



# San Francisco Unified School District

Program Name:	Weighted Student Formula
Implemented:	2002-2003 School Year
Program Type:	District-Wide
Legal Authorization:	School Board Policy

School Empowerment Benchmarks		
1.	School budgets based on students not staffing	yes
2.	Charge schools actual versus average salaries	no
3.	School choice and open enrollment policies	yes
4.	Principal autonomy over budgets	yes
5.	Principal autonomy over hiring	no
6.	Principal training and school-level management support	yes
7.	Published transparent school-level budgets	yes
8.	Published transparent school-level outcomes	yes
9.	Explicit accountability goals	yes
10.	Collective bargaining relief-flat contracts, etc.	no
San Francisco met 7 out of 10 school empowerment benchmarks.		



## I. Program Overview

San Francisco has approximately 56,000 students with student demographics that are 47 percent Asian, 21 percent Hispanic, 12 percent African American, 9 percent White and 30 percent English language learners, with 54 percent of students qualifying for the free or reduced lunch program.

San Francisco's former Superintendent of Schools Arlene Ackerman introduced the weighted student formula (WSF), which allows money to follow students to the schools they choose while guaranteeing that schools with harder-to-educate kids (low-income students, language learners, low achievers) get more funds. Ackerman also introduced site-based budgeting, so that school communities, not the central office, determine how to spend their money. Finally, she worked to create a true open-enrollment student assignment system that gives parents the right to choose their children's schools.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately after assuming the superintendent position in San Francisco in 2000, Dr. Ackerman created a number of committees to focus on improving equity, including convening the Weighted Student Formula Committee.<sup>2</sup> The WSF committee provided a forum for stakeholders to discuss the possible design and implementation of WSF. The district began a pilot of a WSF policy with 27 schools in 2001–02. Based on the results of the pilot policy, in 2002, Dr. Ackerman created a five-year plan, “Excellence for All,” which had three main goals: to improve academic achievement for all students, increase the equitable allocation of district resources and establish accountability for student outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

During 2002–03, the district moved toward school site-based authority in

resource planning and budget development by implementing the weighted student formula (WSF) as the primary method of allocating local funds to schools. Instead of delivering resources through full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing allocations, as had previously been the case, resources are allocated and distributed in dollars. The funding levels of the WSF are based on student needs. A basic funding amount by grade level is provided for each student and supplemented by an additional amount if the student requires English language learner services or is from a low socio-economic household.

In addition, budgetary decisions using WSF resources are made at the school site by local school site councils (SSC) instead of centrally. In this way, the WSF method of allocation allows schools to be more creative, innovative and responsive to local needs. It also makes the SFUSD’s system of resource allocation more accountable and transparent to parents and other stakeholders. After doing a thorough assessment of current conditions and needs each year, each school conducts a monitoring process to see how well the strategies they have been implementing are meeting their goals. Each school’s annual academic plans, beginning in 2008–09, prioritize the continuing needs of the school and outline specific strategies to meet the school’s objectives.

School site councils and principals prepare preliminary budgets using initial allocations based on enrollment projections. Each spring, schools receive preliminary budget allocations that serve as the basis for academic plans, as well as budgets and staffing plans developed using a schedule of average salaries. Funding and administrative responsibilities that are borne by school site

councils and by central offices are identified in the academic planning guide that is produced each year and disseminated to schools.

## II. Student-Based Budgeting Formula

In San Francisco the weighted student formula gives each school a foundation allocation that covers the cost of a principal's salary and a clerk's salary.<sup>4</sup> The rest of each school's budget is allocated on a per-student basis. There is a base amount for the "average student," with additional money assigned based on individual student characteristics: grade level, English language skills, socio-economic status and special education needs. These weights are assigned as a percentage of the base funding. For example, a kindergartner would receive funding 1.33 times the base allocation, while a low-income kindergartner would receive an additional 0.09 percent of the base allocation. In 2005–06 San Francisco's base allocation was \$2,561. Therefore, the kindergartner would be worth \$3,406 and the low-income kindergartner would generate an additional \$230 for his school.

