EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Schools are a core part of our cities and neighborhoods, inextricably linked to and affected by the surrounding urban environment. Urban issues of disinvestment, poverty, demographic and neighborhood change have had a profound impact on city schools. It is critical to explore this connection since schools have a potentially important role within community development and urban revitalization, and communities can have a significant role within schools to promote and support reform efforts. Developing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships are central to this school-community connection.

Project Overview

The Communities & Schools Research Project is a collaboration between the San Francisco Unified School District's (SFUSD), Urban System Program (USP), the School to Career (STC) Office, UC Berkeley's Department of City Regional Planning and Interactive University Project.

Providing students with meaningful work-based learning experiences is central to establishing successful Career Academies. SFUSD seeks to accomplish this in part by encouraging the formation of partnerships between schools and resources in their communities. As one step in this process, the district partnered with a graduate seminar at UC Berkeley taught by Dr. Deborah McKoy and four public high schools to look in detail at their particular communities.

The goal was to begin a broad-based dialogue around school and community partnerships, while also thinking about specific ways community resources can support school-to-career programs in these various high schools.

Working primarily with the STC Office and the partner high schools, graduate student teams conducted community-based research to explore how the community can better support local school reform efforts. Several sub-questions addressed included:

• What are the community supports available around school sites to support STC activities?
• What are the communication pathways that exist? What are the barriers?
• What is the community perception of the school and what do they want to see?
• Who is the community?

First, the school teams conducted a detailed community profile focusing on community resources and potential partnerships. Second, they developed strategic recommendations and specific strategies for community partnerships. These recommendations were presented to a diverse panel to solicit feedback. The final reports reflect this process of collaborative research, feedback and dialogue.
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