Article: INSTRUCTION
Section: SMALL SCHOOLS BY DESIGN
Sub-section:

I.   Executive Summary and Purpose

On Tuesday, June 27th, 2006 SFUSD's Board of Education passed a resolution stating its support for small schools by design and the establishment of a working group to develop a proposal for a "Small Schools by Design"(SSD) policy framework. Built on a foundation of prior SFUSD initiatives for school reform, this action served to reinforce SFUSD's strong commitment to maximizing flexibility and support to all schools as reflected in the implementation of site-based academic planning and budgeting and the Weighted Student Formula. It also demonstrated the District's desire to collaborate with all partners in education to devise a policy for SSD that will increase options for underserved families and promises to enhance district enrollment, attendance, and achievement rates.

This policy is designed to address the achievement gap that persists in SFUSD, despite the overall trend toward increased achievement. In 2004-2005, eight of SFUSD's twenty-one high schools were the source of nearly 80% of the district's dropouts[1]. The 4-year derived dropout rate in the district overall stood at 7.4% in 04-05, and Hispanic, African-American, and Pacific Islander students' rates were all well over 10%[2], with Pacific Islander rates nearly 20%. In the district overall in the 2004-2005 school year, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and African-American students graduated ready to attend college at lower than average rates.[3]

In addition to addressing the achievement gap, this initiative promises to impact positively enrollment in SFUSD schools. Enrollment in SSD in San Francisco has nearly doubled over the past three years, but much of this increase has gone to public charter schools; SFUSD's own SSD are thus an effective strategy for keeping families in the district at a time when the district is losing enrollment.

The Small Schools by Design policy development working group convened in August 2006 and

---

[1] This data retrieved from http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/.

[2] The 4-year derived rate is an estimate. Because school districts cannot design foolproof systems in place to accurately track dropouts (for example, a request for transcripts from another district signals that the student is not a dropout, and whether or not that student ever shows up for classes is not tracked or known), the rates are likely optimistic for all populations. The relative differences by race/ethnicity are valid.

[3] Excerpts from a report to the San Francisco Education Fund created by LaFrance Associates, LLC, August 2006.

included representation from current SFUSD small schools by design staff, parents, and students, district staff, district's bargaining units including UASF and UESF, as well as community based organizations/foundations that support the development of small schools in SFUSD.

The vision of the working group was guided by a general understanding that SSD need to have specific structures and be "small" enough to ensure the delivery of high quality educational opportunities in a setting where students are well known by their teachers and other adults. The purpose of the policy development was meant to further K-12 school reform in SFUSD and to provide a proactive strategy to close the achievement gap and promote equitable outcomes for all youth. All members agreed that the small school policy would prioritize vulnerable, underserved students as defined by multiple measures including drop-out rates, poverty levels, GPA, A-G course completion, etc., and would increase options for underserved families thus promising to increase district enrollment.

The working group process was rooted in the latest research, which demonstrates that small schools, particularly schools of choice, have a measurably positive impact upon inner-city kids, especially African-American and Latino students and those from low-income families. This data finds that:

- Small school size improves students' outcomes on grades and test scores.
- Small school size greatly improves attendance rates and lowers drop-out rates.
- Female and non-white students, in particular, do better in smaller schools.
- Students with special needs, including so-called "at-risk," "exceptional," "disadvantaged," and "gifted" students, are better served by smaller school units.
- In the small-school environment, security improves and violence decreases, as do student alcohol and drug abuse.[4]

The objective of the working group was to develop policy recommendations in each of these areas that would serve to distinguish SSD and provide the capacity for their sustainability. A core belief of the SSD working group is that if schools are provided maximum control over their resources to create an innovative educational program, in exchange for increased, clearly articulated standards of performance, student engagement and performance will improve. While SSD policy enhances autonomy over budget, staffing, curriculum and assessment, instructional time, governance and policies, and facilities, each of the schools is held to high standards of performance through a specialized school quality review process using a set of benchmarks that articulate the criteria for high-performing small schools.

---

[4] "Small Schools: The Numbers Tell a Story", Michael Klonsky, a summary of recent academic research on small schools

II.   Defining Characteristics and Core Principles of Small Schools by Design

    A. School or design teams must demonstrate a commitment to:

        1. **Size and Personalization:** Small schools by design (SSD) will aim to enroll a number of students that is consistent with best practices literature of small schools, including the following range at each grade level:

Grade Level	Ideal Size Range
K-5	Up to 250
K-8	Up to 400
K-12	Up to 500
6-8	Up to 400
6-12	Up to 500
9-12	Up to 400

           SSD shall strive to maintain a reduced teacher to pupil ratio by using coring, looping, and other personalization strategies. These schools shall use their smallness as a vehicle to implement research-based personalization strategies that foster strong, ongoing relationships with students and their families and create a learning environment that addresses the diverse academic needs of all children. The district will honor the school's design plan, including enrollment ceilings.

        2. **Equity and Achievement:** SSD shall incorporate research-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment strategies that promote high achievement and equitable academic results for all students, meaning that students' achievement levels will not correlate to their race, gender, English language learner status, or another other identity. Strategies to promote equity and achievement could include: extensive opportunities for academic enrichment both inside and outside of the instructional day; access for all students to the full range of curricular programs; heterogeneous classrooms; multiple forms of assessment that inform instructional strategies; inquiry-based, culturally relevant pedagogical practices that engage students by tapping into their passions and interests.

        3. **Parents and Families as Partners:** SSD shall treat parents as critical partners in the life of the school and shall include their voices in significant governance and policy decisions that impact the school community. SSD will demonstrate: an ongoing dialogue between families, teachers and school leadership around goals, roles and respectful relationships; family involvement in the academic life of the school; strategies to help families support students in achieving their educational goals; and systems that promote regular one-on-one communication between teachers and families.

        4. **Professional Learning Community:** SSD value teacher collaboration and help to create and nurture a professional learning community within the school. Teachers and administrators shall have significant time to work together on all of the elements within a school that that impact the quality of teaching and learning. SSD encourage

teacher collaboration across disciplines and grade levels in order to create a cohesive and integrated instructional program. SSD allow for teachers to have on-going preparation time to collaboratively plan curriculum, team-teach and influence each others' professional growth during the school year as well as during staff retreats.

5. **Uniqueness and Choice:** SSD shall not strive to be comprehensive schools but rather shall be distinctive and focused schools of choice that promote equitable academic outcomes and help close the achievement gap.

6. **Positive School Climate:** SSD shall strive to create and maintain a safe and nurturing school community where all difference are respected and honored. A tone of decency and trust exists throughout the school community. SSD model the values of dedication, care, creativity and interdependence. Students and staff feel a sense of ownership and belonging.

7. **Resources:** SSD will allocate resources to address the needs of all students and support powerful classroom instruction. Budget planning will prioritize teaching and learning with the majority of funding directed to the classroom.

8. **Leadership:** SSD shall draw from research on best practices in governance and decision-making, including distributive leadership, equitable and democratic decision-making, and processes that nurture and build leadership among school staff. SSD will work with the district to hire instructional leaders who demonstrate the skills and vision for professional development and teacher support, especially for new teachers aligned with the mission of the school.

III. Becoming a Small School by Design in SFUSD

A. Schools eligible to join the SSD Initiative include:

1. Schools or programs in the district that are interested in applying to become/transition into a Small School by Design

2. Charter schools that are interested in returning to the district and applying for SSD status

3. New school design teams that are interested in applying to start a SSD

B. Application and selection process:

1. RFP application and decision-making process, facilitated by group that includes robust stakeholder representation that mirrors or exceeds the breadth of the Small Schools Task Force, and including:
   a. Letter of Intent
   b. Application/Proposal, including analysis of prior school and student performance data for existing schools and referring to indicators listed in Section VI. A. Note:

The purpose of looking at existing schools' prior data shall be developmental, in order to consider ways to improve performance for selected schools, rather than as a basis for exclusion from the initiative. Because this initiative builds on a proven strategy for closing the achievement gap, schools with weak data points might in fact be selected explicitly in order to improve their data.

    c. Planning or Implementation Process

2. Selection process, including:
   a. Interview
   b. Site Visit
   c. Selection based on a qualitative rubric (to be developed in implementation phase)

IV.   Leadership and District Level Support

A. Sustainability and Accountability
Through the establishment of a Division of Small Schools by Design, SFUSD will ensure the sustainability of SSD in San Francisco. The Division will monitor the accountability commitments of all SSD according to their design plans and school Academic/Site Plans aligned with federal, state, and district mandates.

B. Infrastructure to Support the Implementation of the SSD Policy
The Division of Small Schools by Design in SFUSD will oversee the development of a network of SSD, attending to issues of start up, conversions from larger schools, inclusion of charter schools, and operations that are unique to SSD across school levels. The Division will be headed by a top-level district leader, with the authority of an Assistant Superintendent, who reports directly to the Associate Superintendent over School Operations and Instructional Services (SOIS) or his/her equivalent and participates in all SOIS meetings. The Division will ensure the development of the infrastructure within SFUSD to adequately support the implementation of the SSD policy.

C. Role of SFUSD's Division of Small Schools by Design
The Division of Small Schools by Design in SFUSD will support the development of resources, securing of appropriate facilities, incubating of new schools and conversion of existing schools, and advocating throughout SFUSD on behalf of SSD aligned with and in accordance with the SSD policy. The Division will provide technical assistance to other central office personnel in any necessary restructuring of district practices in order to successfully implement the SSD policy.

D. Incubation Process
SFUSD, along with external partners, will support the incubation process of new schools and school conversions into SSD as part of the responsibilities of the Division of Small Schools by Design. The goal of the incubation process will be to have at least five SSD secondary schools (middle, high school, and potentially K-8), including existing schools, in place by 2008-09. Not withstanding this goal, all schools entering this initiative must demonstrate the capacity to succeed as SSD as reflected in the application process described in Section III.B.

Existing SSD would submit an application by March 29, 2007, to become a part of the initiative for the 2007-08 school year. (See Addendum A: draft Policy Implementation Timeline). By Fall 2009, the Division of SSD will revisit the application process to potentially include elementary schools.

E.   Supervising, Coaching, and Evaluating SSD
The Division of Small Schools by Design of SFUSD will be responsible for supervising, coaching and evaluating the operations and teaching and learning practices of the SSD, as well as the initiative as a whole, and for actively seeking resources to create a support team for SSD. The top-level district leader who runs this Division will work closely with the Assistant Superintendents for elementary, middle, and high school levels.

V.   Areas of Autonomy

A. Staffing: Small Schools by Design (SSD) shall have increased flexibility to build and maintain a staff that is committed to the school's vision and staff collective agreements. Specific provisions to guarantee this flexibility include:

1. The entire returning staff at a school shall come to consensus no later than March 15th, and aligned with the Academic/Site Plan, shall determine the faculty working agreements that define their work at that school. The consensus agreement may include paid time, resources, priorities, and programs.
    a. Any March 15th consensus agreement will be proposed to the policy-making bodies of UESF for the purpose of seeking a site-specific memorandum of understanding detailing any exceptions from the UESF/SFUSD contracts.
    b. If the requisite UESF bodies agree with the proposed exemptions, the memorandum shall be proposed to the District.
    c. No exceptions to the UESF/SFUSD contracts will violate the integrity of the contracts.
    d. The site Union Building Committee shall be responsible for the facilitation of any such agreement once ratified.
    e. Any site-specific consensus agreement arrived at in the manner described herein shall apply for one year and be subject to re-authorization.

2. During the hiring process, SSD will meet formally with teachers from the eligibility list following the sequence provided by HR, including consolidated teachers and voluntary transfers. The team to meet with any teacher from the eligibility list should consist of school staff members, the UBC chair or designee, the head of the school or designee, students, and parents selected by the parents' association or their designee. The majority of the people on this committee must be teachers elected by a process facilitated by the UBC.

3. The district supports the ability of SSD to staff their schools with teachers and other staff members who support the vision and mission of the school and for that staffing to happen in as timely a manner as possible, with the goal of the end of the school year. Consolidated teachers may choose to work at SSD if offered a job by the

school; however, consolidated teachers will not be involuntarily placed in a SSD unless required because there is a 1:1 match (one remaining position for which one consolidated teacher is qualified).

B. **Budget:** SSD shall receive a lump sum per pupil budget based on an expansion of the Weighted Student Formula (WSF), with the intention of significantly increasing the percentage of per-pupil allocation that is controlled by the schools, in which the school has discretion to fund the best programs and services that most equitably meet the needs of the students and families they serve, while meeting the threshold of compliance with state and federal regulations that do not permit waivers. This includes:

> 1. SFUSD allocates a lump sum per pupil budget that includes the allocation formulas for WSF and state/federal categorical funds that are distributed to K-12 schools. In addition, SSD will receive direct funding associated with several responsibilities that have traditionally been budgeted centrally in amounts equal to the funding levels that SFUSD central offices would otherwise budget on the their behalf. This additional funding will include but not be limited to the following items: custodial services (based on an agreement with SEIU), day-to-day substitutes, security aides, STAR intervention and support, and Proposition H-funded services.

> 2. In order to allocate this additional per pupil funding, the district will itemize the associated central office costs, and allow SSD to determine spending plans for these funds.

> 3. SFUSD will work with stakeholders to examine how SSD, on a pilot basis, could use actual salaries rather than averages to pay for teachers.

> 4. SSD will be granted up to 7 additional district-funded professional development days. These days are to be used in the summer to plan and adjust curriculum to address district goals around closing the achievement gap. These days are to be paid at the per diem rate.

> Note: There are school districts in which schools receive 85% of per pupil allocation.

C. **Curriculum and Assessment:** SSD shall be accountable for meeting equity and achievement results, set by the Division of SSD, in exchange for the district providing increased autonomy around teaching and learning. (See VI.A. for data points.) SSD will not have lower standards than SFUSD, but will strive to meet or exceed SFUSD results. This includes:

> 1. SSD shall make their own decisions regarding curriculum, instruction and assessment consistent with California State and District Standards and UC/CSU requirements, including but not limited to text adoption and curriculum format. For any curriculum selected that falls outside of California State and/or SFUSD adopted curriculum, SFUSD and SSD would co-create a process to find an appropriate solution, to include but not be limited to, the option of seeking waivers. This obviously includes any state or locally approved curriculum.
> 2. SSD shall determine their own graduation requirements aligned with or beyond

California State and District expectations, with an emphasis on competency-based, performance-based assessment, to align with and support their mission.

3. SSD shall have autonomy to determine the content, scheduling, and support providers utilized for all professional development activities.

4. SSD will co-create a process to receive consistent district support to obtain waivers from the state, when necessary, to support alternative practices used to meet equity and achievement goals. While SSD will participate in state-mandated assessments and practices as all other SFUSD schools do, they will seek to broaden these practices to meet equity and achievement results. And, when these alternative practices require such, SSD and SFUSD will collaborate to seek state waivers. The quality of the state waivers will be assessed by the waiver approval process at the state level.

5. Given the increased budgetary flexibility, referenced in the Budget section, and with respect to the full array of academic programs and services such as Multilingual Programs, GATE, Library/Media, Technology, and Professional Development including BTSA (Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment), coaching, trainings, etc., SSD will choose either to build a school-based program or to purchase services from an outside provider or from SFUSD. Selecting non-SFUSD services will increase the responsibilities of school leaders who agree to take on the management of programs at the school-site level that are traditionally managed at the central office level. Any alternatives to the central office providing services must demonstrate compliance with all state and federal regulations, unless a waiver is secured. Regardless of the service provider or pathway chosen, the schools will be held accountable to their annually set equity and achievement goals.

D. **Instructional Time:** SSD shall have the freedom to set longer or adjusted school days and calendar years, in accordance with California Ed Code and in accordance with the UESF contract and addenda and with timely and thorough parent/guardian notification. Calendars will include the same number of SFUSD-required professional development days as well as additional professional development time, per accessible funding. This includes:

1. SSD have the ability to increase planning and professional development time for faculty, aligned with the Academic/Site Plan.
2. SSD have the ability to increase learning time for students or to allocate learning time in an innovative manner (e.g., internships, service learning, intersession).
3. SSD have the ability to organize the school schedule in ways that maximize learning time for students and planning time for faculty, with an awareness of transportation issues and schedules of nearby schools.

E. **Governance and Policies:** SSD shall be provided with maximum flexibility to choose the leadership model and governance structure that best fits *school needs*, as long as that model meets key *district needs.*

1. School needs may include leading professional community, flexibility of resources, shared decision-making, shared leadership, increased site-based responsibility, cultivating leadership from within the staff ranks, etc. District needs may include

communication, accountability, expertise, and compliance.

2. SSD may determine a leadership model and governance structure that meets the school's vision, as long as the model meets all applicable federal and state laws and is in accordance with the UASF contract and any agreements made with UASF. When such a leadership model is chosen, it should be arrived at through a collaboration of the school leader(s), the school staff, and the SSC, and must be acceptable to all parties.

3. In the event of a leadership vacancy, SSD will interview and recommend a qualified school leader candidate, who the Superintendent will approve or reject, presenting a concrete rationale if the latter. The SSD, represented by the School Site Council, and the Superintendent must come to final agreement on an appropriate candidate.

4. Staff of the Division of SSD will adapt and revise the current Principals' Evaluation tool of assessment to measure the effectiveness of the school leader(s). Revisions will serve to align the evaluation process more closely with the SSD particular vision and Academic/Site Plan.

5. The decision to move a school leader out of an SSD will be made collaboratively between the district and the SSC, and the district will not move effective leaders, as judged by the SSD leaders' evaluative tool crafted by the Division of Small Schools by Design, unless the leader his/herself requests a transfer. In the event that a school leader requests a transfer and the Superintendent agrees, the SSC may not block that request.

6. SSD may propose to receive waivers from specific Board, district, or state policies, procedures, and/or regulations in order to develop distinct policies around a range of issues including promotion, attendance, discipline, and any other areas that help the school implement its vision and close the achievement gap. If an SSD would like to waive any Board or district policy, procedure or regulation or any federal or state law or regulation, it must present its proposal to the Board of Education or its designee, the Superintendent.

7. In assessing whether or not to grant or assist an SSD in obtaining a waiver, the Board of Education or its designee, the Superintendent, shall be guided by the following criteria:

   a. Consistency of the request with the SSD plan and vision approved through the RFP process;

   b. Assurance of the welfare of students;

   c. Compliance with all relevant local, state, and federal laws (except that, where necessary and possible, the district will assist the SSD to receive a waiver from state or federal law); and

   d. Adequate protection of the rights of staff members.

8. Demonstration of a plan that meets these criteria will be the basis for waiving relevant district policies for these schools.

9. The School Site Council will take on increased governing responsibilities, including school leader hiring, budget approval, and setting of school policies. The Division of SSD will work with other district leaders to develop a training protocol for SSC members at SSD to ensure they are well-prepared for the additional responsibilities.

F. **Facilities:** When sharing space, the District shall aim to provide SSD with their own identifiable and contiguous space that adequately meets the needs of the school community and facilitates their ability to serve their student population. This includes:

1. SSD, like other SFUSD schools, will have properly equipped offices and classrooms (including technology).
2. SSD sharing a building will enjoy equal access to common facilities (libraries, gyms, etc.).
3. The district will provide SSD with a formal set of protocols to address their annual needs. The School Site Council will present these needs concurrent with the academic planning cycle in the form of a request letter or statement that is reviewed by relevant district staff and responded to within 60 days
4. The district will ensure that facility selection is appropriate to the school's mission, programming, enrollment capacity, and grade level configuration.
5. While a stand alone facility may be more desirable and may be available based on current location or status of available school sites, any shared facility proposals will be determined with an established protocol and timeline and with a detailed plan and schedule of meetings to include school/broader community input.

