

VI. Conclusion and Next Steps

As measured by objective statistics—including STAR test results, API scores, and teacher retention rates—Hillcrest School is one of the OUSD’s finest institutions. The school scores equally high on subjective measures, such as the range and quality of its enrichment offerings; the degree of parent participation; the general satisfaction level of students and teachers; and the extended school population’s overall sense of community and belonging. As a thriving school, Hillcrest is joined by other Hills schools that also have stellar test scores and wonderful enrichment programs, such as Chabot, Kaiser, Thornhill, Joaquin Miller, Montclair and others. Hillcrest is a rarity, however, in offering a K-8 educational model in a district that is almost exclusively comprised of separate K-5, middle, and high schools.

Not surprisingly, these attributes make Hillcrest tremendously attractive to parents who support public education and who want an excellent academic and social experience for their child or children.

Two factors that have been key in facilitating Hillcrest’s success are its small overall student population, and the school principal’s continuous and rigorous attempts to maintain individual class sizes within the limits prescribed by Class Size Reduction provisions. The small school model allows every teacher and administrator to better know every student, while limited class sizes facilitate greater individualized learning and support teachers’ desires to teach both “to the test” as well as creatively, following students’ leads, putting their own areas of expertise to the best possible use, and igniting new interests in their pupils.

Forcing Hillcrest to attempt to absorb more students than it has capacity for will simply result in the loss of the very qualities that make the school exceptional. The physical campus, which was significantly improved with the addition of a new building and updated playground fixtures in 2006, cannot be any further extended to accommodate larger class groups. As it is, it’s expected that the science lab will be repurposed by 2008-2009 to create another classroom; within the last year, the only remaining portable on the campus (which had housed a variety of enrichment programs) was updated to serve as a dedicated classroom for a K-1 group.

In short, immediate action must be taken to circumscribe near- and long-term future enrollment at the school, while making thoughtful plans to otherwise accommodate students who cannot be admitted to Hillcrest. In addition, potential parents throughout the area should be offered accurate information about Hillcrest’s enrollment situation and OUSD’s plans for the school.

To further these goals, the LRPC intends to move forward with these Next Steps:

- Establish outreach to LRPC committees at Chabot, Kaiser, and other neighboring schools in hopes of working collaboratively to address enrollment issues affecting schools throughout the Hills neighborhoods.

- Institutionalize the LRPC to continue to work with the community, parents, teachers, and the OUSD. In particular, continue to communicate with the OUSD as it develops policy regarding involuntarily redirected students.
- Identify an individual or council who will be responsible for running the school population model every year.
- Explain Hillcrest's enrollment situation to local realtors so that they can communicate accurate information to potential home-buyers looking at properties in the attendance area.