

Change and Innovation in the SFUSD

A parent's reflection of the Coro Fellows' presentation

By: Kelly Close

For those who didn't go, this incredible Coro Fellows group spent an hour giving an in-depth, incisive, vivid role play about some major issues facing the various challenges and opportunities in the San Francisco public school system. Personally, I found it very illuminating because the Fellows Role Play really seemed to offer a true glimpse into what is happening in the SF Unified School District in a fresh, unfettered, non-political way. While I have spent some hours on researching public schools in the past few months, what I learned today in an hour was far more than I have managed to piece together on the San Francisco public school system to date.

The Fellows gathered and in one week researched "The Logic of Change and Innovation of the SFUSD." They had what appears to have been fantastic (maybe unprecedented) access to teachers, administrators, the Board of Education and other supervisors, parents/parents groups, Union leaders, and students and they also appear to have worked day and night to visit schools, talk to people, talk amongst themselves, and really get their arms around what the status quo at SFUSD is today.

The Fellows described the achievement gap in the city, showing the differences in results by race and by socioeconomic status, and described how the SFUSD perceives the achievement gap as a huge social justice/civil rights issue. Achievement, as I understand it, varies by race much more than by socioeconomic status - they showed some stats to this effect at the start. The Fellows addressed several critical questions through a 45-minute role play that opened my eyes in various ways to a range of stakeholders -- and that was very effective for conveying multiple perceptions and opinions. I left feeling *far* more informed about the source of the problems and the challenges for the future and about how and why (or why not) the various groups are (or are not) thinking about issue of "neighborhood schools" and the new assignment process.

Most of all, I was really taken by the program and feel that I was very lucky to see this thinking at work from this independent group that really brought no preconceived perceptions. The Coro Fellows are certainly a fascinating, formidable group of young, bright, committed future leaders and I so appreciated their vivid portrayal of the issues the school system, and indeed, we in the city, are facing. I also appreciated their honesty and candor about the magnitude of challenges ahead.