In an American Institutes for Research study, district administrators in San Francisco explained the rationale behind the level of weights for different student populations.<sup>5</sup> For example, the district argues that the weights for grades K–3 are higher than those for grades 4 and 5 because California's class size reduction categorical funding requires more teachers and therefore greater resources, for the lower grades. In addition, the district indicates that the weights for lower performance

on the English language learner test—the CELDT—increase as the student gets older because it becomes more difficult to attain English in the higher grades. Finally, most special education staff are allocated centrally and the weights for special education students are intended for small expenses, such as additional instructional supplies or professional development activities.

The weighted student formula weights have not changed since 2006-2007. These funds are based on the total general purpose funding available for the weighted student formula at the district level. Weighted student funds make up approximately 56 percent of the district general operating budget and between 70 and 80 percent of individual school operating budgets. The weighted student funds and the weighted student special education funds constitute approximately 74 percent of the total funds a school receives in its budget.

## III. Autonomy

Weighted student formula allows school leaders to more flexibly allocate staff in nuanced ways that are not possible using staffing ratios.<sup>6</sup> In the American Institutes for Research study comparing student-based budgeting in Oakland and San Francisco, school leaders reported on the multiple ways they used their discretion:<sup>7</sup>

- Hire additional teachers to reduce class size or provide additional assistance to English learners.
- Hire additional counselors, attendance clerks, parent liaisons and extra security officers.
- Increase certain useful part-time staff

San Francisco Weights 2006-2007	
K	1.33
1-3	1.33
4-5	1.00
6-8	1.14
9-12	1.19
Low-income (K-12)	.09
English language-learners (K-5)	.0781
English Language learners (6-8)	.0937
English Language Learners (9-12)	.2070
English Language Learners Transition	.0605
Resource specialist (K-12)	.0097
Special Day Class (K-5)	.0179
Special Day Class (6-12)	.0189
Special Day Class (severe)	.0315

(such as a parent liaison) to full-time status.

- Retain teachers to maintain their desired class numbers despite declining enrollment.

For example, one San Francisco principal indicated that the control over retaining teachers despite fluctuations in enrollment gave her a sense of stability and community that would have been lost if the district controlled her staffing ratio based only on student enrollment.

While the weighted student formula gives principals flexibility, full autonomy is limited. San Francisco principals are constrained in discretion over personnel and school-level innovations such as changing instructional minutes by collective bargaining agreements.

#### IV. School-Level Management Support

Through the district's leadership development office SFUSD offers Principal

Training Institutes. This training includes instructional leadership, site-management, partnerships and collaboration with higher education, accountability, technology and closing the achievement gap.

#### V. School Site Councils

School site councils are required at every school in California as a condition for participation in certain state and federally funded categorical programs. SFUSD has expanded the role of the SSC to include oversight of the academic plan and budget, a recognition that all stakeholders (students, parents, community members, teachers, other staff and principals) must contribute to the success of the school. School principals are the critical leaders at school sites. They are responsible for establishing a vision for improving achievement for all students. Principals are ultimately accountable for achieving the goals of the school and the district. Therefore, principals must ensure that the academic plan and

budget are focused on meeting the identified needs of all students. If principals or any other members of school site councils are not confident that an academic plan, as drafted, is adequately focused on the needs of all students, they have recourse with the district to ensure that their concerns are heard.

## VI. School Choice Component

Any student can apply to any SFUSD school. Parents are strongly encouraged to list seven schools; selecting a higher number of schools increases the likelihood of receiving a requested assignment.

The most significant determinants of a student's school assignment are parental choice and school capacity. Since SFUSD allows any student to apply to any school, there may be situations where there are more requests than openings. For example, for the 2008-2009 school year, Lawton K-8 had 60 seats available for new kindergarten students. Eight younger siblings were pre-assigned, leaving 52 seats available for non-sibling applicants. There were 741 applicants for Lawton's kindergarten class, which means there were approximately 14 applicants for every available seat at Lawton.

