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Memo

To Board of Education

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Board Meeting Date October 14, 2020

Subject Recommendations from Equitable Enrollment Working Group

Action Discussion

Background The Citywide Plan calls for an update to the existing Board Policy on Enrollment to ensure more equity in access to quality schools. To this end, the following steps have been taken since January 2020:

- In February 2020, the Board held a retreat to begin the conversation of what an equitable enrollment policy could look like, and discussed convening a working group as a next step.
- In March 2020, a working group of central staff, school staff, and parents (half of the members selected by the Board) was convened to begin looking into potential policy changes.
- In June 2020, the working group provided an update to the Board, including results from an equitable enrollment survey given to the community and learnings from 3 case studies from other cities trying to approach similar issues.
- After the June Board update, the working group split into subcommittees to look at 3 pain points that were deemed both impactful and feasible: (1) need for more enrollment marketing for schools, (2) need for more supports in the enrollment process for non-native English speakers, (3) ways to increase access for low-income families to high demand schools.

Discussion

The goals of this presentation from the working group are as follows:

- Present recommendations from each of the 3 subcommittees
- Present recommendations on our best thinking around how to approach a potential broader enrollment policy change in the spring.

There are considerations embedded within the recommendations for the Board to consider/discuss. Three major themes of those considerations are as follows:

- What resources are we able to devote to enrollment marketing and language support efforts? We believe an investment here has the potential to yield additional enrollment (and positive fiscal impact) in the future, but do we have the ability and discipline to make that investment of time and resources now?
- The equitable enrollment initiatives at higher-demand schools and the drive for diversity have thus far been driven largely by affluent communities and often not by people of color. How might that change over time, or is it a fundamental difference in values?
- Families with more resources have more options they can exercise in school choice. In a district like Oakland where we both have enrollment and fiscal challenges as well as a strong equity lens, what is our tolerance for policies that may lead to families “displaced” from high-demand schools choosing to enroll outside of OUSD? Related, what is the work that can be done (and by whom) to support these families in choosing other OUSD schools?

Fiscal Impact

The recommendations from the enrollment marketing group and the supports for non-native English speakers group have the *potential* to lead to increases in enrollment (and therefore a positive fiscal impact), if implemented well. The recommendations from the access for low-income families group are anticipated to have a net neutral fiscal impact, as described in the separate agenda item regarding edits to Board Policy 5116.1.

Attachment

Presentation - Recommendations from Equitable Enrollment Working Group

Memo - Recommendations from Equitable Enrollment Working Group

Equitable Enrollment Working Group | Report Back to School Board and Community

October 2020

Goal: The goal of this memo is to review the progress the working group has made over the past several months, outline our research, recommendations, and plans around 3 specific areas identified by the community as pain points, and discuss our recommendations for how to move forward with a broader Board policy update in the spring of 2021.

Introduction

OUSD's Citywide Plan calls for an update to the existing Board Policy on Enrollment to ensure greater equity in access to quality schools. The Equitable Enrollment Working Group was formed in March 2020 as a result of a Board retreat on Enrollment in February 2020. The working group is composed of central staff, school staff, and parents. About half the participants were selected by Board members, and the other half were selected as Superintendent designees.

Since the community working group was formed, the following major steps have been taken:

- An equitable enrollment survey was designed and distributed widely to the community.
- A data sharing partnership has been established with researchers at UC Berkeley to model potential changes to OUSD's enrollment priorities. These researchers are actively processing data and building their algorithm to be able to support with analytics through this winter and spring.
- The working group heard case studies from 3 cities who have tried different approaches to designing more equitable enrollment policies: Denver, Berkeley, and Boston.
- In June 2020, the working group provided an update to the Board, including results from the community survey and learnings from the 3 case studies.
- After the June Board update, the working group considered a set of 9 pain points around the enrollment process/policy that had been raised by multiple stakeholders. The group conducted an exercise to determine which pain points appeared to be high on both the *impact* scale and the *feasibility* scale to tackle in the short to medium term. Based on the outcomes of this exercise, the working group split into subcommittees to look at 3 pain points that were deemed both impactful and feasible:
 1. Need for more enrollment marketing for schools,
 2. Need for more supports in the enrollment process for non-native English speakers,
 3. Ways to increase access for low-income families to high demand schools.
- In September 2020, the working group met with Board Director Yee to discuss his proposed, overarching Board Policy 5116 that would lay out a series of values that the enrollment policy should promote and create space for the Board to regularly evaluate the impact of its enrollment policy against its stated values.

