



Tamalpais Union High School District

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

November 16, 2011

Presented by:



**NATIONAL
EQUITY
PROJECT**

Summary of Findings: Tamalpais 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.

- What's missing is mentorship. There's too many kids, not enough teachers. Students are overwhelmed. I've seen the spark return to my son who's now a junior, and it's because of the tutoring – that I'm paying for. The teachers are overwhelmed.
- They're doing the core subjects as a way to better communicate among teachers, but my daughter had 6 projects due on the same day. I don't think the teachers had communicated, so I don't know if that's working.
- All the things we know about kids needing to sleep – why don't we move the start time to ½ hour later? We know it and we have to do something about that.
- Maybe they don't get as much homework, but community service is built into the curriculum. I think that kind of hands on work is so much more beneficial.
- We've had a lot of data – about sleep, privilege, homework – we know what to do, but the school is so overwhelmed they're not doing anything.
- I like that the library is open until 7pm and there's people there to help them.
- I think the freshmen are confused about tutorial, about how to get to the teachers and get help.
- New Core program (freshman and sophomore) is a disappointment...weak teacher two years in row
- Inconsistency from teacher to teacher in terms of curriculum, rigor and grading within the subject
- Embedded honors in regular classes is not working for my student

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.

- I did notice that teachers reach out at Tam. I like that I can follow up on her progress on-line. There are a lot of parents in this community that don't have access to technology so that doesn't work for everyone. A lot of teachers don't pick up the phone for many days at time.
- If the district could use texting about important meetings that might help to get more parents to come out. Everyone has a cell phone.
- How many people use the website? (about 4 raise their hands) It could be a lot better. It's not so easy to get information. Maybe some of us parents could get together – put an icon on there that's just for parents and give access to information. Here's what you need to know about freshman year... Here's what you need to know about sophomore year...
- I use the Tam website all the time and I think it's a great tool for parents and the kids, however I'd like the teachers have their websites up to date. Some teachers don't have anything on there.
- We want to see all teachers using Home Access, posting grades, assignments – and we need to see the homework. It shouldn't be optional.
- I don't know as a parent how well the school communicates with me. I think they communicate to students, but not to parents.
- My daughter is A.D.D. and it is difficult to consistently get the homework assignments for all her classes
- Want a centralized homework place for posting homework and it should be required

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.

- Link Crew is great! I'd love to see an adult version!
- I wish there were a way to encourage more parent involvement. Maybe in the administrative office, or in the classrooms. Whatever it is, I think it would be beneficial for the school.
- It seems like in grammar school they're desperate for parent involvement and it gets less and less through middle school and high school.
- We need to have parent discussion groups like the one that formed for the listening campaign
- Because I couldn't read, it made it so difficult to do well in school. Teachers need to learn how to deal with that kind of issue. My kids come back from school and say my teachers don't pay attention to me. Pride as parents makes it difficult to help our kids at times. I knew when they were in 9th grade I couldn't help them anymore. That was hard to deal with.

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 kids are not ready for English, Science and Math because there has been a breakdown here (Marin City). The kids are smart, but if you don't give them the information they go into shock in the high school. There is a breakdown from 8th to 9th grade. I'd like to speak someone at Tam to see if there can be tutors to help our kids get ready for high school.
- There's been a long-term history of our kids (Marin City) coming into Tam unprepared. Tam then treats those children as basically that they don't exist. I don't see the support of programs that will help them have success. If you have the support you can do a quick catch up. Somehow there is a sort of "Those Kids" attitude. There seems to be a path to get into the criminal justice system. They get referred to the County school and then they are already in the system.
- Giving the kids the message that they are going to college no matter what it really helps them stay on track.
- My daughter is a sophomore here. She can't take an advanced math class because we can't afford a tutor.
- My older son was very enthusiastic, being surrounded by other highly motivated students. But in the embedded classes, I don't think the kids like it either, the other kids wonder why they're not getting the honors credit for doing the same work.
- My daughter is a freshman in college now and was very well prepared for college – her college English class is easy for her (she took both AP Comp and Ap Lit).
- Can there be criteria about effective homework and what's busy work? There's stuff that doesn't need to be done!
- My boys were not academically inclined, but there's an environment here. The kids want to learn and get into honors, and that's inspired my boys. That's what's great about this school.
- I have been unhappy with the new "core program" where freshmen and sophomores have the same English and History teachers for 2 years. The idea is great if you have good teachers.
- I'm noticing that my son might make good grades but if he had to solve a real life problem, he wouldn't be able to do it, the common sense math. He can do all the equations, but has no critical thinking (pointing to mission statement).
- The school has helped my student to think critically and the over-all experience has been great
- Great school for independent learners and self-motivated...great programs for them
- My student has A.D.D. and the school has been responsive to his needs...teachers stays in touch with me..."there is a bit of a safety net"
- I think the math department only works for the students who excel in math...the other kids just have to get by with one time lectures and no real teaching of the concept.
- There's an organization issue with boys specifically.

- Something I've observed is the inequity of the teachers' programs - for example two different AP Lit classes can be vastly different in terms of difficulty, reading materials, etc. There should be more coordination across the classes, without giving up teacher individuality.
- Since Denise Pope came last year to talk about stressed out students, I've noticed that the school has tried to keep the pressure minimal as much as possible for the students (less homework).

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 daughter can't stand coming in the classroom with disrespectful interactions, how students talk to teachers, some of the language teachers use with students.
- The other feedback I get that concerns me is how kids are able to consume drugs and alcohol during lunch. My daughter explained she got a C on her presentation because her partner was high. What about the teacher? I think they ignore this because it always happens. I wonder if it's a cultural issue.
- I think if you have a child who has interests outside of academia there are a lot of choices here. There are a lot of clubs, you can start your own clubs. There's drama, ceramics – beautiful alternatives for students who didn't match the traditional academic model. I feel like there's room for everyone. My daughter has been so happy here.
- The level of tolerance for people who are different is inspiring. For different races, for artsy types, for gays – that's really special here. When your freshman boy comes home and says, "There's a place for everyone here," that's reassuring.
- Culture of drugs and alcohol is too widely accepted...the messages to students is inconsistent.