Whenever requests are greater than the number of seats available, SFUSD uses a process called the "student assignment system" (SAS) to determine which students get an assignment offer. The SAS is a formula, made up of five race-neutral factors, that calculates the probability that in a given grade randomly chosen students will be different from each other based on the five factors.

Whether students receive one of their

school choices depends on a range of factors, including the number of seats available at the schools chosen, the number of students requesting those seats, the number of siblings who get pre-assigned, the ranking of the choices, the diversity of the applicant pools for the schools listed and, in some instances, the application of the student assignment system.

If a student does not get assigned to one of his choices through the student assignment system, SFUSD assigns the student to a school with openings. SFUSD considers the student's home address as well as SFUSD's transportation infrastructure when selecting a placement for students who did not get one of their choices. In 2008-2009, 81 percent of kindergarten applicants received one of their choices, 92 percent of sixth-grade applicants received one of their choices and 91 percent of ninth-grade applicants received one of their choices.

SFUSD is currently revamping the school choice and student assignment process with changes scheduled for the 2010-2011 school year.

More than 40 percent of the city's children now attend schools outside their neighborhoods.

## VII. Accountability

In San Francisco the district uses the "academic plan" to guide school-level accountability. The academic plan outlines a school's programs and strategies for improving student achievement, as well as the responsibilities for everyone involved in that process. In this way it provides a framework for continuous improvement and holds schools accountable for improving student achievement.

The district's academic plan is useful for the following purposes:

- To specifically define a school's targets for meeting the district's primary goals of improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap.
- To identify and align the strategies, programs, services and resources that a school will use to meet its student achievement goals.
- To identify and communicate to the whole school community the roles and responsibilities for implementing the components of the plan.

In addition to the academic plans, SFUSD is developing a new tool to measure school quality and overall district performance: The School Quality, Equity and Access Matrix. This tool provides a simple visual model of complex data to assist families, school sites and district policymakers in exploring important differences among the district's schools. It measures how well each school serves each and every student based on that school's ability to disrupt the historically predictive power of racial, ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic student attributes. The matrix is designed to measure relative peer-to-peer performance. This dimension is captured by benchmark analytics that adjust statistically for each school's demographic context and other starting conditions. In doing so, benchmarks level the playing field for meaningful school-to school comparisons. Thus, the matrix reveals positive trends and practices and will direct intervention with greater accuracy on behalf of the school's lowest performers.

The more precisely an intervention addresses a school's individual needs and

builds on its strengths, the more effectively resources are used and the greater the chances of creating sustained improvement in student outcomes. For the district, truly meaningful school-to-school comparisons distinguish those low performers that have least managed to disrupt low performance associated with socio-economic student attributes and, on the upside, to pinpoint even among low performers the emerging positive outliers that are beating the district trend by a wide margin.

## VIII. Performance Outcomes

For seven consecutive years, SFUSD has outperformed the seven largest California school districts on the California Standards Tests (CST).<sup>8</sup> SFUSD students improved their California Standards Test scores for the seventh consecutive year in 2008. More SFUSD students have now earned a score of "proficient" or "advanced" (at almost every grade level in both English Language Arts and Mathematics) than students in similar districts across California.

Fifty-six percent of students tested in 2008 earned a score of "proficient" or "advanced" in English language arts, up from 35 percent in 2002. Sixty-two percent of students tested in 2008 achieved proficient or advanced scores in math, up from 37 percent in 2002.

A greater percentage of San Francisco students graduate from high school than almost any other large urban public school system in the country. According to a 2008 report from the EPE Research Center, San Francisco ranks five out of America's 50 largest cities. In 2008, 85.6 percent of San Francisco students graduated in 2008.

In 2007 San Francisco Unified School District was the only large urban district in California to meet the federal proficiency targets for students with disabilities who took the state tests in English language arts and mathematics.

SFUSD currently provides immersion education at 17 schools with Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese and Korean programs. Studies show students in language immersion programs do as well—if not better—than their peers in English-only classes in all aspects of academic performance. Among the highest-performing elementary schools in SFUSD are West Portal Elementary and Alice Fong Yu Alternative, both with Cantonese Immersion Programs.

