ISSUE

The San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) needs a paradigm shift when thinking about its long-range facilities planning because the city demographics and enrollment are changing dramatically.

During the last three decades, San Francisco’s public school enrollment has been fairly stable, with a gradual declining trend overall. However, forecasts show that enrollment will increase nearly 20% by 2025. A little over half of this expected increase is due to the city’s ambitious housing growth plans.

METHODS

Interviews were conducted with key staff at:

- SFUSD and SFUSD’s demographer consultants, Lapkoff & Gobalet Demographic Research, Inc.
- City Departments: San Francisco Planning Department, Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development, and the Office of Community Investment and Infrastructure.
- Other Districts that have faced similar growth: Denver Public Schools (DPS) and Wake County Public School System (WCPS).

CASE STUDIES

Background: Denver Public Schools (DPS) and Wake County Public School System (WCPS) faced similar trends of rapid housing growth. Interviews revealed that the following practices were helpful for addressing the growth for both districts:

1. Dedicated Staffing - Both DPS and WCPS created district staff positions to address forecasting, planning and analysis needs. WCPS also contracts with experts at North Carolina State University.

2. Real-time Data Updates - The districts have both developed ways to have automatic electronic access to city planning data. This allows them to receive continual updates and reduces the administrative burden.

3. Regular Meetings with City Planners - DPS and WCPS works closely with the city departments and major developers to collect information on residential development projects. WCPS meets monthly with planners from its 13 different municipalities. It started these meetings 15 years ago as growth started to become an issue. It took several years, but eventually these regular meetings dramatically improved communication and collaboration.

“Fifteen years ago everyone was at their own tables. Now we are all at one table.”

- Christina H. Lighthall, Senior Director of WCPS’s Long Range Planning

RECOMMENDATIONS

- SFUSD should consider whether it has sufficient expected growth to warrant developing its own internal planning and analysis staff. If it is too premature to create new staff positions, SFUSD can develop a core strategic working group with existing district staff to focus on these issues. It can also continue to contract out for this expertise when needed.

- SFUSD should explore if there are ways data can be shared electronically and automatically between SFUSD and city departments. Insufficient data sharing is often a consequence of the staff time and resources required to exchange data.

- SFUSD should continue pursuing ways to increase communication with city departments. Regular communication and relationship building is the key to identifying shared opportunities and increasing collaboration.