While the original timeline and ambition of the working group was to potentially propose a broad enrollment policy change in Fall 2020, our update to the Board in June 2020 stated that we would be postponing this larger Board Policy update for a few reasons:

- **COVID-19:** The pandemic has highlighted two issues with pursuing a broad enrollment policy change right now. First, there are other issues that are more urgent for the Board and community to tackle; second, there are challenges to engaging the full breadth of community that we feel is important to engage before recommending these types of changes.
- **Board composition changes:** With a majority of Board members slated to change in January 2021, the working group felt it was critical to get their input and buy-in for any major policy changes. This is a lesson we heard repeated by all 3 cities we spoke with who have previously proposed major enrollment policy changes.
- **Board direction on values:** In order to design a broader enrollment policy that meets the goals and values of the District, we need clearer guidance from the Board on what those goals and values are. While we can lift up the themes we heard in community surveys and conversations, we do also need to understand what the Board is and is not willing to support. In particular, we need to understand where the Board stands on the spectrum between promoting neighborhood schools vs promoting integrated schools.

To that end, the working group is now planning to aim for a spring 2021 proposal around potential broader enrollment policy changes.

The remainder of this memo describes the research and recommendations from each of the 3 subcommittees, as well as recommendations for how to approach the future broader policy update.

Subcommittee: Enrollment Marketing

The enrollment working group identified the following **problem to address** with proposed marketing strategies: Parents choose or do not choose schools based on their perception of whether or not the school is considered quality. This problem arises because we are not telling the story that shows something different than traditional biases that have existed for so long.

The **goal of the enrollment marketing group** was to start with researching effective enrollment strategies and to develop a toolkit for marketing strategies to be employed centrally and through individual school sites in the 2020-21 school year and beyond.

Research:

In addition to the equitable enrollment survey, we **conducted the following research:**

- Talked to Chris Campos, researcher at UC Berkeley, about preliminary school marketing research in Los Angeles.
- Met with Christie Herrera about the effective strategies Early Childhood has used to increase enrollment at the Childhood Development Centers.
- Met with Geoff Vu about the marketing strategies for the Middle School Initiative to learn about student focused strategies we can use for all grade levels.
- Talked to Fremont for strategies they used to increase their enrollment.

Overall **learnings from all the research** are:

- Communication about schools programs and success needs to be intentional.
- The more information you share the more it will influence parent decisions. If it is not highlighted, parents and families are less likely to know about the great things happening at schools.
- Parents will share information with each other (“spill over”)
- The type of information you share should be more than performance data; it is helpful to include information about academic growth, academic programs, alumni information, community building/culture building, student and family experience...

Based on this research, our **recommendations** are below:

1. Centrally supported videos for all our schools. Centrally supported videos for middle and high schools. The videos would be created over a three year cycle with about 10 each year. Start with a pilot for Fremont High School to be a model of what we do for all schools.
2. Central office should work with school sites to create a school spotlight section on a regularly distributed newsletter to families and staff that would include a photo and a highlight of the programs and achievements for each school throughout the year.
3. Create a social media toolkit for each school site to support sites to increase their social media presence to attract students and families to each school.

Measures of Success:

- Increase in on-time applications for traditionally lower demand schools
- Social media toolkit created and used by at least 50% of OUSD schools

Subcommittee: Increasing Access for Low-Income Families

The enrollment working group identified the following **problem to address**: low-income families unable to easily access many high demand schools because of the existing enrollment policy that broadly prioritizes siblings of existing students, neighborhood families, and then everyone else in Oakland.

The **goal of the increasing access group** was to develop a few smaller-scale initiatives around the enrollment priorities that could increase access for low-income families to high-demand schools and that could provide information to learn from when approaching a broader enrollment policy update.

In addition to the equitable enrollment survey, we **conducted the following research**:

- Learnings from Denver’s school pilots around a *priority* for Free/Reduced-Price Lunch eligible (FRL) students versus a *minimum* percentage of FRL-eligible students
- Learnings from Berkeley around using Census information as a proxy for FRL
- Conversations with several high-demand schools, and their conversations with their school communities
- Modeling different enrollment priority scenarios at a few high-demand schools using recent lottery data

Based on this research, our **recommendations** are below:

1. Add equitable enrollment priority pilots at 3-4 schools to create more access to high-demand schools.
2. Add an enrollment priority (after neighborhood) for pre-K students to continue at the nearest elementary school, which is typically on the same campus.

Measures of Success:

- Individual schools that are implementing equitable enrollment pilots see changes to the population of their incoming class in line with their proposed goals to increase enrollment of low-income students.
- Community support of the equitable enrollment pilots remains strong through the implementation phase.
- Data and feedback from the equitable enrollment pilots is used to inform broader enrollment policy considerations.
- More OUSD Pre-K students apply on-time to and gain admission to the elementary school located on their same campus.

