

PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL TO THE SAN FRANCISCO BOARD OF EDUCATION

SUMMARY OF OPERATING PROCEDURES

Note: These Operating Procedures are based on the PAC’s Bylaws, to be used as a guide as we conduct our work. We expect these procedures will be modified over time. They are also based on the assumption the PAC will continue to be staffed with a Coordinator working at least .75 FTE.

CONTENTS

- Mission and Role of the Parent Advisory Council** 1
 - Representing Parent Voices to the Board of Education and SFUSD Staff..... 1
 - What the PAC Does 2

- Roles and Expectations of PAC Members** 2
 - Regular and Alternate Members 2
 - PAC Officers and the Lead Team 3
 - The PAC Coordinator (staff) 4
 - Appointing New Members 4

- How the PAC Functions** 5
 - PAC Meetings 5
 - Meeting Attendance and Absences..... 5
 - Setting Priorities for the PAC’s Projects..... 5
 - Making Decisions and Taking Positions 6
 - Committees & Project Teams 7
 - The Brown Act and “Sunshine” Laws..... 8
 - Internal & External Communication 8
 - Reaching Out to Hear from Families..... 9
 - Developing Reports of Findings and Recommendations..... 10
 - Representing PAC Positions and/or Viewpoints..... 10

- Appendix** 11
 - The Brown Act & Rules for Open Government: Examples 11
 - The PAC’s Process of Planning and Evaluation 12

MISSION AND ROLE OF THE PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

In May 2003 the Board of Education established the PAC with Resolution No. 33-25A15. That resolution set basic rules and defined the Parent Advisory Council's mission:

The mission of the Parent Advisory Council is to advise the San Francisco Board of Education on existing and proposed education policies, bring forth issues of concern, and make suggestions about changes that will improve the achievement of students and the effectiveness of schools. The PAC will ensure parental input to the Board's decision-making through active outreach.

In 2008 the Board revised their rules to require that all their advisory committees work to support the district's strategic priorities of ***access and equity, achievement, and accountability.***

The PAC works with community partners to actively reach out to families to let them know about issues being discussed by the Board of Education; identify their questions, concerns and suggestions; and communicate these to the Board of Education and other district leaders.

The PAC prioritizes reaching out to engage parents and communities whose children are most directly impacted by the district's ongoing achievement gap. We strive to hear from families who traditionally have not been represented in education policy discussions, to ensure that their voices are heard and their perspectives are reflected in these discussions and decisions. The PAC also supports district and community initiatives to involve parents in school-site and district-level governance (such as the annual School Site Council Summit).

Representing Parent Perspectives to the Board of Education and SFUSD Staff

The PAC has time on the agenda at regular meetings of the Board of Education to briefly report on our work and to represent parent perspectives on district issues. From time to time the PAC also presents longer reports that include findings from community meetings, and our recommendations for Board policy or the district's procedures to implement Board policies.

PAC members take turns presenting these reports to the Board of Education, and all PAC members are encouraged to participate in giving PAC reports. PAC members are encouraged (but not required) to stay for as much of the entire meeting as possible, because observing Board meetings is a great opportunity to learn more about issues across the district.

The PAC also meets regularly with SFUSD staff to provide parent and community perspectives to strengthen the district's ongoing work. Sometimes these conversations are a chance to give feedback to district proposals or review draft materials, to help them be more "parent-friendly." At other times PAC members or staff work together with district staff and other community groups on a larger-scale project.

What the PAC Does

Represent parent voices and advocate for SFUSD policy	Engage families to help shape district policy	Participate in coalitions to support parent leadership, equity and school quality
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Highlight issues and make recommendations in regular reports to the Board of Education▪ Attend BOE committees, meet with staff, and make recommendations for setting and/or implementing policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Conduct community meetings about district issues or proposed changes to district policy▪ Invite parents and community advocates to participate in meetings with district leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Participate in the Family Engagement Coalition, Afterschool For All advisory council and Community Schools initiative advisory council▪ Support the annual School Planning Summit (w/SSCs, ELACs, etc.)

Issues the PAC has addressed include:

- Reducing suspensions and improving school climate through Restorative Practices
- Priorities and options for a new student assignment system
- Expanding access to high-quality afterschool programs
- The district’s process to address state funding and the budget crisis
- Developing a district-wide family engagement plan

ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS OF PAC MEMBERS AND STAFF

Regular and Alternate Members

The PAC can have up to eighteen members: fifteen regular members and three alternates. Regular members have the right to vote in the PAC’s formal decisions. Alternate members fill PAC seats that become vacant, and can fill in for regular members who are absent from a meeting. Alternate members are held to the same standards as regular members; they may participate in the discussions at PAC meetings, and can vote if any regular members are absent.

