

School Choice in Oakland: How Community Data Can Inform School Portfolio Management and Empower Principals

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Schools are at the Heart of Health in our Communities
PLUS Leadership Regional Learning Initiative
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Objective:

Since adopting a school choice model, numerous schools in the Oakland Unified School District have faced significant enrollment variation. Roosevelt Middle School, for example, went from 225 sixth graders in 2011 to just 153 in 2012; 189 seventh graders in 2009 to 232 in 2010; 247 eighth graders in 2008 to 221 in 2009. Garfield Elementary experienced a peak of 101 Kindergardeners in 2008 and then an all-time low of 80 in 2010; 111 first graders in 2007 to 86 in 2011; from 2008 to 2010 the overall school experienced an average loss of 6.65% per year but from 2010 to 2012 the school experienced only a 1% loss in 2011 and then a 5.4% increase in 2012. The story of enrollment variation extends well beyond just these schools, transcends every grade, and is most amplified in the 5th grade demographic. In some ways, enrollment variation is one of the intended consequences of a school choice system; students are supposed to flock to the “best” schools and thus the strongest schools prosper while the weaker schools do not - your standard market-based theory. While it is certainly true that enrollment shifts are intended in this system, what is also true is that there needs to be an explanatory logic to understand why these shifts happen. Failure to understand the rationales behind enrollment shifts impedes the District’s ability to learn and react to what the community wants and deems important for education. The inability to project enrollment poses challenges for both a principal and for school portfolio management. Each school in OUSD is in a unique place and they all need answers for different reasons. Roosevelt Middle School is an example of a school-site with a bad reputation. With falling enrollment the school is losing money. The leadership at Roosevelt points out that to turn around his school, he needs more students and resources. Interestingly, he points out that he is forced to spent too much time marketing his school and not enough time on traditional school-

site tasks. By understanding enrollment variation and what the community wants, schools like Roosevelt can start to target their programs more effectively to stop their declining enrollment. Other schools like Manzanita SEED are in a different place. Manzanita is by all traditional indicators a strong school, but the school struggles with attracting students from within the neighborhood. By understanding what the community there wants, the school could change its program portfolio in the hopes of attracting more neighborhood students. Other schools like Garfield are struggling and lack a solid identity to emerge in this school choice model, by understanding community needs a school like Garfield could cater more closely to a specific community need and take-off more quickly. Undoubtedly, there are a variety of reasons and motivations for school leaders to want to understand enrollment shifts and community need - this report hopes to make the case for what community data can offer OUSD.

This report was born out of a project that seeks to aid in generating a comprehensive understanding of changes in enrollment, the impact that various programs have on enrollment, community perception, community preferences, and the impact that the Options Process can play in all of this. By understanding these issues we hope that the District will be able to more effectively project student enrollment, understand where to place programs, and help create a way to more effectively target, recruit, and retain students.

Broader Research Questions:

The long term goal of this project is to help answer several different questions. Questions like: Why do students decide to leave a school? What accounts for the years that see increases in

enrollment? How do parents get their school-related information? What do they consider to be important? Some of the key questions we needed to answer were issues related to community perception. What *exactly* does the community want? What is driving their school decisions? How are they getting their information? What's important to them? What programs do various neighborhoods want in their schools? What characteristics are represented in schools that students and family choose? What are current parent perceptions regarding various schools? How can we change that? How can we make parent perception align with school-site realities? How can we do that in a cost-effective way? Can technology play a role here? What changes can we make in the Options Process to meet our goals? Are students choosing the "right" schools that are the best fit for them? These are all questions that this project draws into, however, this report will show that these questions can only be answered after the long-term completion of this project. The recommendations in this report will help the District adopt a method that will help it be able to answer these questions.

Methodology:

To help answer these questions we sent surveys out to various principals in the district and took a look at what other districts are doing to help them navigate their school choice models. We also took a look at existing data like the CHKS survey -- which asks important questions related to violence, school safety, and a students comfort in a school. After exploring existing data sets, it became clear that the District does not have the data needed to accurately answer these questions in the context of school choice. Numerous meetings and interviews were conducted with staff members working on school portfolio, options process, and opportunity mapping work.

Case Study: Roosevelt Middle School

1. *What sort of strategies do you utilize to market your school?*

YouTube videos, road shows, and 5th grade visits to Roosevelt.

