

North Oakland Schools Community Survey

Final Report

October 2017

It is the goal of Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), and District 1 School Board Director Jody London, that Oakland families have excellent local public schools available to them and that programs are strong enough to support all students in arriving at high school prepared to succeed in rigorous programs and academies. In the spring of 2017, Director London commissioned Communities in Collaboration to help assess community opinion about the portfolio of schools in North Oakland, to deepen understanding of what will encourage people to choose Oakland public schools.

As in much of the Bay Area, North Oakland is experiencing rapid demographic changes. Young families have flocked to neighborhoods that offer lower cost of living than in San Francisco or the Peninsula. At the same time, many long-time Oakland residents find themselves priced out of their home neighborhoods. As the demographics continue to shift, it is important to ensure that the public elementary, middle, and high schools available to North Oakland families meet needs of those both new to the community and long-time residents. Currently North Oakland families are served by a number of elementary schools – some over-enrolled, others under-enrolled – as well as Claremont Middle School, Oakland Technical High School, and Oakland International High School. (Oakland International High School serves students who are recent arrivals to the United States. The school's mission is to provide a quality alternative education for recently arrived immigrant students in English language acquisition and in preparation for college.) Some program sites are currently in transition – these include Sankofa, which recently phased out a middle school program, and the former Santa Fe Elementary site, which is housing Glenview Elementary students through 2019. OUSD is also undergoing a District-wide facilities master planning process, known as the Blueprint for Quality Schools.

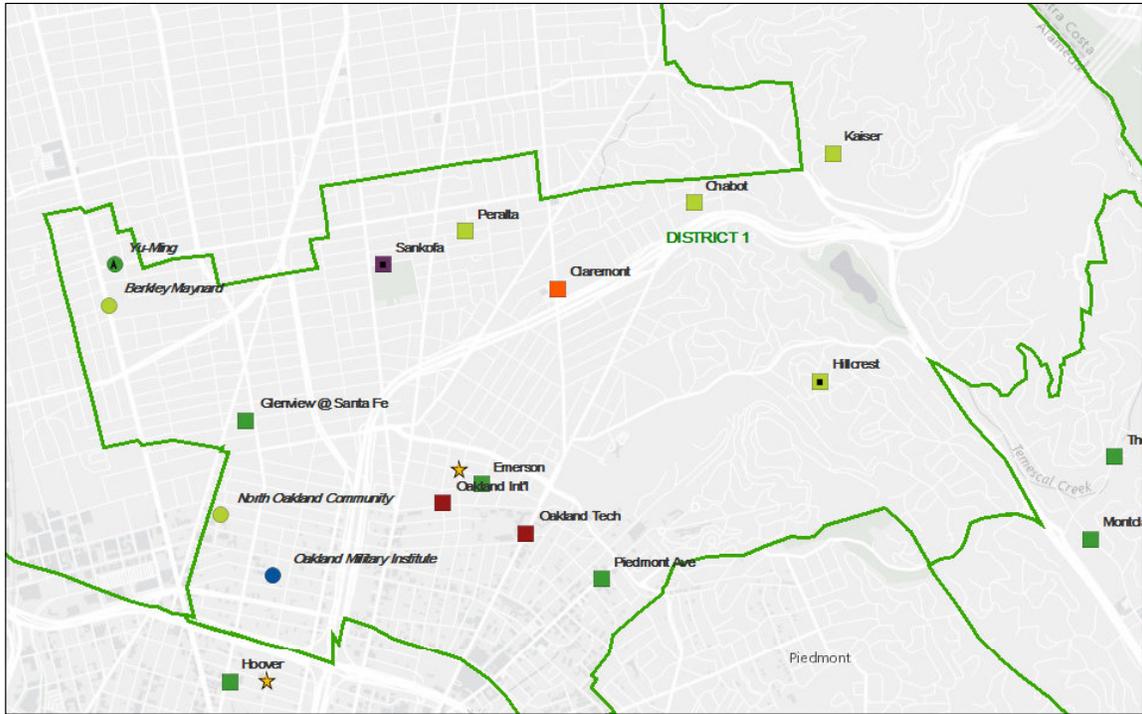
With these school and neighborhood shifts in process, now is an opportune time to check in with community to ensure available school programs are meeting their needs.

