



# **Tamalpais Union High School District**

## **Listening Campaign Report Summary of Findings Based on Family Interviews Tamiscal High School**

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**Presented by:**



**NATIONAL  
EQUITY  
PROJECT**

## Summary of Findings: Tamiscal 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.

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- It is great that the district has this school. It is a really important alternative for kids who are bright and not in trouble but don't thrive in a traditional setting, so rather than waiting until they do get into trouble – it is nice that there is an 'in between' school. I think the school meets the goals of this mission.
- One thing I would change is that they don't have a senior science class – there is a class on line. They don't have Chemistry and my daughter really likes math and science- it is too bad. I feel blessed that she got everything else and she could take a Science at Tam or Redwood, but it would be nice to be here.
- They need to have mentorships (apprenticing) or internships instead of college courses. They need electives.
- The Education plan is individualized. I'm getting that the contract is gone over every week and it can be revised and updated and that's really good.

## 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.

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- Close communication with teachers is wonderful for my daughter.
- I'm still not sure of how the electronic communication works, but I'd like to understand that more and for there to be more of it.
- We have a senior and a junior that have been here since freshman year. I can see Moodle will be an extra help. It will bring clarity around what's expected.
- Moodle is muddled.
- The teachers communicate with the parents and are accessible to the parents and students.

### 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.

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- First day of school the principal knew all of our names and it meant so much, I think we really matter as people.
- Teachers are uniformly clear, kind, and competent.

#### 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.

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- Teachers can pull the information out of the students to make sure the child really understands what is going on. The questions they give the kids to work on are really nice high level questions and teachers support the child when they don't understand, they give them a lot of support.
- My daughter is a good student and was totally uninspired by Redwood and disengaged. It didn't match her learning style or her pace. She would have dropped out and gone to COM if she hadn't transferred here. She felt the kids don't really want to be there at Redwood and at college the students do. She didn't like the way the work was structured – lots of little meaningless assignments and she didn't really have a chance to think. She went to a Montessori school before high School so Redwood was a real shift for her. This school seems like it is a move back in that direction.
- This school has been positive – her passion for learning is back.
- Her time management skills are being honed and challenged which we love.
- Not just the relationship with teachers. Our daughter wouldn't usually speak up in class, but with smaller class size speaks up more.
- Doesn't work for everyone – you have to be self-disciplined.
- I knew this was the perfect place – they cut out the busy work, and get to learning. He's already really a learner. He just has to deal with the time management part. Missing the social part is unfortunate in some ways.
- My son was able to take resource here, but now he has to go to Redwood for that and he was trying to avoid the big school. He has dyslexia and processing issues – he misses social cues, that's been a part of his challenge.

## 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.

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- People here are really supportive and my daughter feels connected.
- There is some comparison by other students that there is something wrong with kids who go here or they aren't smart but that isn't true.
- This school saved my daughters life. She was always a really smart student and in May she said she was depressed. She was so stressed out and couldn't cope. Even though she's missed a lot of school – it's a year and a half later and they really brought her in and sent her work and it has been great. She was going to try this school for just a year but it has really worked out. She is still really learning a lot. You have to be independent and really focused – not everyone can do it.
- My daughter's experience at Tam High was that students weren't there to learn but were there to show off who they were and what they had – she called them the "plastic people". She had some great teachers and counselor who cared about her deeply and went out of their way to try to accommodate her. She was bullied and there was a real tolerance of that – that bullying was OK and there wasn't anything to be done about it. She needed to change - she did all of the research about the program here and it is great. She feels really empowered.
- First day of school the principal knew all of our names and it meant so much, I think we really matter as people.
- They'll come here when there's not class, to study and be with other students. It's an excellent environment.
- If it wasn't for this school my son wouldn't be able to graduate. He didn't want to deal with a large school, being bullied. Had the chance to work independently and keep on with his music.

