

Ad Hoc Committee on Student Assignment

January 25, 2010



Tales from Two Contexts

A Report about Race, Ethnicity, Class and Student Assignment in
the San Francisco Unified School District

Prepared by Prudence L. Carter, Associate Professor
Stanford University
January 2010



Focal Research Questions

- What academic, cultural, social, and organizational factors do educators and students perceive as affecting students' and specific social groups' school performances?
- How do educators and student discuss difference and think about the role(s) of diversity in schools?
- How do educators and students perceive the current student assignment system? What do they support?

Table 1
Number of Interviews, By School Levels

	# of Principal Interviews	# of Teacher Interviews*	# of Student Interviews*	Total
Elementary Schools (8)	8	10	6	24
K-8 Alternative Schools (3)	3	3	6	12
Middle Schools (6)	6	11	6	23
High Schools (7)	6	9	3	18
Total	23	33	21	77

* Multiple interviews were conducted at some schools.

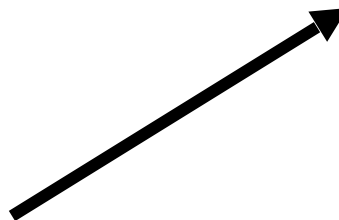
Students' Schooling Outcomes and a Tale of Two Contexts

**Schools'
Opportunities
Context**



**Students' Schooling
Outcomes**

**Schools'
Socio-cultural
Context**



OPPORTUNITIES CONTEXT

- Teacher Quality/Experience
- School Leadership
- Quality of Physical Plant, Library, Technology
- Per-student spending
- Student-Teacher Ratio
- Curricular Offerings
- Extracurricular Offerings
- College-going rates
- Test scores


SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT

- Demographic Diversity
 - Class Diversity
 - Racial Composition of Educators
 - Racial Composition of Students
- School's Cultural Climate
 - Academic Ideology & Beliefs
 - Intergroup Dynamics
 - Implicit and explicit cultural codes about student self-presentation, academic competence, intelligence, etc.



Two Different, though Intersecting Contexts to Consider

- Disparate resource contexts between high API and low API schools
- Disparate social and cultural contexts, modes of engagement and belonging for social groups *within high API schools*



The Paradox of Neighborhood Schools

- Strong preferences for neighborhood schools
 - Transportation and convenience
 - Safety
 - Community-building
 - Increased parent involvement

- Social and economic character of city's neighborhoods undermine goals of diversity and weaken SF's political and economic fabric
 - Family capital and resources vary significantly
 - Concentration of high-SES and low-SES in specific schools
 - Access and resources (e.g., teachers, libraries, enrichment programs, extracurricular activities)
 - Imminence of separate and unequal educational contexts

Thinking about Equity *within*

- Choice is a necessary albeit insufficient condition for equity within higher performing schools
 - Disparate educational experiences for students within high API schools enable persistent “gaps” among groups
 - Status hierarchies formed through divisions such as honors vs. general and special education; immersion version non-immersion
 - Differential rates of participation in after-school and extracurricular programs → transportation and safety
 - Social and cultural isolation of numerical minorities
 - Issues of teacher favoritism and labeling



Diversity & Student Assignment

- Consistently expressed value for diversity

- Values-interest “stretch”—Educators believe in diversity but want their children’s and neighbors’ self-interests to be privileged

- Variable concepts of “diversity”
 - Both API groups of students and educators think of themselves as diverse
 - The absence of groups with perceived high-status is noticeable and mentioned frequently by low API school members
 - Converse is not true in high API schools
 - Desire for more language diversity in high API schools
 - High API educators struggle with encroaching on the student supply of their colleagues in low API schools
 - Low API educators dissatisfied with “dumping” and concentration of academically challenged students in their schools



Thinking about educational quality *between and within* schools

- Social diversity in public schools serves a positive democratic function for the city and society
- Absence of diverse schools reproduces and further entrenches separate and unequal society
- Spatial proximity of diverse bodies, however, does not guarantee a rich educational experience for all groups of students.



Pragmatic Considerations

- Variable levels of parent capital and involvement disadvantage less fortunate students in assignment process
- Strong competition for limited spots in high demand schools from parents in “the know”
- Insufficient space for all students in high-minority and poverty schools in more multi-ethnic, lower poverty schools
- Redistribution of students alone does not improve achievement



Policy Recommendations

- Setting a similar resource threshold in all schools is a must.
- Address the deep resource disparities between schools.
- Teacher professionalism and development around social difference and cultural sensitivity is critical for teacher-student disconnect.
- Consider an assignment of students in “pods” or “posses” across schools levels to facilitate network and community-building.
- Minimize status hierarchy in ability and interest groups (e.g., tracks, immersion).
- High expectations of educators and students and engaging educational contexts in all schools