



Tamalpais Union High School District

Listening Campaign Report Summary of Findings Based on Family Interviews Redwood High School

November 16, 2011

Presented by:



**NATIONAL
EQUITY
PROJECT**

Summary of Findings: Redwood High School

Overview:

The intention of a Listening Campaign is to capture the participants' thoughts, feelings, and questions about their experiences at the schools and in the district. Family members were invited to participate in one of several opportunities that took place during September and October of 2011. They were held both at each of the five sites as well as three neighborhood locations – Marin City, Tiburon, and West Marin. During the Listening Campaign, interviews were conducted in small group and, when requested, one to one formats. One hundred three parents in total participated in the Listening Campaign.

- Drake High School – 30 participants
- Redwood High School – 30 participants
- San Andreas High School – 9 participants
- Tam High School – 40 participants
- Tamiscal High School – 15 participants

Listening Campaign Guiding Questions:

A summarized version of the Mission statement with three guiding questions were offered as prompts for the conversation.

The Mission of TUHSD is dedicated to the development of creative, passionate, and self-motivated learners. Through this Mission, our community has defined TUHSD success as having all students being able to:

- Demonstrate mastery of core competencies
- Access and critically analyze information
- Pose substantive questions
- Communicate effectively

Therefore, we would like to know – what is your experience as it relates to the above?

- 1. What is working well at your school? (and who benefits?)**
- 2. What isn't working well at your school? (and who is impacted?)**
- 3. What would you change about your school for the Mission to be true for all students?**

Themes of Responses:

A team of coaches reviewed the transcripts of interviews conducted during the Listening Campaign to surface themes and patterns in participants' responses. The following themes emerged:

- 1. School Structure & Programs**
- 2. Communication**
- 3. School Connection to Parents and the Community**
- 4. Academic Experience of School**
- 5. Experience of the School Culture and Climate**

1. School Structure and Programs

The responses selected for this category indicate a range of participant perceptions, experiences and ideas related to the courses offered at sites, grading policies, curriculum, and scheduling. Parents express both appreciation for unique course offerings and programs as well as desire for greater variety to meet the diverse needs of all students. There is, again, a range of opinions around the current curriculum with some experiencing it as relevant and adequate for preparing students for college to others questioning its relevance and rigor. Courses and instructors seem to influence at least some of this variability. Parents at the alternative schools tended to report greater satisfaction with their children's schedules while parents at the comprehensive high schools tended to report a very full, almost unmanageable schedule for their children. The comments below are a sampling of the range and richness of the Listening Campaign data from across the five sites. And while this is not meant to be an exhaustive representation of peoples' experiences, it offers a window into how parents in the district are experiencing their school's structures and programs.

- The curriculum is super varied between teachers, even within the same grade. Not just stylistically, but the amount of work too.
- I am so offended as a musician that they have to get up for zero period. They are doing performances in the evening and have to get up early to go to Jazz Band. Its sad to make the trade off.
- The music program is great and it is like a home. The room is open at lunch. Any time you can make a big school smaller, it is great.
- My son would like the ability to sit in on a class before committing to it. He would like to know the workload and if the teacher has a style he can learn from.
- My son is not very physically active person – after the 2 year requirement – there aren't options for a kid like him. Why can't we create an option where kids can play one or two times a week and not commit to a team with their entire after school life.
- As a parent of a student with an IEP, I get a lot of feedback, but if he gets a B, does that mean he didn't do HW? He didn't learn something? I get very little information from a letter grade. Occasionally I get "E" = enjoyed having child in class – which is nice to know – but that doesn't give me much information. Very few teachers even use that.
- There needs to be some way for the school to figure out if the students aren't learning what they are supposed to be learning. How do they deal with bad teachers? I would hope the school is monitoring so that can't happen. I think there is also the problem of some bad matches between teacher and student.
- There is a large White affluent culture that is a major shock. When they get there they are remediated. They are put into two academic workshops. There needs to be a much higher lever of urgency. They have two electives that are Academic workshop, which is fine if it makes a difference. But if it doesn't help the students there needs to be a look at the program. You have to have a strategy to catch them up.
- The range of AP courses – he'll be taking advantage of those. The size of the school and breadth of offerings is amazing compared to the small schools the students feed from.
- The college counseling office has been fabulous. He reached out to let her know he was interested in pursuing an internship – she gave him materials to review and checked back in to him and said she would support him.
- I do not agree with having art integration – 2 and 3 dimensional art projects – enter into the grading process in academic classes such as English class and foreign language class. I guess it is okay to kill time with these when there is