2. *When marketing your school, how do you involve parents? The community?*

Parents and community members are involved by visiting the roadshows. **Key Takeaway:** Aside from word of mouth information dissemination, parents must self-select to get new information about a school by attending a roadshow.

3. *What kind of information or data do you use to inform site-based program decisions? What data would you like to have?*

We use CST and our own internal assessments. We would like to have multiple data points like 3-4 academic measures for math, and another 3-4 for ELA. These data points would come to us throughout the year so we can measure progress. If by assist you mean recruitment efforts, I would say the best thing is to help me build a better product. **Key Takeaway:** Principals aren't getting access to the various data points they need to make the most informed decisions they can related to SPM so that it links best to community need and interest.

4. *How do you disseminate information about your school? To the community? To parents?*

Information is disseminated via the website, roadshows, and visits by 5th grade students to our school.

5. *What month do you begin your recruitment efforts for the upcoming school year?*

October.

6. *How involved is your school in supporting your 5th grade families in selecting a middle school or your 8th grade families in selecting a high school? On a scale from 1 to 5.*

On a scale of 1 to 5, I would rank them a 4.

7. *What kind of information or events do you offer parents who are looking for Options information?*

We do an options fair at Roosevelt for our outgoing 8th graders

8. *How much money do you spend on recruitment efforts per year?*

\$500 dollars. **Key Takeaway:** Schools do not have very much money allotted in their budgets to market their schools. This is especially important for those schools that are trying to change the image of their school or disseminate new information about their school. Effective marketing for a school would require far more money than this. The District should consider including more information in their Options Booklet to help schools disseminate new and pertinent information.

9. *What do you think is the cause for gains and losses in your school's enrollment?*

Losses - Loss of enrollment throughout the district. Who wants to raise kids in the third most violent city in the nation? Also, Roosevelt's reputation is "your kid will get hurt and they won't learn". **Key Takeaway:** This highlights the cyclical nature of a school reputation on enrollment. The challenge here is disseminating new information about schools that are "turning around". The Options Booklet is the most systemic vehicle for disseminating updated information about a school.

10. *What would you like to see the District do to assist you?*

1) I want to be more aligned with LCI so that we don't have competing sets of expectations. LCI, site administration, and teachers should form workgroups to create content area work plans that clearly lay out goals and steps to reach the goals. 2) A core of translators and interpreters (Spanish, Viet, Cant, Mien, Khmer) 3) Two RJ coordinators. 4) Five full-time therapists/counselors. 5) An admin assistant. 6) A full-time crisis counselor. 7) A full-time person to coordinate incentives for students

11. *Which programs are in the highest demand at your school?*

The EBAYC after school program.

12. *Please feel free to share any other thoughts you might have on this subject (school choice, marketing, program placement, the Options Process, etc).*

The options model creates winners and losers, and the losers have a difficult task of becoming a winner if there is not additional resources or support, and if they don't have extraordinary leaders

and staff. Perhaps we should create very clear common goals that apply to any Oakland school (SQR? Balanced Scorecard?) and for the weakest schools, all of us in the district problem-solve around how to make sure we reach it? So that we are not competitors, but team-mates that feel collectively responsible for the well-being of all schools? If we are going to have a free-market system, it makes principals and schools see each other as competitors and creates a disincentive to help each other. We're all idealistic and generally respect each other, but there has to be some sort of a negative effect. I'm not sure I've totally thought this through, this is just my gut reaction as one of the current "losers". **Key Takeaway:** The current school choice model pits schools against each other, rather than working towards developing a cohesive district-based strategy.

Findings:

The first and most important finding is that a community poll must be done. A community poll means that it is important to have the parents of students in district schools answers questions related to their school choice decision. This could be at various levels: parents who are deciding to enter into an OUSD school, parents that are leaving a particular school, or former parents of students who went to an OUSD school. Undoubtedly, there are several different data sets in existence. For example, the California Healthy Kids Survey is conducted annually and asks important questions related to school safety, violence, health, a students comfort within a school, their interaction with teachers, and so forth. The problem, though, is that this data is not within the context of school choice and it also isn't specific enough. There is no existing data that systemically asks students or parents why exactly they choose to enroll or leave a school. A

community poll that answers those questions is what will truly empower principals in optimizing their school portfolio management decisions.

