

# San Francisco Unified School District School Times

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WINTER 2010 VOLUME IV ISSUE II

## Superintendent Proposes New Student Assignment Method

Complex, unpredictable, frustrating — over the years SFUSD’s current student assignment system has received its share of criticism. It’s also fallen short in one of its primary goals: to desegregate and diversify schools. That’s why dis-

trict staff has spent more than a year working closely with a Stanford research team and gathering public feedback to develop a system that improves school diversity, while simplifying the assignment process for families.

Under the current system, students are not assigned to schools based on their address; families submit seven school choices and participate in a lottery, which assigns students to schools based on several diversity factors like socioeconomic status or home language.

In February, Superintendent Carlos Garcia proposed a new student assignment system to the Board of Education. Under the new system, elementary and middle school students would receive preference for attending a school near their home. These neighborhood schools would be based on new “attendance area”

boundaries drawn by the district.

The superintendent emphasizes that the new assignment system is just one of many actions that the district is taking to improve schools.

“A new student assignment system is one part of creating educational environments in which all students can flourish. Making sure every school is high quality is the most important concern for all of us, and a student assignment system alone cannot ensure school quality, although it does have a role to play,” says Superintendent Carlos Garcia. “We believe

that this investment in neighborhoods is a strategic use of limited resources and will enable us to assure more quality schools in every neighborhood.”

Under the superintendent’s proposal, families would still be able to apply to any school outside their attendance area. Schools with special language programs or K-8 grade spans would be deemed “city-wide” schools. That means anyone could request those schools and no one receives a local preference.

The current assignment system uses five diversity factors  
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**CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS** - Last fall, the Galileo High School community opened its newly-renovated athletic field, which was paid for in part by voter-approved bond funds. Over the last six years, funds from bonds have made it possible for SFUSD to modernize and repair facilities at 92 schools, including Balboa High’s front entrance, Marshall High’s corridors, and Galileo High’s field.

## Singing, Rhyming and Learning Science

It’s no secret that today’s urban public school teachers face a number of challenges each day in the classroom. In San Francisco, despite rising test scores for the last eight years, the work to improve student success for the lowest-performing students continues.

Teaching very young students here, with their diverse backgrounds and different languages spoken at home, is something Glen Park Elementary second grade teacher Anna Dearlove is familiar with. She has begun using some new techniques that are showing signs of success with her students.

Last fall, Dearlove used a strategy called ‘Essential Summaries’ to prepare her physical science and social studies lessons. Essential Summaries requires the teacher to think deeply about where her students are in their understanding of the sub-

ject before teaching.

“What experiences do students need and how can I build upon those that they bring?” is the question Dearlove now asks herself before preparing for her classes. By working backwards from the big, complex, ideas and simplifying them, without diluting the concept, teachers are able to fill the gap in prior knowledge and experience.

“You are sometimes filling a void of prior knowledge,” says Dearlove. “For example, some of my students live within a mile of the ocean, but they’ve never actually been to the ocean, so they need some information about oceans that others might take for granted before they can begin learning.”

Dearlove and her colleagues at Glen Park prepared for a lesson on rocks and started with determining what concepts their students did and didn’t understand.

“The idea that the Earth is covered in rocks, even under the ocean, can better be relayed to some of our students with pictures and songs.” This, she says, is much more effective than to start out asking students to memorize geological classifications.

“Doing this foundation work can make teaching the actual les-  
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Watching T.V.  
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## More Fun than Watching TV: Students discuss their experiences at ExCEL after-school programs.

Over 90 SFUSD schools have an ExCEL after-school program. In addition to homework support, these programs offer a wide variety of educational enrichment activities that range from cooking to movie-making to Chinese ribbon dancing. These programs are provided in partnership with local community-based organizations and are free to SFUSD students. Over 16,000 students participate.



### Brittani Stribling, A.P. Giannini Middle School, 6th grade

After school I come to the cafeteria to have a snack and talk with friends. Then I have project club for an hour. I participate in the DJ club, where we get to produce our own beats on turntables using software on a computer. We're going to show off our skills at the school dances. This is a lot more fun than being at home watching T.V.



