK-3rd timeline.

PreK-3rd Five Year Timeline

Year One

- Solidify vision of aligned PreK-3rd system
- Begin pilots and PreK-K transition support

Year Three

- Teachers understand alignment expectations
- Content has continuity
- Aligned assessment tools are administered
- Family resources are consistently provided

Year Five

- SF identified nationally as a PreK-3rd model

Project Accomplishments

To create a coherent system in which all children are provided sustained, aligned instruction from PreK-3rd, community based organizations and the District must work together. This project provided an opportunity to do this by building understanding and communication between preschool and elementary school teachers and administrators and building trust between the District and community-based organizations. Specific strategies through which this was accomplished include:

1. **Teacher Exchanges:** PreK and K teachers visited each others' classrooms to deepen their knowledge and enhance alignment
2. **Parent Involvement:** Parents were given formal opportunities to share thoughts and provide input
3. **Citywide PreK-3rd Planning Summit:** early education stakeholders were brought together to affirm a shared vision and plan for a collaborative PreK-3rd approach

1. Teacher Exchanges

Prekindergarten and kindergarten teacher exchanges were conducted to enhance teachers understanding of the two educational domains. Thirty-eight (38) preschool and 17 kindergarten teachers visited each other's classrooms to gain greater insights into the instructional techniques, student expectations, and general experiences of both grades. Of the 38 preschool teachers, 19 were district preschool teachers and 19 were community based preschool teachers. To support teachers in the observational process, SFCCPA and First 5 of San Francisco worked with the District's early education team to create an observational form. During their visits, all 55 teachers completed the written observation worksheets. The SFUSD

Kindergarten Transition Program Specialist partnered with the SFCCPA to lead a focus group attended by 23 community and District teachers and one director in which findings, experiences, and suggestions were shared.

Teachers uniformly shared that they appreciated the exchanges, viewing them as a helpful learning opportunity for both PreK and K teachers. Community and district preschool teachers developed an enhanced, more nuanced understanding of what is expected of kindergarteners and kindergarten teachers deepened their knowledge of the ways in which preschool prepares young learners for kindergarten. Teachers made astute observations about classroom and programs. Teachers noted particular areas of effectiveness in areas such as use of space; amount of children's work on display; methods for relating lessons to real life experiences; learning through play versus formal/structured environments; the interrelation of auditory instruction, visual prompts, hands-on activities, and individual and group work; and level and nature of parent participation. Within all of these observations, teachers noted that there was the same level of high teacher engagement and dedication in both grade levels.

Teachers also observed a fundamental problem that the PreK-3rd framework is designed to address: in many cases, there is a disconnection between preschool and kindergarten. Teacher feedback suggested that exchanges such as this will serve to decrease the disconnection. For instance, many teachers responded that they would like additional opportunities to visit each others' classrooms; observe other teachers and students; and regular meetings with colleagues to discuss shared needs, best practices, and ways in which teachers from both respective educational levels can support each other in facilitating a smooth transition process for families and students. Participating teachers were eager for PreK to K and K to 3rd alignment and connections, including communication systems across grades and community-district entities.

2. Parent Involvement

Parent involvement and engagement, especially in pre-kindergarten and early grades, is widely considered an important component in the success of schools in helping students learn. Recognizing that parents are a fundamental part of the PreK-3rd approach, parent input was sought through focused stakeholder meetings and focus groups. Coleman Advocates held focus groups with a total of 47 parent participants and Wu Yee Children's Services conducted focus groups with a total of 33 parent participants.

There was universal parent consensus that increased support for students' transition to kindergarten would be positive and helpful. Parents and caregivers of preschool-age children were very interested in having an in depth understanding about what children are learning, what

they will be expected to know in kindergarten, and how parents can best prepare their children. Parents were interested in having opportunities to meet with their children’s preschool teacher and future kindergarten teacher about their individual child’s progress as well as the grade level expectations. Parents were also interested in receiving more logistical support when applying to schools to enable them to navigate all facets of the student assignment system adequately.

Parents of students in grades K-3rd expressed similar sentiments about the importance of children’s preparedness. Some parents mentioned that their children had not attended preschool and for those children, the transition to kindergarten was much harder emotionally, socially, and academically. Conversely, those who had children participating in an out-of-school-time program shared that the programs gave their children the extra support needed to be successful. Many agreed that support with the transition would be helpful, suggesting supports such as a “Kinder Camp” model (a summer transition program for families before kindergarten starts) or expanded access to counselors during the first half of kindergarten.

Parents representing groups of students had distinct experiences and concerns. For instance parents who did not know about SFUSD’s student assignment system tended to be Chinese and Latino parents, some parents expressed concerns about the racial isolation of African American students, and other parents shared distinct challenges and needs in supporting children with special needs. Overall, parents were very open in sharing thoughts, many of which reinforced the guiding principles in the PreK-3rd model.

3. Citywide PreK-3rd Summit

Over 250 participants including early educators, teachers, directors and administrators, family support group representatives, funders and city-elected officials, parents and students, were brought together in a highly successful event, “Looking Back, Moving Forward.” Mayor Ed Lee opened the event and San Francisco Board of Education President, Norman Yee, chaired the Summit. Keynote speaker Ralph Smith, Senior Vice President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, reiterated that the PreK-3rd alignment system will enhance grade level reading by 3rd Grade.