Second, after conducting a community poll to acquire the relevant data, OUSD will be able to build a data framework around each student in the District to serve them more effectively and make more progress towards the mission of a full-service community school model. This data network must go well-beyond traditional indicators and begin to include data inputs that relate to things like public housing, access to social services, school program preferences, and so forth. Conducting a community poll lets the district. OUSD has the technological infrastructure that is necessary to visualize this data strategically. Applying the data that is collected from a community poll to the existing Opportunity Mapping structure will empower principals and SPM decision-makers. Opportunity Mapping is a tool that the District has developed that creates an online map that displays existing structures or conditions that tend to produce success, and where opportunity is lacking. It inputs and layers data related to nutrition, housing, absenteeism, graduation rates, and crime onto a single map to give us a way to understand data in a city context. OUSD explains that, “Opportunity Mapping tries to show where conditions exist that tend to produce positive outcomes for kids, and where opportunity is lacking and the challenges for students are greater. By using data to show where children live in relation to schools, health care providers, nutritious food options, recreation areas and good housing stock, Opportunity Mapping can help direct investment and initiatives that improve the quality of life for youth and promote regular attendance, academic progress and social, physical and emotional growth. The OUSD Opportunity Mapping Project uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology to

map the distribution of school-based and District-wide traditional and non-traditional indicators of student performance and community health ”. These Opportunity Maps can be enhanced greatly by including data related to community preferences around schools so that we can develop a more reliable understanding of why families choose certain schools over others. In alignment with the philosophy embodied in the notion of full service community schools, research tells us that student success is dictated by a variety of factors both school and non-school related. We know, for example, from the California Healthy Kids Survey, that a sizable portion of elementary students at certain schools in Oakland don’t eat breakfast. Logically, it’s hard to reasonably expect a child to succeed in school if they aren’t appropriately nourished. Connections like this are important to make when attempting to understand the real stories within Oakland Unified -- these stories can be understood by inputting community data into this Opportunity Mapping structure. Currently, Oakland Unified’s opportunity mapping includes several different indicators that users can be controlled for and applied to draw results. These include: school sites and enrollment, graduation rates, CA Healthy Kids Survey, language, suspensions, academic performance, assessments, absenteeism, health and fitness, civic resources, ethnicity, housing, and crime. This is one area that is ripe for city and school collaboration. With the rise of “Big Data” culture, it is becoming increasingly important for city administrations and school governing structures to share data sets. Part of the challenge is legal and would require revising privacy disclosures when data is initially collected to expand who can have access to it later (including a provision, for example, that says the Police Department can share a certain data set with the District). Building this data framework will take several more years and initiating more programs to collect and input new data into the Opportunity Mapping

structure. In talking to Principals, they expressed considerable interest in blending Live-Go, Crime Spotter, CHKS, StudentFinder, and other existing data sets into the mapping structure. Additionally, it is important to collect data to create a universal catalog of school programs that each school offers. By integrating this into the mapping structure, we can get a much better sense of community need and interest for a particular program. Overall, principals have indicated that there are two primary buckets of data that they need: First, data that can help figure out how to help their students be successful i.e. bus lines, social services available in the area, crime, etc; Second, data to help figure out how to get students to enroll in their school. After collecting all the data related to these “two buckets” OUSD can help build a cutting-edge data framework around each child to truly align with the vision of a full-service community school.

Third, collecting and using community data can help break away from a school choice model in which districts are working against each other. This is a sentiment that has been echoed by various school leaders. Currently, OUSD has a model in which schools compete for students and they do so by creating certain programs. But, after creating a poll, OUSD can gain a better understanding of actual community need and encourage principals to place programs of particular interest for their neighborhood or community in their schools. The goal would be then to not have all schools go after the most popular programs in general for a district-wide population, but rather to have greater diversity in school programs so that it better matches total community need and interest. A community poll can help promote a “district-based school choice strategy” rather than an “individualistic” one. More so, if the goal is not to create a district-based strategy and indeed have schools compete against each other, principals should at least get the

resources to compete competently. Principals are not getting access to the data that they need to best inform their SPM decisions. In a true market model, principals would have access to all the information and resources they need to compete effectively. The better alternative, however, is to work as a collective District so that programs can be placed strategically in appropriate schools. For example, this project has found that bi-lingual education programs are often closed or opened whimsically without consulting relevant community data. Certainly, that is at no fault of the school leadership - there is not much data available to inform their decisions. However, this does shed light onto the importance of using informed data to determine SPM decisions so that we can start to, for example, place bi-lingual education programs in schools that need them most and offer other programs in schools that need different things. By doing this, we can create a school system that collectively serves the needs of the community rather than fighting over a single-popular slice of the enrollment pie.