The PAC’s regular and alternate members are all expected to:

- Attend and participate in PAC meetings, events, and project teams
- Support the PAC’s efforts to reach out to hear from families across the district
- Take turns representing the PAC at meetings of the Board of Education
- Be thoughtful about representing the PAC and stating positions the PAC has agreed to
- Be clear when representing your personal opinions rather than PAC positions, or when representing organizations other than the PAC (for example, your child’s school or a community organization you also volunteer with).

PAC Officers and the Lead Team

The PAC has four elected officers who have specific responsibilities: the Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Parliamentarian. PAC officers meet as needed with PAC staff as the group's "lead team," to strategize about the PAC's work and identify issues to bring to the whole group. Lead team meetings are open to any PAC member who is interested in attending.

Officers serve a one-year term, and no member may hold the position of Chair or Vice Chair for more than two years in a row. The PAC's elections are usually scheduled so that officers begin their terms in July. Sometimes the positions of Secretary or Parliamentarian remain open until the fall, and new members are encouraged to run for election to those positions.

The PAC Chair is responsible for:

- Convening and chairing the PAC's meetings
- Representing the PAC in public and to the media
- Ensuring that the PAC is making progress to achieve its goals.

In practice, this includes:

- Meeting with the PAC staff person and the PAC's Lead Team to plan meeting agendas
- Meeting with PAC funders, district leaders, and other community partners
- Helping review and/or present proposals and reports to PAC funders and community partners
- Communicating with other PAC members to support their efforts.

The PAC Vice Chair is responsible for:

- Supporting the PAC Chair to plan meetings, review materials and communicate with PAC members
- Helping to lead meetings and represent the PAC when needed.

The PAC Secretary is responsible for:

- Ensuring that someone is taking notes during PAC meetings that reflect the presentations, discussions, and decisions considered during the meetings. (The notes may be taken by non-PAC members - we have found that it's hard for people to take detailed notes and also participate in PAC meeting discussions, so we often have someone who is not a member of the PAC present to draft meeting notes.)
- Helping to lead meetings and represent the PAC when needed.

The PAC Parliamentarian is responsible for:

- Keeping time during PAC meetings, to help us start and end on time
- Ensuring the PAC follows correct procedures to conduct its meetings and take votes, and help build an organizational culture that supports all PAC members to participate
- Helping to lead meetings and represent the PAC when needed.

The PAC has one staff person to support the PAC members' work and provide stability to the PAC as an institution. The Coordinator works for the PAC through our fiscal sponsor, which is Community Initiatives (www.communityin.org). Community Initiatives receives and accounts for our funding from community foundations and contracts with the school district.

The Coordinator provides administrative, program development and outreach support for the PAC, in coordination with the lead team.

The Coordinator is responsible for:

- Preparing materials, agendas, and updates for PAC meetings (in English, Chinese and Spanish, as needed); ensuring all PAC meetings are noticed and documented
- Supporting communication among PAC members and with the Board of Education and SFUSD leaders; responding to requests for information; maintaining the PAC's archives
- Supporting PAC members to develop presentations and reports to the Board of Education, and providing written materials to school board members and district staff
- Expanding and strengthening the PAC's relationship with Board of Education commissioners, district staff, parent networks, and community groups and agencies serving SFUSD families; representing the PAC in community meetings when appropriate
- Helping PAC members develop and implement effective strategies for reaching out to parents who traditionally have not been involved in education policy advocacy
- Coordinating the PAC's community outreach events and ensuring they are documented
- Helping to develop findings from community conversations, parent surveys, and other outreach activities, and to develop written reports of these findings
- Maintaining the PAC website, data base, and other communications systems
- Developing funding proposals; developing written reports to the PAC's funders and fiscal sponsor; responding to funders' and fiscal sponsor's requests for information
- Developing the PAC's annual budget and monitoring expenses
- Coordinating the recruitment and orientation of new PAC members.

Appointing New Members

PAC members are appointed by the Board of Education. The PAC does outreach to recruit parents and guardians to apply for open seats on the PAC. We interview all candidates and then adopt a list of candidates to present to the Board as nominations for the open seats. The PAC takes seriously the commitment to reflect and represent the diversity of the SFUSD's student and family population - across language, ethnicity, socio-economic background, neighborhoods and types of schools in the district. The PAC sometimes leaves seats open to conduct outreach in specific communities that are under-represented among PAC members.