### Taranjot Singh, Francis Scott Key Elementary School, 5th grade

On most days, when I get to the after-school program there is a teacher who can help me with my homework. But on Fridays, I participate in project clubs. For the hiking club, we walk to Golden Gate Park and study the different plants. In the movie making club we write our own stories and then our teacher takes characters from everyone's story to make one story for our movie. We get to be the actors. Some days we get to do cooking projects. So far we made sweet potatoes, apricot muffins and toasted cheese sandwiches.



### Bella Stardust Torres, Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy, 3rd grade

My favorite part of the after-school program is the science club because you get to do a lot of projects. We build plant boxes so we can grow our own plants. We also get to dissect animals. The other day I got to dissect a squid. I didn't want to do it because I wasn't sure if it was still alive. But everyone promised me it was dead. I got to cut off one of its eyes. Its blood squirted on me, and it looked like ink. That was cool.

To learn more about ExCel after school programs, please visit:  
<http://www.healthiersf.org/ExCELAfterSchool>



Students from Bret Harte Elementary School perform a hip-hop dance to open the annual showcase featuring the after-school dance clubs from schools across the city. Salsa, Chinese Lion dancing and a remake of Michael Jackson's "Thriller" were also part of the lineup.

## Budget Q & A with Myong Leigh, Deputy Superintendent of Policy and Operations

*Myong Leigh has spent the past decade overseeing policy and operations for SFUSD, including oversight of the district's budget. Before coming to SFUSD, he was the budget director for D.C. public schools and a financial advisor to the City of Philadelphia. He lives in the Mission, loves burritos and tries to get to the gym when he's not crunching numbers.*

### ST: What do you do at the district?

In a nutshell, my job is to oversee most of the non-classroom operations that support our schools: student nutrition, human resources, fiscal services, transportation, facilities, technology, etc.

### ST: How is the SFUSD budget decided?

It's a team effort. Each year the superintendent seeks feedback from schools, district depart-

ments, the unions and the community. Using this input we develop a budget proposal based on the amount of funding we can expect from the state and other sources. The Board of Education reviews the proposal, and, ultimately, the Board decides whether or not to approve or amend it. This is true for all California school districts.

### ST: Are some schools within the District funded differently than others? Why? How is this determined?

Schools get most of their funding through a budget system we call the Weighted Student Formula. With this system, a school receives funding based on the specific characteristics of the students who attend that school. We do this because we know that some students have circumstances that pose unique challenges for their academic success, so we send extra fund-

ing to their schools to better support them. For example, a student from a low income household who qualifies for free lunch or a student who is an English Language Learner would carry extra funding to a school site. From there, the school community develops its own budget to best serve the needs of its specific students.

### ST: What happens to the money that doesn't go directly to school site budgets?

Some of the money supports the basic operations of the district like human resources or accounting services. But a significant portion of the funds the district budgets centrally supports staff that work at schools. For example, the cost of custodians is budgeted centrally, but custodians work at school sites and are a part of school communities. The same goes for student nutrition workers, after-school coordina-

tors and school nurses. Some of these staff members serve multiple schools, so it makes more sense for them to be paid by a central budget rather than across multiple school budgets.

### ST: How has state funding for education changed over the years?

Put simply, the state has cut funding down to the bone. In the 70's California's education spending was among the highest in the nation. Now we're headed to being dead last in the country for per-pupil education spending.

### ST: What can teachers, parents and community members do to help our schools?

In the long term, we need to advocate for greater state funding for education. There

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### The State Budget Crisis:

### What does it mean for San Francisco's Public Schools?

Learn about the largest cuts to education funding in California history and discuss ways our district can address these cuts.