Fourth, the poll or survey should be conducted in the Options Packet. This helps ensure that the answers the District receives are in the full context of school choice. This helps isolate extraneous variables and other considerations that may bias results. A great model for this is San Francisco Unified. SFUSD places a very short and simple survey in their school assignment packet; the survey takes less than a fourth of a page and is based on a very simple rating system. It is not complicated, provides the district with a great deal of data, and is certainly a model Oakland can look at. Their survey notably uses language like “Your response to this question will not impact your child’s assignment, but it will give us a better understanding of what is important to families” to help remind parents that the responses they gave will not have a

negative consequence on their school, teachers, or children. In the past, parents have been known to give inaccurate information out of fear that their responses could lead to negative action against their school or child. The SFUSD survey offers very simple directions, “Rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how important each of the following factors are when requesting schools. 1 = not important and 5 = very important.” Their model asks parents to rate factors like: attend school with sibling, attend after school program at schools, language pathway, special education services, school bus transportation, near home, near childcare, near work, school hours, diversity of students, neighborhood safety, school’s academic reputation, teachers and principal, parent community, recommended by family or friends, proximity of various community services, specific programs, etc. OUSD could certainly build on these variables and drill down into more specific programs and variables that the District would want to test from year to year. Having every student’s parents in the District take this short survey -- something that really shouldn’t take a parent more than a minute or two -- would provide the District with an unprecedented level of actionable data.

Creating A Poll and Next Steps

OUSD is now currently working to create a survey for 5th grade families. The Office of School Portfolio Management is working to conduct focus groups to understand the challenges and concerns that families are facing. From there, they are creating a Beta version of the survey to be tested with various focus groups in multiple languages. Then, the survey will be administered through EduSoft. By doing this, the data will be linked directly with each student and can be analyzed with greater accuracy. This “test group” will serve as an important milestone in

OUSD's journey to enhance their school choice model and make it better align with the mission of a full-service community school district. Shortly, OUSD will have the first batch of data related explicitly to school choice decisions. The next step will be to interpret that data, inform principals, and modify school portfolio decisions in a way that best serves community need. OUSD is making significant strides in how they execute their school choice model and by continuing down this path of community data collection, there is no doubt that they will empower principals to make the most informed SPM decision and in doing so help their students thrive.

San Francisco Unified Survey Application Example

4 School Requests

Fill in the pathway, school name, and school number for the schools you would like the student to attend. List your school requests in order of preference, using the school list attached on the front cover. If you wish to list additional choices, please see an EPC counselor. You may apply to more than one pathway at a school by placing each pathway on a separate line.

	Pathway	School Name	Sch#		Pathway	School Name	Sch#
1				6			
2				7			
3				8			
4				9			
5				10			

Do you wish to have your twins, triplets or multiples placed in the same school? Yes No or N/A

Does an older sibling living at the same address attend one of your choice schools? Yes No

Younger siblings can receive priority to the school their older sibling is currently attending if:

(1) the older sibling will also be attending that school next year; and (2) you list the sibling's school on this application and complete the requested older sibling information.

Older sibling's Last Name Older sibling's First Name Older sibling's 2012-13 grade

Older sibling's birthdate Older sibling's school

Guidelines for Non-Request Assignments

Yes, I have read the guidelines for making non-choice assignment offers on page 2 of this application form, and if I do not get assigned to any of my choices I would prefer the closest school with openings in a requested language or newcomer pathway over general education.