Methods

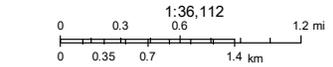
This project focused on reaching North Oakland families, who may or may not have chosen OUSD schools, to better understand their hopes and expectations for a robust K-12 pipeline through:

- A widely disseminated online survey to understand parent and community priorities for their students and
- Follow up focus groups to engage stakeholders in conversation about the survey findings to help inform future decision-making.

District 1 Schools



July 8, 2017



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Legend

Charter School (Authorizer)

A Alameda Co. authorized charter school (all other charters OUSD authorized)

Charter School

- TK/K-5
- K-8
- 6-8
- 6-12
- 9-12

District-Run School

- PK/TK-5
- PK/TK-8
- TK-5
- TK-8
- K-5
- K-8
- ▲ K-12
- 6-8
- 6-9*
- 6-12
- 9-12
- Inactive site



This data can supplement demographic, school site, and community preference data being developed as part of the Blueprint for Quality Schools. With local and District data in hand, School Board members will be better able to make policy decisions that meet the needs of diverse local families.

Online survey

The online survey received 185 responses, of which 165 were within zip codes in Oakland's District One. The data compiled here in this report is from the following District One zip codes: 94608, 94609, 94611, 94618, and 94705. Those responding to the survey included families with students at 36 local public, private, and charter schools, with two-thirds of the respondents having students at Peralta Elementary, Oakland Technical High School, Kaiser Elementary, Claremont Middle School, and Chabot Elementary. Survey respondents represented families with children ranging from preschool to adult. A full breakdown of this and other data is available in the data appendix.

Focus groups

As part of the online survey, participants were asked if they would be willing to join a future focus group. All willing participants were contacted with an invitation to one of two focus groups scheduled for July 8 and July 25, 2017 – one during a weekend day and one on a weekday evening. Five community members participated in the first focus group. Seven community members participated in the second. Notes from these focus groups are also detailed in the data appendix.

Major Themes

Through the survey, several major themes arose – including programs that were of interest to North Oakland families as well as shared concerns. These themes were further explored in the focus groups.

Quality is easy to identify, shouldn't rely on community wealth

Focus group participants identified markers of a quality program including engaged students with strong relationships with adults on campus, good communication between site administration and families, safety and security on site, a diversity of students with support to meet their needs, and enrichment programs available to all. It was noted that these features are more likely to be found in schools within affluent communities. Participants felt these elements should be available to all Oakland students, regardless of the fundraising capacity of the school community.

Participants mentioned examples of strong programs such as Claremont Middle School's variety of enrichment programs: sports, math club, music, gardening, and animation. Glenview's Black History month celebrations, which include in-class assignments, artworks, assemblies, and community events were another example of evidence of a successful school where collaboration across faculty, administration, and community result in inclusive and enriching curriculum.

Neighborhood schools are important, but not the deciding factor

While nearly two-thirds of respondents said that attending a neighborhood school was important, less than half had students in their neighborhood school. The variety of reasons for choosing a non-

neighborhood school included finding the local program lacking, choosing schools that have special programs (such as autism inclusion programs), and moving out of the zone for their chosen school at some point after enrolling.

Future commitment to OUSD varies considerably

When asked about their commitment to sending children to an OUSD school in the future, non-OUSD parents who said yes gave a variety of reasons, including: proximity (walkability and bikeability), quality of programs, and experience with a previous student there. A number of respondents cited the future of the Santa Fe site as their deciding factor. If a District-run elementary school continues to be available at the site, they would enroll their students there. Others cited concern about the enrollment process. They were willing to commit to OUSD if their students were able to enroll at programs such as Peralta, Chabot, Claremont, and Oakland Tech.

Of those who stated that they would not consider an OUSD school in the future, most cited previous experiences with inadequate academic differentiation, concerns about academic rigor, or weak support of students with learning differences in OUSD schools as a deciding factor. Of those, most were expecting to send students to private schools in the future.

New programs and alternative models appeal . . .

Many respondents expressed interest in new programs, particularly dual language programs. When asked what innovative or alternative models they would like to see in North Oakland, such as magnet programs, dual language programs, or early childhood centers, the response was enthusiastic, but tempered by concern about the District's ability to successfully implement new programs when current and traditional programs are perceived by some as not successful. Many also stated that they would support new programs only if they were not charter schools. Of the 141 people who responded to the open-ended question:

- 44 mentioned dual language programs, in particular Spanish (17)
- 30 mentioned early childhood programs including preschool, transitional kindergarten, and early childhood centers
- 25 mentioned magnet programs
- 19 mentioned arts and/or music
- 11 mentioned science and/or STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math)
- 4 mentioned GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) or gifted programs

Willingness to send students to these programs was dependent not just on the type of program, but on the quality. Parents were clear that the existence of such a program was not enough to draw students if the program was not implemented well. As one participant stated:

“As important as the program, leadership, community, and academic excellence will also be factors influencing our school choice.”