#### ■ March 3 / 6:00-8:00pm

Horace Mann Middle School  
3351 23rd St. (at Valencia St.)  
Free Parking / Muni lines: 48, 14

#### ■ March 10 / 6:00-8:00pm

Thurgood Marshall High School  
45 Conkling St. (near Silver Ave.)  
Free Parking / Muni lines: 44, 14X

#### ■ March 11 / 6:00-8:00pm

Francisco Middle School  
2190 Powell St. (at Francisco St.)  
Free Parking / Muni lines: 39, 8

Free childcare & Interpretation  
available by reservation:  
call (415) 249-9293

# Viewpoints

**Board of Education President  
Jane Kim**



2010 will go down in California history as the year we balance the state's budget on the backs of our children. The governor has proposed a staggering \$2.5 billion in education cuts for the coming fiscal year—the largest single funding cut since Proposition 13 passed in 1978.

Already, California ranks 48th in the nation in per pupil spending and has some of the largest class sizes in the country. As a state, we consistently spend more on prisoners than we do on our students—current figures show that California spends approximately \$49,000 annually per prison inmate compared to less than \$8,000 annually per public school student.

Are you angry about how we de-prioritize our children? You should be. And on March 4th, you can do something about it.

On that day in San Francisco, and elsewhere throughout the state, educators, parents and students will participate in a series of actions, including a rally and press conference on the steps of City Hall and the State Building, to demand reforms to our educational system.

Central to our call of reform is budgetary reform that would allow for the state legislature to pass a budget or revenue legislation by a simple majority. This is critical to stabilizing educational funding as the current 2/3 super-majority rule allows a small self-serving group within the state legislature to hijack the entire budget process.

Yes, it is an uphill battle, but we need to organize and mobilize for long term funding for education as we weigh local budget cuts to schools that we have never imagined before.

Our public schools need our support. Change can happen, if we demand it. □

## Budget Q & A with Myong Leigh *con't from page 2*

is support out there to increase the education budget. But every year, it's almost impossible politically to get the number of legislative votes necessary to pass a budget that funds our schools adequately. One thing everyone can do is support efforts to lower the two-third majority threshold for

approving a state budget. California is one of only three states to have this requirement, and if we lower the threshold, there may be a chance that we can get better funding for our schools.

In the short term, giving time and resources to schools can make a powerful impact on students now.

Over the years, San Franciscans have rallied for our schools and through this support we've made some incredible gains. We have come far, and this is so important to the future of our city so we must keep the momentum going. □

**Superintendent  
Carlos A. Garcia**



Over the next two years, our school district has the dismal task of addressing at least a \$113 million deficit. We are not alone. School districts across California are struggling in the face of one of the biggest cuts to education any of us have ever experienced.

I've been talking about the bad news a lot recently and will have to continue to do so as we figure out how to make some incredibly difficult decisions in the near future. I also want to appreciate some strong funding that will remain in place for our schools during this bleak economic time.

Thanks to the support and foresight of San Francisco voters, there are many things we can be certain will continue to happen in our public schools despite our fiscal woes.

Thanks to Prop H, the Public Education Enrichment Fund, we know that all students will continue to have access to art classes, and elementary students will have access to music instruction. Prop H also ensures that our schools will still have resources to support athletic teams, physical education classes and school libraries.

There's even more to be thankful for. Through Prop A, the Quality Teacher and Education Act, our teachers receive salaries that are competitive with other Bay Area school districts. And teachers in hard-to-fill subject areas (e.g special education, advanced math) and those who work in some of our most challenged schools receive additional pay incentives. The allocations from Prop A enable us to recruit and retain the best teachers for our schools.

While there is no quick fix that can make up for the loss of state funding for education, the resources from these local voter initiatives will provide significant benefits to our students during these difficult times. Prop A and Prop H demonstrate the value San Franciscans place on education and their willingness to support public schools.