Subcommittee: Supports for Non-Native English Speakers

The enrollment working group identified the following **problem to address**: non-English native speaking families do not participate in the On Time application process as much as native English speakers. The problem arises because we do not have the resources/structure to connect with all non-English native speaking families (and low income families).

The **goal of the supports for non-native English speakers group** was to better understand the “why” by exploring choice tools, processes, and supports. Also, a goal was to explore the need for continued engagement/ongoing support throughout the school year. We believe it is our responsibility to ensure all families are knowledgeable about the process, key dates, and resources.

In addition to the equitable enrollment survey, we **conducted the following research**:

- Focus groups with Spanish speaking families
- Focus group with Arabic speaking families
- [In progress] Focus group with Mam speaking families
- [In progress] Focus group/survey of high school students from non-native English speaking families

Based on this research, our **recommendations** are below:

1. Spanish-speaking families experienced challenges in researching and applying to schools due to limited supports and tools in their native language.
 - Translating all materials, hosting tours and informational events in different languages, and having adequate levels of non-English speaking staff at OUSD schools, the OUSD Enrollment Office, and other offices that support non-English speaking families.

- Increase collaboration and training with community partners that have strong connections with non-English speaking communities.
2. Academic quality was consistently cited as the most important factor in choosing a school.
 - Design tools using the voice of the community that allows families to more easily research and understand school quality information, beyond just test scores, as well as ensuring accuracy in school-created materials.
 3. In contrast with the wide-spread preference for strong academic quality, the importance of a diverse school was mixed across participants.
 - Families look for school culture, teacher training, and curriculum that allow for all students to feel welcome when selecting a school, and be able to succeed at all schools.
 - Families need more concrete student assignment priorities/scenarios to react to when discussing why “school diversity” might be an important value in the student assignment process.
 4. Families that do not have legal status responded that the application process and related educational supports are disconnected, creating challenges for navigating the process.
 - Connect key OUSD services with community partners that closely support immigrant families and are often trusted organizations that can assist with the full scope of enrollment, education challenges, and related services, such as food, housing, healthcare. Make it an integral part of the process vs. separate.
 - Simplify the application process for all families by limiting the proof of residency information required to submit an application.

Note that focus group summaries will be made available on the Equitable Enrollment website.

Measures of Success:

- Increase in On Time participation from non-Native English speaking families.
- Improvement in survey responses from non-Native English speaking families, focusing on an increased feeling of engagement/support/belonging to the school community.
- *Hypothesis:* similar supports will help other family subgroups that do not participate as highly in On Time enrollment.

Committee Recommendations: Broader Policy Update

As our group thinks about a broader Board policy update in the spring of 2021, we have the following recommendations:

- There is a need to enunciate the District’s values and goals of the enrollment system, to guide policy decisions at the highest level. For example,
 - How should the District’s enrollment policy balance neighborhood schools versus integration? (knowing that Oakland is a residentially segregated city, as are many cities in the United States).
 - What does the District specifically mean when we talk about integration? Racial, socioeconomic, or other types of integration?

- How does the District define school quality? This is important to understand if a goal is to have high-quality schools in every neighborhood.
- More engagement with the community is critical. In particular, we would seek additional engagement with the following communities:
 - Families of color
 - Students (all students who were invited to participate in the working group were unable to attend).
 - Teachers from a wide variety of schools
 - Families whose children are not yet school-aged
- Gather buy-in from a majority of the Board members on any broader policy changes, as implementation will be challenging without their support. In particular, we have learned from other cities that privileged families tend to push back if their neighborhood school priority is threatened.

Next Steps

The table below outlines our proposed next steps in order to work towards execution of the subcommittee recommendations and to continue pursuing a broader enrollment policy change.

Milestone	Timeline
Discuss and vote on updates to BP 5116.1	October/November 2020
Discuss and vote on new, overarching BP 5116 from Dir. Yee	October/November 2020
Discuss and vote on specific schools' equitable enrollment pilots	October/November 2020
Convene staff working groups focused on implementation of marketing and language supports recommendations	December 2020
Update AR 5116.1 to flesh out edits to BP 5116.1	January 2021
Meet with new Board to understand their enrollment priorities	February 2021
Reconvene equitable enrollment community working group	February 2021
Continued scenario modeling and community engagement	February-May 2021
Potential proposal of broader changes to enrollment policy	June 2021

Thank you to the Board and the Oakland community for your continued attention to this important topic, and for entrusting us with researching and designing these recommendations.