a substitute teacher, but these should not be graded projects. Art skill should not be part of the academic grades in “solids”.

- A way should be found to reduce the number of “impacted” classes with waiting lists. This could be done in part by teaching two classes together, the way regular and honors architecture are taught together. While clearly not everyone can get the most popular teachers, some way should be found to make room for everyone who signs up for the most popular regular, honors, and AP courses.
- Some of these kids are only 15 years old, they carry a full and challenging class schedules and they practice their sport 2 hours a day, 6 days a week. It’s no wonder that our kids are over worked, stressed out and exhausted. Something has to give and it is usually their grades then their health. It seems to me that we could do a better job in scheduling the **pre-season** games and tournaments. Do we really need to play Ukiah? Do we really need to practice 6 days a week and not get home until 9:30 or 10:00 PM every night? How about taking Wednesday nights off to focus on homework or just to give their bodies a rest? Parents are always being told not to over schedule their children but once a child gets to high school and are on a sports team it’s the school that manages the schedule.
- I have a senior and a sophomore – it works really well when the school brings in outside speakers to bring home what the students are learning. For example they brought in a holocaust survivor and that prompted a lot of dialogue at home.
- School counselors have been terrific – we’ve switched schools and everything has been seamless. They are very responsive.
- The teachers are very responsive as well. For such an academic school, they try really hard to create an environment where the kids are well balanced.
- I have a senior daughter and a 10th grade son. The welcoming at the school is doing really well for incoming students. My daughter is on link crew, she never saw herself as a leader, and the leadership that was foisted upon her has taught here a sense of responsibility that she didn’t have before coming here and she’s now looking at smaller colleges that emphasize leadership
- Academically, my son came from a very small K – 8, and he had trouble focusing. His teacher recommended Alpha program and it was really helpful.
- I think it is great how the school is conscious about what happens after high school, particularly about what it takes to get into a UC, CSU school - both in academics and preparation.
- There are a lot of great teachers, but there isn’t consistency. Kids could take the same course with different teachers and have very different experiences.
- It seems, the Freshman year in particular is especially varied. Some kids have teachers who really inspire them and my son is just sitting there bored. Social Issues and Geography in particular, because the curriculum is so loose, seems to be the place where there are classes being taught poorly. Don’t even get me started on the coloring in Geography.
- Is there a mechanism for the students to share their concerns? And put it in teachers’ files?
- A problem is that if you do 3 sports you have absolutely no time off. We talk about balance, but we need family time.
- That’s how the whole school functions. They’re expecting the same level of commitment, of organization, from a freshman as they do from a senior. They need to differentiate.

2. Communication

The responses selected for this category indicate a range of participant perceptions and experiences related to communication, both between the site and parents and between teachers and students. The use of technology to facilitate timeliness of communication as well as increase access to information has been met with mixed reviews. Some are definitely benefiting because of technological advances, while others have found technology to have created unintended consequences in communication. There seems to be a common request for consistency across the site in their use of technology for communication (posting homework and grades, for example). The variability in experience with communication tends to depend on the individual teacher. The comments below are a sampling of the range and richness of the Listening Campaign data and are not meant to be an exhaustive representation of peoples' experiences.