Following the keynote speeches, all participants were randomly assigned to breakout classrooms, therefore creating heterogeneous discussion groups. These smaller, intimate conversations revolved around what PreK-3rd alignment means within the city of San Francisco. The many breakout session discussion questions included:

- What are San Francisco’s biggest strengths for ensuring children are successful in preschool and school?

- What are the biggest challenges preventing young children and/or their families from being successful?
- What are the highest priority actions for advancing a PreK-3 agenda in San Francisco?
- What does this mean (i.e. implications for action or policy) for schools; preschools; community-based organizations; parents/parent organizations; and local government?

After the discussion, the trained facilitators shared out many insightful points with the whole group, providing needs and recommendations including the following:

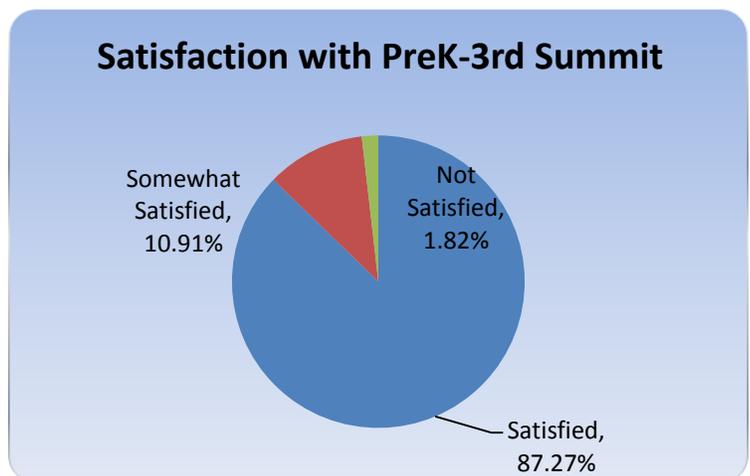
- Developing/ensuring a common understanding of schools readiness
- Creating and supporting aligned, sustainable philanthropic partnerships
- Convening annual PreK-3rd Grade Summits
- Increasing opportunities for teacher professional development, particularly shared professional development with PreK and K teachers
- Creating additional opportunities and access points for parent involvement
- Creating a shared curricular vision for all students that is tied to student outcomes

Following the breakout sessions, a panel of early education, district, and city leaders shared insights and thoughts in a discussion. Panelists included:

- Richard Carranza, Deputy Superintendent, SFUSD
- Nancy Gapsin-Gnass, Chair, Parent Advisory Committee, SFUSD
- Graham Dobson, Child Care Planning and Advisory Council
- Laurel Kloomok, Executive Director, First 5 San Francisco
- Maria Su, Executive Director, Department of Children, Youth and Families
- Michele Rutherford, Program Manager, Child Care Policy and Planning, DHS
- Sylvia Yee, Vice President, Evelyn & Walter Haas Jr. Fund

Each panelist introduced themselves, shared highlights from the day, and engaged with the participants in a question and answer session. Panelists and participants addressed proposed solutions to identified problems and identified roles that distinct agencies could play. Following this discussion, Superintendent Carlos Garcia ended the Summit with closing remarks.

Participant feedback was largely positive. Overall people were inspired by the joint learning via the collaborative event, the passion people had for supporting young learners, and leaders' commitments to actualizing the vision and plan. Some healthy skepticism was expressed, but primarily people were excited about collaborating to move the work forward. There was appreciation for the opportunity to network with educators and community members that represented a wide variety of



organizations. Many felt like their voices were heard and their partners' voices were heard. The opportunity to "brainstorm", and share experiences and thoughts, best practices, and future plans in a community context was valued.

Summary

The project represented a notable milestone in the early stages of a burgeoning PreK-3rd system. The District and community partners will continue implementing unified efforts to support children in aligned, city-wide PreK-3rd grade system. SFUSD will continue and expand communication between parents, SFUSD, CBOs, and city entities through implementation of a PreK-3rd Strategic Plan. Training and professional development with an emphasis and progressively shared citywide learning opportunities are paramount pieces of the plan. Continued opportunities to create systems for PreK-K teacher communication, parent involvement, and successful student transition are also key parts of the plan that will grow and expand over coming years. All of this work will ensure not only that San Francisco implements a PreK-3rd system, but that it is a high quality one with excellent preschools and high quality instruction that is aligned from grade to grade.

Overall, the District is excited about the work and grateful to all partners, leaders, funders, and participants for the shaping and implementation of this PreK-3rd work. Thank you to all who participated in the project, especially those who played a key role in making the project and summit happen.

Special Thanks to...

Board of Education President Norman Yee
Everett Middle School
Annie E. Casey Foundation
San Francisco Unified School District
SFUSD Early Education Department
SF Child Care Providers' Association
Wu Yee Children's Services
Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth
First 5 San Francisco
Parents for Public Schools
City College of San Francisco
Attendance Works
Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund
Mimi and Peter Haas Fund