HOW THE PAC FUNCTIONS

PAC Meetings

The PAC meets once a month during the school year. We usually schedule meetings several months in advance and post this calendar on our website. We try to schedule PAC meetings to be consistent (for example, the third Wednesday of each month), but change the dates when they conflict with holidays or other important events. (School board meetings are the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month, so we avoid those.)

The PAC's lead team works together to develop a proposed meeting agenda, which is sent to all PAC members at least four days before the meeting. The agenda is also posted on the PAC's website. We often talk about items to include on the next agenda as we conclude a meeting, and PAC members are encouraged to offer suggestions for topics to address. We often invite district leaders (including school board members and SFUSD staff) to present information, answer questions, and engage in discussions about district issues.

We do as much as possible to make it easier for PAC members to participate in the meetings - including providing dinner, childcare, interpretation and translated written materials (in Spanish and Chinese) as needed by PAC members. PAC members should feel free to suggest other ways to support participation, or to request specific support they need (for example, if you need a ride home after an evening meeting).

Meeting Attendance and Absences

As stated in the resolution creating the PAC, if a member has three unexcused absences from PAC meetings they will be considered to have vacated their seat. To be excused from a meeting the member must notify the PAC Chair or staff at least 24 hours in advance. (Exceptions to this 24-hour rule are sickness or a family emergency.) Acceptable reasons for missing a meeting include illness or a death in the family, pre-arranged vacation, business travel, scheduling conflicts that have been previously announced, and other reasons at the discretion of the Chair.

Any PAC member who misses more than four regularly scheduled PAC meetings in one school year, whether they are excused or not, will be considered to have vacated their seat.

Setting Priorities for the PAC's Projects

Every member of the PAC brings specific concerns and ideas about how to improve public schools. The SFUSD has many initiatives, as well as challenges and problems. There are always more ideas for projects and issues than the PAC can possibly work on - so at least once during each school year we set priorities for our time and limited resources.

Through this process the PAC reviews information about the school district (including student achievement data, the Board's strategic priorities, and specific policy proposals or initiatives) as well as projects that our community partners are working on. We also look at what we've learned from community forums and focus groups, to reflect issues and perspectives important to families. Some issues carry forward from one year to the next, while others have a shorter time frame (usually based on the Board of Education's decision-making timeline).

In deciding priorities we consider many aspects of the possible projects, including: the possible impact on student achievement, how important the issue is to families, whether we've been asked to work on it (by Board of Education commissioners, district staff, and/or community groups), and the resources needed to do a good job.

In the end it comes down to: What issues are PAC members willing to work on? If no one wants to work on a project it won't get done, even if everyone thinks the issue is important.

Making Decisions and Taking Positions

The PAC works to balance our limited meeting time between sharing information about district issues, giving PAC members the opportunity to discuss their concerns and ideas, and working together to develop the PAC's projects and make decisions about our recommendations. We strive to be democratic and inclusive. Our official rules state that decisions are reached through a majority vote of members, but we aim to reach agreement and consensus among members rather than making decisions by the simple majority.

While we think it's good to try and reach agreement, we believe it's important that everyone feels supported to ask questions, express their ideas, and share their concerns - especially if these have not been brought up in the discussion so far. We expect all PAC members to treat each other with respect, whether or not you agree on specific issues.

The PAC takes a formal vote to adopt positions or recommendations on district policy. PAC members can then represent these positions and share these recommendations with the Board of Education, district staff, and the community. **PAC members and staff should not represent any positions until they have been formally approved by a vote of the PAC.**

PAC votes follow "Robert's Rules of Order," as set by our Bylaws. In this process, a proposal is suggested by a PAC member as a "Motion" for the PAC to adopt. The Motion needs to be seconded by another PAC member. More discussion about the motion can follow, and then the Chair calls for a vote.

In practice, we try to allow for a lot of time to talk about proposals (or different options for a decision) before calling for the vote. Sometimes the PAC will vote to approve a general position and empower a small team to finalize the language for the written report of that position.

As part of the State of California's "Brown Act" for open government, the PAC needs to publically announce any issues that will be voted on at least 72 hours before a meeting. (See pages 8 and 11 for more information about the Brown Act.) For this reason, we need to know in advance about any proposals or requests for the PAC to take a position on an issue.