While SFUSD has high performance overall, the district's achievement gap—the discrepancy between the academic proficiency of students by race, ethnicity, class and language—has continued to widen. San Francisco has the highest average student performance of the large urban districts in California and the widest gap between the district average and the lowest performing students. The district's new strategic plan and the new accountability matrix is focused on analyzing performance outcomes and setting school-level targets to close the achievement gap.

academic goals for each school. The weighted student formula in isolation is just a funding mechanism, but when budgets are aligned with academic goals it helps school leaders to focus on how best to use school-level resources to raise student achievement.

2. WSF can increase equity. For example, the American Institutes for Research 2008 analyses of the San Francisco weighted student formula implementation found that high-poverty middle and high schools in San Francisco benefitted significantly from the implementation of the WSF policy. Focusing on the overall per-pupil spending, they found that San Francisco increased the proportion of total resources allocated to high-poverty relative to low-poverty middle and high schools after implementation of the WSF.<sup>9</sup>
3. San Francisco also demonstrates the need to focus on the achievement gap within a school district. San Francisco's new School Quality, Equity and Access Matrix allows comparisons between schools with similar student populations and a tool to examine negative and positive trends toward closing the achievement gap and connect those trends with specific instructional strategies and budget decisions.

## IX. Lessons Learned

1. San Francisco demonstrates the importance of using a weighted student formula in conjunction with school-level academic plans that tie instructional strategies to budgets and outline specific

## Resources

*Beyond the Talk: Taking Action to Educate Every Child Now, 2008-2012 Strategic Plan*, San Francisco Unified School District, May 2008, [http://portal.sfusd.edu/data/strategicplan/strategicplan\\_summary](http://portal.sfusd.edu/data/strategicplan/strategicplan_summary)

### ENG.pdf

Jay Chambers et al., *A Comparative Study of Student-Based Budgeting and School-Based Decision Making in San Francisco and Oakland Unified School Districts*, American Institutes for Research, October 2008, [http://www.air.org/news/documents/A%20Tale%20of%20Two%20Districts\\_Final.pdf](http://www.air.org/news/documents/A%20Tale%20of%20Two%20Districts_Final.pdf)

Larisa Shambaugh, Jay G. Chambers and Danielle DeLancey, *Implementation of the Weighted Student Formula Policy in San Francisco: A Descriptive Study of an Equity-Driven, Student-based Planning and Budgeting Policy*, American Institutes for Research, August, 2008. [http://www.air.org/news/documents/REL\\_2008061.pdf](http://www.air.org/news/documents/REL_2008061.pdf)

For school-based budgets go here: [http://portal.sfusd.edu/data/budget/FY08-09\\_Recommended\\_Budget\\_2nd\\_Reading.pdf](http://portal.sfusd.edu/data/budget/FY08-09_Recommended_Budget_2nd_Reading.pdf)

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### Endnotes

1. Lisa Snell, "The Agony of American Education," *Reason*, April 2006.
2. Larisa Shambaugh, Jay G. Chambers, and Danielle DeLancey, "Implementation of the Weighted Student Formula Policy in San Francisco: A Descriptive Study of an Equity-Driven, Student-based Planning and Budgeting Policy," American Institutes for Research, August, 2008.

[http://www.air.org/news/documents/REL\\_2008061.pdf](http://www.air.org/news/documents/REL_2008061.pdf)

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Jay Chambers et al., *A Comparative Study of Student-Based Budgeting and School-Based Decision Making in San Francisco and Oakland Unified School Districts*, American Institutes for Research, October 2008, [http://www.air.org/news/documents/A%20Tale%20of%20Two%20Districts\\_Final.pdf](http://www.air.org/news/documents/A%20Tale%20of%20Two%20Districts_Final.pdf)

8. The following district level outcomes are compiled from San Francisco Unified School District, <http://portal.sfusd.edu/template/default.cfm?page=about.didyouknow>.

9. Shambaugh, "Implementation of the Weighted Student Formula Policy in San Francisco."