- Every single teacher should have all of their grades and HW on line and be responsible for updating it in a timely manner and it should be mandatory. So many more are doing it now than used to.
- I like the communication I have with the teachers; particularly with one of my kids, the other one not as much.
- The teachers will e-mail me with a missed assignment or a progress report.
- I like that there is access to their midterm grades, I like to be able to check it for my son.
- My daughter just started at Redwood. She is a freshman. If she missed a minute of class or is late the school follows up, which is nice. There is voicemail or e-mail.
- One of the hardest things of the transition that my son and I have found, there is no **one** place to go. He has the range of ... one teacher who, my son doesn't know his grade until he gets his report card, to another who updates grades on the central school system, then others who have their own website. It would be great if the kids could access information more easily.
- Communication between administration and the parent body has improved. The principal has directly communicated by email regularly. It is hard to find the right channel to reach as many parents as possible. We need to find a way to guide parents to the website because that is a great way of getting information. I think parents are used to sitting back and waiting for the information to come to them.
- The information on athletics is really difficult to find and sort through. It is like a secret-club. Some coaches are good at getting information out to kids, but if you go on the website to find the information, it is a total mystery.
- The principal should continue his newsletter on a regular basis. He has also done a great job on letting organizations have access to the parent emails to get information out.
- I'd love to see on the website not just the names of the teachers but what they teach and when. I'd like to see the master schedule. I think they might want to keep it closed, I don't know. Some teachers do have a website, but I think they should standardize it so we know a little bit about them. Where they graduated and what they're teaching.

3. School Connection to Parents and the Community

The responses selected for this category reflect the range of experiences, perceptions, and beliefs related to the connection parents feel to the school and the connection of the school to the broader community. Parents both took responsibility for their part in establishing and maintaining a positive and proactive connection with the school, and they also raised issues and requests for support from the site to facilitate such connections. In particular, families who do not live in the neighborhood of the school face challenges regarding transportation and communication. The comments below are a sampling of the range and richness of the Listening Campaign data and are not meant to be an exhaustive representation of peoples' experiences.

- I feel very disconnected from the community here – if there is a community. I went to a couple of PTA meetings even though they are in the morning at a very inconvenient time– there were interesting speakers – but it wasn't intended to create any dialogue. It would be great if we were supported to have dialogue. The school could play a role in helping to create that community that many of us don't have. It is disparate groups and some individuals and not a real community.
- The bus picks up the kids and have to walk across the bridge to school but don't take them directly to school. They get off on Lucky drive and then cross the freeway. The same bus system that serves other communities gets taken into the campus.
- Transportation is really an issue. They don't have cars to drive to school. Not at weird hours either. There needs to be a more friendly public transportation schedule that allows them to participate on campus; something that doesn't penalize them for not having a car. They did it for summer school. So the transportation change is possible.
- Parent involvement, could always be more, but the Foundation and PTSA are very positive forces on campus.
- There is such a parental component – a lot of the drive is based on parental pressure. If you look at a freshman geometry course – it is mostly Freshman, a lot is pressure because parents are focused on getting their kid into college. We need to think about what we're pushing the administration to do. Parents have to own a piece of that too.

4. Academic Experience of School

The responses selected for this category indicate a range of participant perceptions, and ideas around students' and families' academic experiences of the school. Comments in this section refer to the academic aspects of school such as classes, instruction and homework. The comments below are a sampling of the range and richness of the Listening Campaign data and are not meant to be an exhaustive representation of peoples' experiences.