Sometimes members of the community will ask the PAC to take a position on a district issue, or to support a Resolution before the Board of Education. It is up to the discretion of the PAC Chair (in consultation with the lead team) whether to agree to put these items on a PAC agenda. In order for the PAC to make an informed decision, we have several requirements to respond to these requests:

- The group requesting the PAC's support or input must provide the information we need to shape our discussion - for example, the specific action requested, who else is supporting the proposal, who is opposed, and why.
- We must receive written materials related to the request at least a week before the meeting where we'll consider the issue. These materials should include translations into languages needed by PAC members (usually Spanish and Chinese).
- Someone from the group requesting the PAC's support should attend the meeting to present their request and answer questions from PAC members.

Committees & Project Teams

Project teams (or committees) carry out the PAC's different projects, and provide leadership to involve the whole PAC in specific issues. For example, every year members of one committee interview applicants for appointment to the PAC, while other teams may focus on planning community forums, analyzing results from a survey, or doing research on specific issues.

Each member of the PAC is expected to participate on at least one project team. These teams are allowed to include people who aren't members of the PAC - for example other parents, representatives from other organizations, and other community members, when appropriate, to represent different parent perspectives or expertise in specific issues.

PAC members choose which project team they'd like to work on. Project teams get together (usually outside of the PAC's regular meeting time) to develop proposed goals and an action plan, which is then presented to the PAC for feedback and approval. The PAC staff makes an effort to attend and support project team meetings, including keeping notes when necessary.

Each team should identify issues that need to be decided or approved by the PAC on the whole, and bring these issues to a PAC meeting. Project teams must have approval from the PAC before making commitments of resources or publically expressing a position on any district issues.

The Brown Act and “Sunshine” Laws

As an advisory body to the Board of Education, the PAC is considered a public entity and must follow open government laws under the Brown Act (often called “sunshine rules”). These rules were established to ensure public access to discussions and decisions that affect public policy.

The Brown Act defines a “meeting” as any gathering of a majority of PAC members, in any location, where members discuss PAC issues. This includes retreats or special meetings, as well as regular meetings. All of these gatherings need to be publically announced as a meeting of the PAC at least 72 hours ahead of time, and members of the public must be allowed to attend.

This does not include events that are purely social or ceremonial. For example, the swearing-in of new school board members is a ceremonial event. Similarly, a member of the PAC can invite other PAC members to an event like a family celebration or birthday party. The only condition to these exceptions is that members of the PAC may not discuss PAC business at these events. The goal is make sure that the PAC’s discussions and decisions are made in public.

Committees or sub-groups of the PAC may meet without public posting of the meeting, as long as there is less than a majority of PAC members present.

Internal & External Communication

At the PAC meeting following a school board meeting, the PAC member who attended should report any issues that the PAC should pay attention or respond to. If the material is time-sensitive, it should be distributed via email to all members of the PAC as soon as possible following the Board meeting. The PAC staff can help communicate this information to the rest of the PAC’s members.

Communication with the Board of Education

Any information received from the Board of Education should be distributed to all PAC members in a timely manner – at the next PAC meeting, if the material is not urgent, or by email if it requires an immediate response or is an announcement.

Communication of Individual PAC Members with the Board of Education

PAC members and staff may only speak to the Board as a representative of the PAC about an issue or a position that has been agreed to by the PAC. Any PAC member can comment to the Board as a private parent. PAC members or staff may not make a commitment of time or resources to the Board or district unless previously agreed to by the PAC.

There is a degree of flexibility for the PAC to be able to respond to the Board’s requests for information. PAC members or staff may represent the PAC in these instances, provided they specify if any information is incomplete and as long as they represent the opinion or range of opinions the PAC is considering.

Public Inquiries

All inquiries to the PAC (by phone, email, or regular mail) should be responded to within 48 hours, either by the staff person or a member of the PAC. Each member is responsible to ensure all contacts they make (at community events, school sites, etc.) are documented in the PAC's database and responded to within the time limit.

Communication with the Media

The Chair will be the designated spokesperson for media inquiries, with the Vice-Chair as backup. If press inquiries are made to other members and the officers are not available, other members may represent the PAC, as long as they specify if any information is incomplete and as long as they represent the opinion or range of opinions the PAC is considering.

Reaching Out to Hear from Families

Outreach is key to the Parent Advisory Council's ability to represent parent voices. Only by actively reaching out to hear from parents and guardians can the PAC authentically provide parent input to the Board of Education and advise the Board on policy decisions.

The PAC strives to hear from parents who represent the different types of schools, and the ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, and geographic diversity of the SFUSD, while focusing on engaging parents in communities that historically have not been well represented in education policy discussions and decisions.