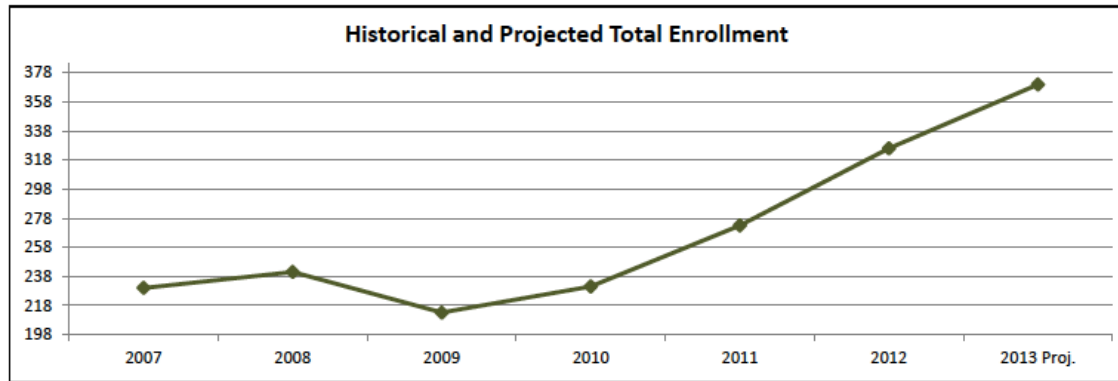
5 Survey

Your response to this question will not impact your child's assignment, but it will give us a better understanding of what is important to families. Rate on a scale of 1 to 5 **how important each of the following factors are** when requesting schools. (1= not important, and 5= very important).

		not important		very important
Attend school with sibling	①	②	③	④ ⑤
Attend after school program at school	①	②	③	④ ⑤
Language pathway	①	②	③	④ ⑤
Special education services	①	②	③	④ ⑤
School bus transportation	①	②	③	④ ⑤
Near home	①	②	③	④ ⑤
Near childcare	①	②	③	④ ⑤
Near work	①	②	③	④ ⑤
School hours	①	②	③	④ ⑤
Diversity of students	①	②	③	④ ⑤
Neighborhood safety	①	②	③	④ ⑤
School's academic reputation	①	②	③	④ ⑤
Teachers and principal	①	②	③	④ ⑤
Parent community	①	②	③	④ ⑤
Recommended by family/friends	①	②	③	④ ⑤

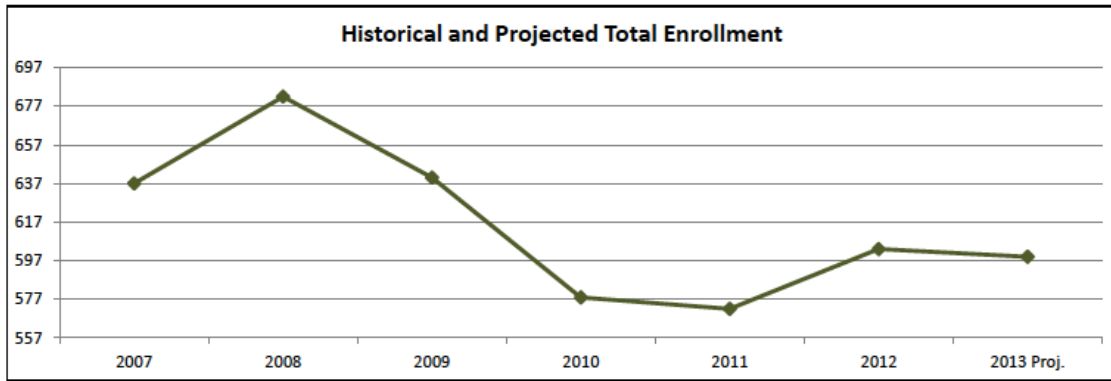
Manzanita SEED Enrollment / Projections

Historical Enrollment							
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 Proj.
TK						0	23
K	50	38	34	44	74	93	80
1	57	55	39	39	48	68	93
2	52	47	51	37	39	47	64
3	24	42	39	47	34	42	43
4	47	17	35	34	47	34	37
5	0	42	15	30	31	42	30
Total	230	241	213	231	273	326	370
% Change		4.8%	-11.6%	8.5%	18.2%	19.4%	13.5%



Garfield Enrollment / Projections

Historical Enrollment							
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 Proj.
TK						42	40
K	91	101	102	80	101	101	87
1	111	106	104	97	86	100	105
2	113	117	99	102	95	85	99
3	125	115	108	98	100	96	84
4	111	125	105	104	89	96	91
5	86	118	122	97	101	83	93
Total	637	682	640	578	572	603	599
% Change		7.1%	-6.2%	-9.7%	-1.0%	5.4%	-0.7%



Roosevelt Enrollment / Projections

Historical Enrollment							
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 Proj.
6	225	193	217	216	225	153	154
7	251	221	189	232	215	213	152
8	252	247	221	202	216	218	213
Total	728	661	627	650	656	584	519
% Change		-9.2%	-5.1%	3.7%	0.9%	-11.0%	-11.1%