- The other son is a sophomore who is self-motivated and gets work done ahead of time – the kind of kid the school seems to really support and be designed for.
- My other son had an IEP coming in. Didn't need a great deal of support but did go to the 1 hour HW support. He does have ADHD and is in a wide group of students who were widely under-supported at Redwood. It wasn't like they were mean – but it was clear they kind of hoped we would go away.
- Nearly every mother I know of a Freshman boy, is being a secretary for their son. The level of responsibility that is expected of them is entirely developmentally inappropriate. Granted, it is a life skill that needs to be learned, but it is stressed here at the exclusion of other skills and they are being penalized for things that aren't related to their grasp of the material.
- It would be better if my son's teacher understood what his issues were better – I've paid for a private therapist to speak to his teacher so she would have some ideas and strategies.
- People backfill with lots of stuff like tutoring and organizational stuff, and we know we need to help, but it was a full time job.
- So many people here are doing tutoring for math, paying for support.
- They need a better system so there is a limit for homework. Each teacher thinks their work is important and they sometimes load the work on. My son is very bright and is a slow processor and will spend forever on HW. Then he gets discouraged. His Math teacher says, the work shouldn't take more than 45 minutes – but what if it does?
- There should be regular student feedback on teachers and course content, and that feedback should be listened to. Teachers give students feedback regularly and it should go both ways.
- I'd like to see all the kids coming into high school retested and then teach to the skill area that they are deficient in. They could do it in the classroom or after school or tutoring, etc. If the kids need something else we should give it to them. The school needs to give them the resources where they need them.
- Make better use of the students' time in required courses. After teaching the general lesson to the class in the last 10-15 minutes instead of allowing the students to waste time chatting, teach more in depth material for the more interested students. None of the students can handle all of the classes being hard, but that doesn't mean that in-depth material can't be lectured or practiced, but not tested. Challenge interested students more with independent reading of real books, not textbooks, from the library.
- After I saw "The Race to Nowhere", I asked my daughter about the time she spends on HW and she said, it wouldn't be too much if we didn't have to think so much! I've seen improvement over the last year and a half, the work is generally very thoughtful about things. They are doing more analyzing and thinking and they could of course do more – I'm glad it's on the mission statement.
- The math department is an issue and that is so critical right now. They just keep moving on and they aren't getting it.

- The teachers need to spend more time and effort with kids who are struggling. There are so many kids who don't have the core competencies in math.
- The pace is nuts. They are doing a year's worth of Algebra in a semester and that works for some kids but other kids are really lost.
- My daughter has HW every single weekend and they should get a break. She has to devote 3-4 hours on Sunday so either her week coming up isn't insane, or she can get caught up. And she is a Freshman.
- The science department is gangbusters – we have top level, college level teachers. They're so organized, so professional. I had a child go on to college and do well in college science courses.
- My son doesn't get the help he needs. I've seen a paper my son got back and he said it was peer edited. I'm all for peer editing, but he's not learning what he needs in writing.
- I have a son who wants to get by, so if the teacher isn't telling him it's not good enough, he won't do any more.
- Redwood does a really good job to tracking their curriculum to the UC system. But one thing that got left out is writing – the actual writing portion isn't a UC approved course.
- The English dept is filled with passionate teachers, the reading choices are really cool, so they're hooking them in, but they don't actually look at the kids' work individually. There's something not connecting
- We have a very strong AP Environmental Science Class, but a class shouldn't be so determined by the teacher. If he leaves, we wouldn't have that class.
- We have weaknesses in the math department. The levels of instruction are very different.
- I've had some math teachers who were not responsive, lost homework routinely, not available to meet with my child, us, with the counselor.
- We had an experience where our student just kept getting further and further behind because the teacher never responded and never responded. By the time we got to see the teacher our child was already failing the course.
- My daughter is a freshman so I really don't know what I think about the school. When I look at the mission statement, and I applaud it – the first word is creative and I don't really see that happening here. I think of project based learning and work that inspires kids, and I don't see that much of it. I see a lot of memorization.
- It is a lot more difficult to keep a kid on track and successful in A-G then it is to track them somewhere else. These are kids that don't have the resources to go on to UC's so they get counseled to COM but because they are working and burning through their financial aid. There needs to be strategic academic counseling for these students every step of the way.

5. Experience of the School Culture and Climate

The responses selected for this category indicate a range of participant perceptions, experiences and ideas related to the school culture and climate. Comments about environment, inclusiveness and personalization are examples of elements included in this school culture and climate section. The comments below are a sampling of the range and richness of the Listening Campaign data and are not meant to be an exhaustive representation of peoples' experience.