To reach these families the PAC works with community partners including the SFUSD Office of Family Engagement and other district staff; nonprofit organizations and city agencies that focus on education or parent empowerment; as well as community-based groups that work with families. The PAC works with community partners to analyze findings from joint community meetings, and to present our recommendations to the Board of Education.

Community Meetings and Events

PAC members or staff who organize community conversations are responsible for ensuring the meetings follow agreed-upon discussion guides, are fully documented and are reported to the PAC. Discussion guides usually include templates for event sign-in sheets to record information about the people who attended, including their contact information and children's schools. Special care should be taken to record the discussions in as much detail as possible. It is best to have someone transcribe verbatim the entire meeting, and we usually have templates for transcribing community conversations. If it's not possible to transcribe a meeting, detailed handwritten notes can be taken and typed up afterwards.

Similar procedures for taking notes should be maintained for meetings about PAC business with SFUSD staff, other organizations, or individuals, to keep track of our work and commitments.

Developing Reports of Findings and Recommendations

After conducting a series of focus groups, community conversations or public forums about district issues, the PAC presents a report of what we learned through the campaign. We call this our “Report of Findings,” and we usually include detailed information about how we organized the meetings, our objectives, and who we heard from, as well as a summary of what we heard and more in-depth information about our conclusions from those conversations.

The PAC often works with other community groups to conduct these meetings, and developing our report is generally a collaborative process. A team of people work to identify key themes, important ideas, and lively quotes that help make the message from parents more clear. The reports usually go through several revisions, which are shared with PAC members to solicit feedback. Reports are brought to a PAC meeting for approval before being presented to the public, and all of the PAC’s reports of Findings from community outreach are translated into Chinese and Spanish.

We follow a similar process for developing recommendations to the Board of Education. A team of PAC members (and community partners, if we’re collaborating with other groups on a project) work together to develop options for recommendations about specific issues, and bring this to the PAC for discussion and formal approval before being presented to the Board of Education or to SFUSD staff. We make an effort to give ample time for PAC members to present new ideas for recommendations as part of the discussion process.

Recommendations that we develop as part of an outreach campaign are usually incorporated into our report of findings from that outreach, but sometimes these are developed separately.

Representing PAC Positions and/or Viewpoints

As explained above, members or staff of the PAC may not state PAC positions, endorse policy statements or make commitments in the PAC’s name unless the PAC has taken formal action to take a position, support a policy recommendation, or make a commitment to a project.

APPENDIX

Following Open Government Rules Under the Brown Act: Examples

The Brown Act is intended to protect democracy, to ensure that government policy decisions are made in public. Imagine if the Board of Education had a secret meeting, and decided to create policy changes without anyone knowing. The PAC is expected to comply with the same standards as the Board of Education, in holding public meetings and making public decisions.

Question: *Can PAC members discuss PAC issues or business outside of meetings, on the phone or through email?*

The Brown Act says that individual members of the PAC may contact each other to talk about PAC issues. These discussions cannot include a majority of PAC members, however.

Here are a few scenarios that the Brown Act covers:

1. **A PAC member talks on the phone with several other PAC members about an issue that the PAC will vote on.** That would be acceptable only if the total number of people involved is not a majority of the PAC (called a quorum). It would be illegal for people in the first conversation to talk to other PAC members, if the number of PAC members in the total number of conversations is a majority of the PAC. This applies to all matters that the PAC will be voting on.
2. **A PAC member sends out emails discussing issues to a majority of PAC members,** and PAC members who receive the emails respond. This would be considered a meeting. Even if only a few members *participate* in the discussion, it is illegal if a majority of members receive the emails or follow the discussion. Again, this applies to all matters that the PAC will be voting on.
3. **A PAC member calls a few PAC members by phone, and contacts others by email.** This would be illegal if the total number of people equals or exceeds a majority of the PAC. This also applies to all matters that the PAC will be voting on.
4. **A PAC member or staff person may contact a quorum of PAC members to establish a date or time for a meeting,** or provide background materials for a meeting. They may not discuss any issues or business that the PAC will be voting on.

The PAC's Process of Planning and Evaluation

At least once during each school year (usually in the fall) the PAC decides on its priorities for the year, and through the project teams the PAC develops work plans that include overall goals, specific objectives, and action steps for each project or area of work. The PAC has templates for the project teams to use to help develop ideas for actions, and the Coordinator supports the PAC to identify overall goals and set specific, measurable objectives. Throughout the year we keep track of our progress in achieving our goals, and make adjustments to our plans to address changing circumstances or incorporate what we've learned as we go.

This chart shows how our process of planning and evaluation works:

