

SF: SUPERVISOR CALLS FOR CHANGES TO CRITIQUED SCHOOL ASSIGNMENT SYSTEM

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On the heels of a grand jury report slamming the San Francisco Unified School District's public school admissions system, a San Francisco supervisor today called for changes allowing students to more easily be assigned to schools closer to their homes.

A San Francisco civil grand jury report, released on June 26, condemned the District's School Choice program as expensive, confusing and alienating to families.

The program is based on a computerized Diversity Index intended to make K-12 public schools in San Francisco more integrated academically, socio-economically and linguistically. By law, race cannot be used as a factor in school assignment.

The report said parents have to navigate a lengthy and complicated application process without the assurance their child will be admitted to one of the seven schools to which they apply. It also noted that busing has not made the District more diverse.

The Diversity Index takes into account factors such as extreme poverty, socioeconomic status, academic achievement by both the student and the student's previous school, and home language use.

"What is not taken into consideration is location," Supervisor Carmen Chu said today at a meeting of the Board of Supervisors.

School District spokeswoman Gentle Blythe said today that the current School Choice policy does assign students to schools closest to where they live, but only if their parents' top choices are not approved.

Blythe added that some parents actually prefer being able to choose a school for their children in any part of the city.

Chu said the policy "has created a tremendous hardship for many, many families." She said parents often face transportation difficulties, tough application deadlines and are unable to fully participate in school activities.

Chu introduced a resolution this afternoon that, if approved by the full Board of Supervisors, would urge the School District and the Board of Education to modify the system by incorporating "a geographic component" into the admissions process.

"Right now the District is investigating alternatives to our current system," Blythe said. According to Blythe, the School District's strategic plan, approved earlier this year and which sets its priorities for the coming years, includes "an assignment process that is both equitable and accessible for all students."

Blythe said a modification of the policy further incorporating geographic factors is "definitely one of the things that is being considered."

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