Many survey participants expressed deep concern about OUSD's ability to implement new programs, and whether new programs would draw resources from general education programs when many schools are currently failing students. Starting these programs would not guarantee enrollment, they'd have to be well implemented and resourced. Many also stated that new programs would not be welcome if they were charter schools. These topics were explored further in focus groups.

Dual Language

Language immersion programs, particularly Spanish programs, were mentioned many times as desirable. Participants noted that although OUSD offers some dual language programs, none are in North Oakland. Those programs are in high demand and too far from North Oakland to be a good option for District 1 families. In the focus groups it was noted that dual language programs might not appeal to all families in a neighborhood, and therefore might push some families away from their neighborhood school.

Early Childhood Education

Similarly, many respondents expressed a desire for more universally available early childhood education. They noted that the age range for transitional kindergarten is very narrow and that OUSD-provided preschool is income based. Some students end up in different preschools, transitional kindergarten, and kindergarten programs over the space of three years. Flexibility to provide more universal preschool for all Oakland children was seen as a goal.

Arts Programs

The arts were seen as a way to engage diverse students in school programs, ensuring that every student could find a program or aspect in school that resonated for them. Participants expressed a desire to see more performing and visual arts in all schools, not just in special arts-focused programs. Participants also identified a need to ensure these programs were not reliant only on parent or grant funding. They felt these programs should be universally available to all students as part of a core curriculum.

Physical Activity and Outdoor Education

A number of participants noted that physical activity is insufficient at OUSD schools currently. Several expressed a desire for more activity and more outdoor time for students who benefit from connecting to nature and moving their bodies.

Quality of programs matters most

One of the most universal themes was a desire for OUSD to focus on ensuring support for current programs and teaching staff. Quotes from survey participants convey the consistency of this concern:

“I think Oakland needs to get the basics down before expanding into alternative models.”

“We don’t need innovative or alternative. We need high quality.”

“I would like to see OUSD focus on its current struggling schools like Emerson in a more meaningful way”

“I’d rather focus on having quality teachers and teacher stability than alternative models.”

“I am WAY less interested in innovations than in plain, simple programs that work and solid management.”

Others also suggested that the District focus on learning from existing successful models, particularly those that don’t rely on funding from well-resourced parent communities. Many such models exist

North Oakland school landscape presents possibilities

When asked to look at the map of existing North Oakland programs and consider how the ideas for new programs might be applied to the map, focus group participants were happy to brainstorm. It was made clear that this was purely an exercise in blue sky thinking, so participants felt free to be creative. Among the ideas presented were:

Sankofa / Peralta Elementary merger

Peralta is space challenged and, because it is all on the ground floor, is ideally suited for the lowest grades of elementary school. Sankofa is only three blocks from Peralta and is chronically under enrolled. It was suggested that overcrowding could be relieved at Peralta by using the space for TK-2 classes for Sankofa and Peralta students while Sankofa could host grades 3-5. Because the two schools were in July 2017 both undergoing searches for new principals, this could be an ideal time to rethink the programs at both schools.

Oakland International High School Lab School

Oakland International acts as home to many of OUSD's newcomer students. All students at Oakland International, most of whom have been in the United States for less than 4 years, are English Language Learners. This model is being used as a lab school for training teachers from throughout Oakland and beyond in serving high school newcomer students academically, socially, and emotionally. More information can be found at <https://www.oihslab.com>.

Piedmont Avenue dual language

It was noted that neighborhood enrollment at Piedmont Avenue Elementary is weaker than at most North Oakland schools. This was identified as an opportunity site for a dual language Spanish/English program in which so many survey participants expressed interest. Focus group participants also expressed concern, however, that a dual language program could deter some families from joining and that robust dual language middle and high school opportunities would also need to be developed.

Santa Fe Elementary Campus

Many community members from the neighborhood surrounding the Santa Fe Elementary campus expressed a desire for an OUSD-run elementary school to reopen on the site when Glenview Elementary returns to its home campus at the end of 2019. Some of these families currently have students attending Glenview at Santa Fe. Others are parents of preschool students who hope to have a walkable OUSD option in their neighborhood when their children reach kindergarten.