As we continue to navigate the budgetary challenges of the next two years, I hope we never lose sight of our shared commitment to educating our children and a strong belief that together we can and will weather these budgetary storms. □



San Francisco Unified School District

## School Times

Volume IV Issue II

Executive Editor, Gentle Blythe

Managing Editor, Heidi Anderson

Assistant Editor, Mitzi Mock

555 Franklin Street

San Francisco, CA 94102

415-241-6565

email: [newsline@sfusd.edu](mailto:newsline@sfusd.edu)

## School Calendar: Spring 2010

**March 29 - April 2**  
Spring Break – no school

**May 31**  
Memorial Day – no school

**June 4**  
Last day of school

# Students Turn One Word into Poetry

Alex Pollak and Otto Pippenger are sophomores in their second year of School of the Arts (SOTA) Creative Writing I. They wrote the poems below in their poetry unit, which ended with the annual Poetry Café at Maxfield's House of Caffeine.

In Creative Writing I, students work with Frances Mayes' book, *The Discovery of Poetry*, that begins with a segment titled "Invitation." In a class session, they

discussed and explored definitions of "invitation," and then were assigned to write a poem in response. The discussion generated a range of approaches in content and in form, as the poems selected show.

"The main work of good writing is revision," says teacher Heather Woodward.

"The willingness to revise separates the poet from the person who engages in poetry sim-

ply for self-expression."

Woodward requires reading across a range of poetry to teach students not only how to write well but to recognize when a poem is complete.

For more information about the creative writing program at SOTA go to:  
[www.sfsota\\_creativewriting.org](http://www.sfsota_creativewriting.org) □

## Invitation

(the rusting insides of a Radio Flyer  
tires slicking in the rain)  
(the sly smile  
and resetting of a loose strand of hair  
the blushing)  
(the leaves  
ready to  
crackle crunch rustle)(laps  
of mothers  
beckoning cats and children)  
(chairs)  
(heater's warm gusts  
from hot metal grilles)(pillows)  
(smooth sheen of unruffled water in winter  
silver as mercury)  
(invitations are waiting)  
(invitations are empty spaces)

Alex Pollak

## Invitation

Ideas dead on arrival  
Want to shut Word  
Which would be absurd  
(Rhyme is for children, not sophomores)  
Empty heading, no company  
Windows is open  
Three more smothered  
Minimized with my email-

I would like to cordially invite  
Every English word  
No door charge,  
No entrance fees,  
To a Grand Ball  
Of one to two pages  
Don't mind the roommate;  
Sarcasm will leave if you come over.

And I'd freely let any metaphors  
Who would be so gracious  
As to show their faces  
Pick the music.

Otto Pippenger

## New Student Assignment Method can't from page 1

to determine an assignment preference when there are more applicants than available seats at a school. The new system would use only two: Census Track Integration Preference (CTIP) and Attendance Area.

Using CTIP is one way the new assignment system works to diversify schools. It gives students from census areas with traditionally lower test scores a preference over their peers who come from neighborhoods with a history of

higher academic performance.

"This proposed method is simpler for families," says Special Assistant to the Superintendent, Orla O'Keeffe, who leads the redesign initiative. "All you need to tell us when you sign up for school is where you live and where you want to go to school. Elementary and middle school families can take a school assignment near their home, or they can submit a list of other schools they would like to attend."

The high school assignment process will also be simplified, but remain a choice-based lottery, in order to give older students the opportunity to select a school where the academic programs and enrichment activities best meet their interests.

The new assignment method has not been decided on yet. The Board of Education is scheduled to take action on a new policy on March 9, 2010. □

## Singing, Rhyming and Learning Science can't from page 1

sons much more effective."

By using a singsong approach to recitation, and dancing definitions (a phonics lesson where students create their own rhythmic-sounding definitions for new words), students become proficient English speakers more quickly.

"We do a lot of rhyming, even singing, in the classroom, things that touch the kids' spirit," says Dearlove. "And it's working really well with my lowest-level achievers, which is something I'm always looking for."

"By conveying complex information through lyrical rhythm, young students are better able to grasp and retain the information. They are making actual neurological connections."

Teachers at ten district schools are learning these and other techniques through the National Urban Alliance (NUA), an organization that

SFUSD is partnering with this year to offer teacher training, coaching, and modeling.

Dearlove says her first few months using NUA methods have been rewarding.

"What I like about the NUA is that the coaches get right to the point with strategies I can use as soon as I leave the training, and every student can benefit." □