



Planning for Big Change: Enrollment Growth and SFUSD School Portfolio Planning

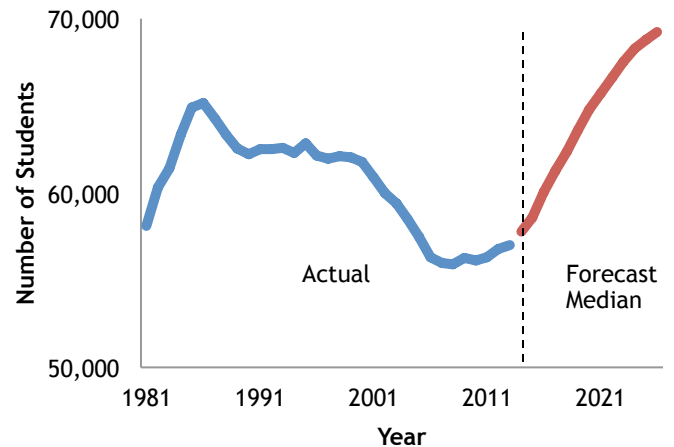
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ISSUE

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.

Until recently SFUSD was closing schools due to excess capacity. While closing schools is a difficult and complicated issue, it does not require as much advanced planning and information as building a new school, which takes three to five years. For a district that has been used to stable or even declining enrollment trends, this change requires SFUSD to develop a new approach to long-term planning.

San Francisco Enrollment History and Forecast
Scale not set to zero



Data Source: Lapkoff & Gobalet Demographic Research, Inc., 2013. SFUSD is in the process of refreshing these enrollment projections to incorporate the latest information from the City about housing development.

METHODS

Interviews were conducted with key staff at SFUSD as well as SFUSD’s demographer consultants to understand how they currently conduct long-range forecasts and school portfolio planning. To understand more about collaborative planning possibilities with city departments, interviews were done with key staff at San Francisco Planning Department, Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development, and the Office of Community Investment and Infrastructure. Finally, interviews were conducted with two other school districts that have faced similar issues and illustrate potential strategies.



FINDINGS

On the San Francisco Context

- SFUSD currently has several district working groups and structures in place that are addressing school portfolio planning in light of this likely housing growth.
- SFUSD needs updated data from multiple city departments to ensure the accuracy of the enrollment forecast. While city departments do share data with SFUSD, there may be additional information that would help SFUSD plan but is not currently shared.
- Historically communication between SFUSD and the city has not been strong enough to ensure that potential opportunities are always identified. The new Urban Planning Steering Committee, which has members from both the district and city departments, is making progress at increasing this communication.

Learning from other Districts: Denver Public Schools and Wake County Public Schools

- Denver Public Schools (DPS) and Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) faced similar trends of rapid housing growth.
- Both DPS and WCPSS created district staff positions to address forecasting, planning and analysis needs. WCPSS also contracts with experts at North Carolina State University.
- The districts have also both developed ways to have automatic electronic access to city planning data. This allows them to receive continual updates and reduces the administrative burden.
- DPS works closely with the city departments and major developers to collect information on residential development projects.
- WCPSS meets monthly with planners from its 13 different municipalities. It started these meetings 15 years ago as growth started to become an issue because all of the cities and the school district were still fairly siloed. It took several years, but eventually these regular meetings dramatically improved communication and collaboration.

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.