VI. **Implementation and Evaluation of Effectiveness of SSD Policy**

A. **Indicators of SSD effectiveness would include:[5]**

1. Academic achievement data including A-G course completion; CAHSEE passage; graduation/promotion rates; percentage of students who enter and graduate from 2-year and 4-year colleges; performance-based assessment data; and analysis of cohort data from the Math and Reading CST tests, with a trend toward increasing proficiency
2. Attendance and drop-out data
3. School climate data, including: suspensions and expulsions, violent incidents, student pre and post-survey, teacher pre and post-survey (both surveys will be developed by the Division of SSD and be common to all SSD)
4. Parent involvement (determined by a pre and post-survey common to all SSD)

---

[5] **Notes:**

- All student data will be disaggregated by race, class, gender, ELL, Special Ed, and other sub-groups, and evaluation will include a focus on equitable outcomes and closing the achievement gap for these groups.
- SSD will strive to produce better results for all students; however, they will not be held to different or inequitable standards from other schools in the district.
- Evaluations will also measure value added growth.

5. Teacher retention rate

B. Qualitative Assessment of the Implementation of Characteristics and Core Principles

1. A rubric will be created by the Division of SSD to measure the implementation level of SSD characteristics and core principles outlined in Section II.A. of this policy as well as progress toward performance benchmarks along the data points in VI.A.

C. The evaluation process of SSD would include:

1. Critical friends visits by other SSD to give feedback, on the rubric referenced in VI.B., toward growth goals.
2. School quality review visits by a group representing the breadth of the Small Schools Task Force, at least every two years, and which generate feedback on the rubric referenced in VI.B.
3. School quality review teams will be empowered to recommend renewal and, where appropriate, revocation of participation in the initiative to the Division of SSD.

D. Performance benchmarks required to retain autonomies

1. In order to retain autonomies described in Section V, each SSD must meet its established performance benchmarks, incorporating the indicators identified in Section VI.A. Schools will be evaluated based on the qualitative rubric referenced in VI.B. and meeting their own individualized benchmarks, which have been approved by the district and built into their annual Academic Site Plan.
2. If a school does not meet its benchmarks for three consecutive years, the Division of SSD can discontinue any given autonomies.

E. Evaluation of Effective Implementation of SSD Policy

1. In year four of the implementation of this policy the Superintendent shall contract for an interim evaluation of the effectiveness of the SSD policy and shall report to the Board of Education with the recommendations to modify, expand or terminate the policy. The evaluation shall include, but not be limited to:

   a. The fiscal structures and practices of SSD including the amount of revenue generated from various public and private institutions.
   b. Parental satisfaction and involvement compared to other district schools.
   c. The pre and post test scores of students attending SSD schools and other student assessment tools.
   d. Assessment of student achievement and student satisfaction (measured by truancy, tardiness and drop out rates, etc).
   e. Level of teacher satisfaction.
   f. The existence of any discrimination and or segregation in SSD schools ad the existence of inequitable distribution of resources throughout the district.

g. The number of applications for SSD status submitted and denied.
h. The number of SSD status revocations.
i. The governance, fiscal liability and accountability practices and related issues between the SSD and the district.
j. The role and impact of the collective bargaining agreements on SSD schools.

2. The Superintendent shall establish a system of data collection necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of SSD.
3. All SSD shall cooperate in collecting and maintaining all data needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the SSD Policy.

F. Applicability of Autonomies to non-SSD Schools

1. After an initial period of three years and concurrent with the interim evaluation described in VI.E., the Superintendent will convene an advisory committee, including in equal numbers school-based representatives of SSD and non-SSD schools, to review the autonomies provided to SSD.
2. Based on an examination of each area of autonomy and utilizing data culled from the evaluation, the committee will analyze its applicability to non-SSD schools.
3. The committee will develop recommendations regarding whether each area of autonomy should be: provided to SSD only, provided to all schools, or revised.