- My kid has Aspergers and has trouble with social aspects of school. My son recently told his counselor that he has zero friends. The school doesn't have anything set up to help integrate him into the social aspect of the school.
- I was in shock to find my eldest son had such low grades. I don't know how but he needs more time. I have a 14 year-old girl that is a real bundle. They went to Tam and got really caught up in keeping up with the Jones. She is in a leadership class that requires her to be there by 6:00 and the bus schedule has changed which makes it difficult. There use to be 2 buses and now there is only one.
- It is harder for our kids coming from Marin City going to high school. The other kids are coming from other middle schools and towns that have way more resources and are way ahead.
- The one thing I'd like to see change is I'd like to see more people of color working with the schools. We don't see us. If you don't see anybody or can't communicate then it is difficult to get in.
- If you are at Del Mar you get parent participation. When you come to Marin City you don't get parent participation as much. We don't have the resources that Del Mar has. If you are looking at a child from Marin City in the same way as a Del Mar kid then you are missing the mark. They (Redwood) may look at those kids in the same way that they are already used to.
- There is a whole relational thing that takes supporting kids from a small community to a large community. To support kids with the race issues that exist. To help them be comfortable and confident in class so that they can raise their hand and guide the discussions. That's the stuff that will help them be successful in college. That's the relational side and then there is the technical side.
- My family is from Marin City from the shipyard days. I have a daughter at Redwood and my son went through there. It has been a pretty good experience. My son was a battle from day one and my daughter is different. He barely slid into his cap and gown and Brianna is waiting for her progress report.
- My mother didn't let us say that we couldn't do something because of other factors. She started off at the library reading. I'm a single parent living paycheck to paycheck. The lessons of education were instilled. I'd take my children out to the trails and to the library that was free. It was harder with my son. They had a lot of good support at Redwood but in the end I couldn't make them do their homework.
- The other thing missing is related to health and wellness. We get a lot of absences and if you take a look there is health issues connected. Without a grocery store, our kids eat fast food and then if they have a headache, it is real.
- With regards to my son, he told me that he is the only Filipino at the school. He asked me, "Why do you always put me into a rich white kids school?" I thought it was the best, but now he is slipping. He can't keep up with the kids and friends from middle school who are now going on Europe trips. The worst one is this, that my two other girls that graduated from Redwood, who did really well, but the counselor really pounded the College of Marin, they could have gone anywhere. A lot of parents loved her, but she really hindered my daughter.
- It is really hard being in the minority in this place and our kids come up against some name calling. There are racial things going on. People there don't even want to acknowledge it.

- Cultural education from the top down, from the board of directors, to the superintendent, the principals, the teachers, etc. We need to talk about issues about White Privilege. We need to talk about differences and how they play themselves out across the board.
- It is one thing to say that we live in Marin County, the richest county, and have distinguished schools, but if you look in the schools then you see patterns like the kids of color not going to the UC's like they should. Where did we fall short? Invest some dollars in these kids so that everybody can be successful.
- Actually enforce the ban on freak dancing at school dances. Teach the students the boys that they need to ask the girl to dance (or vice versa) not sneak up behind them.
- We ought to have healthier food choices for the students, an organic salad bar like they have at Drake. Realistically, funding issues aside, if it can happen at Drake, it should happen here too.
- I think there is a serious drug and alcohol issue. My older daughter stopped going to dances and parties, kids would be coming in drunk and stoned despite the restrictions that chaperones were putting on it. I know it is a complicated issue but it is really alienating to a lot of kids.
- This year we offered a program about being adept at recognizing alcohol and drug use. We had the support of admin to publicize it widely, and emails went out to all of the parents and we offered pizza to lure students there and we had very few people show up. In contrast – we hosted a College Fair, poorly publicized, and 400 students and parents showed up – that's what people care about in this community.
- My daughter experienced a culture of hazing when she came to this school. There was throwing of food, calling them Fresh-meat. There's a very strong culture of this is senior territory, this is junior... Maybe that's a part of the culture?