

V-C. Results of the Best Practices Subcommittee

1. Scope of Assignment

The Best Practices Subcommittee was charged with examining a) other districts' approaches to managing enrollment, specifically at overenrolled schools, b) other districts' management of communications to incoming kindergarten families about enrollment processes, particularly the possibility that their children may be diverted to schools other than their primary attendance-area school, and c) the pros and cons of the K-8 educational model.

2. Methodology

The Best Practices Subcommittee investigated a number of solutions adopted by school systems faced with situations similar to that at Hillcrest and other nearby Hills schools in the OUSD. We surveyed both larger and smaller school districts within and outside of California. We spoke directly with school representatives, administrators, and parents. Ultimately, the subcommittee investigated the following approaches to dealing with overenrolled schools: Redrawing Attendance-Area Boundary Lines; Multi-Track Year-Round Schooling; Redirection/Diversion; Increasing Hillcrest's Physical Capacity Off-Site.

The subcommittee discussed ways that other districts have communicated limited enrollment capacity to potential incoming kindergarten families and how redirection was accomplished. LRPC members conducted research on the Internet and conducted interviews and conversations with relevant OUSD administrators regarding how other school districts allocate space. Information on the policies and communications of the following districts are included below: Oakland (enrollment and redirection information currently provided by OUSD); San Ramon Valley Unified School District; Clarkston School District; San Jose School District; Irvine School District; and Alameda Unified School District.

3. Data and Analysis

a. Approaches to Dealing with Overenrolled Schools

There are three basic approaches for addressing excess demand in school districts. These are redrawing attendance-area boundaries, adopting a year-round schedule, and redirection/diversion. The approach adopted in any given district appears to be based on the particulars of the local situation.

(i) Redrawing attendance-area boundaries

Most school districts include on their websites a copy of their policies and regulations. In virtually every one of the districts examined, written policies state that the district will adjust the geographic boundaries of school attendance areas from time to time; many say boundaries are continually under review. Where there is a long term/permanent increase in demand within a

particular section of a district but there is capacity elsewhere within the district, redrawing school boundaries seems to be the most commonly utilized solution.

Adjusting boundaries brings controversy, as it changes whether a group of houses remains in a current attendance area or is shifted. In addition, boundary adjustments necessitate addressing whether siblings of students already in a particular school will be allowed—or given priority—to attend the same school as their siblings despite their home having been reassigned to a new attendance area.²⁴

In conducting its research, the Best Practices Subcommittee learned that OUSD will be investigating boundary adjustments prior to the open enrollment period for the 2008-2009 school year. While the scope of the anticipated adjustments is not known to the LRPC, this seems like a reasonable opportunity to at least consider boundary adjustments for Hillcrest, given the past three years of overenrollment and the survey results showing that this trend will continue or increase.

Redrawing the lines of the Hillcrest attendance area will impact other schools in the North Oakland region. For example, if the Hillcrest attendance area shrinks and the houses that are shifted out of it are shifted into the attendance areas of Chabot, Kaiser, Montclair, or Thornhill, this change might affect those other schools' ability to accept intradistrict transfers.²⁵ Redrawing Hillcrest's boundaries would mean redrawing the boundaries of neighboring schools' attendance areas as well. However, if schools that have been accepting intradistrict transfers for the past several years would be the "receiving schools" for former Hillcrest houses, the impact and need to redraw lines for other attendance areas beyond those that directly share boundaries with Hillcrest could be eliminated or minimized. OUSD data implies that this would be the case with several nearby schools. The LRPC did not have complete data on the historical experience of other nearby schools, but understands that some of these have space while others are nearly completely filled with attendance-area residents (and/or Options transfers) in every kindergarten class.

Regardless of where attendance-area lines are drawn, it is important that any adjustments be well planned and take into account the needs and capacities of all the schools in the district. Considering the available space at nearby schools, this appears a viable solution to the burgeoning enrollment at the hills schools.

24 Current OUSD policy states that once a student is enrolled in a particular school, he or she may remain there even if his or her home address changes. ("Once enrolled, a student shall not be required to apply for readmission." Administrative Regulation 5116.1 - Intradistrict Open Enrollment)

Current OUSD policy does not, however, address the issue of grandfathering siblings after boundary adjustments. OUSD staff reported to LRPC members at in-person meeting in October 2007 that they are examining these kinds of policy issues, but were not yet prepared to make categorical statements regarding future policy. For the full text of the specific questions on grandfathering that the LRPC initially posed to OUSD via email, see Appendix G.

25 Data supplied by the OUSD to the LRPC in October shows that several of these schools had the capacity in 2007 to take in a large number of intradistrict transfers. For more detail on these numbers, see Appendix E.

(ii) Multi-track year-round schooling

The other option that is adopted to address school overcrowding is multi-track year-round schooling (YRS). Under YRS, students are assigned to “tracks,” with each track having a separate attendance schedule. In a three-track schedule, for example, the student population would be divided into thirds, with only two tracks actually attending school at any given time. A typical schedule would be 45-15 in which students are in school for nine weeks at a time, and then have three weeks off. So, for example, Track 1 would attend for nine weeks and then “track out.” The idea that was analyzed by the Best Practices Subcommittee was phasing in a YRS schedule for kindergarteners starting in 2008 or 2009 and adding more grade bands with each subsequent year.

(a) Pros and cons of YRS

There is a great deal of literature on YRS. The web is populated with information from groups that strongly support or strongly oppose it. These groups are selective in the information they advance in their cause. Below are some observations on the pros and cons that have been gleaned from the literature.

YRS has the potential to add capacity to an existing school. The biggest advantage of YRS is that it allows a greater number of students to be served in a given physical space. The literature suggests, however, that YRS only has the potential to add space at schools of a certain minimum size. In other words, there need to be at least five classes per grade level for a school to be able to gain capacity.²⁶ Hillcrest does not have five classes per grade. The physical space currently includes twelve classrooms, plus a multipurpose art/music/breakout room (currently being used as a classroom), and a shared science lab that this report indicates will likely soon be used as a dedicated classroom. At twelve, thirteen, or even fourteen classrooms, it may be a significant challenge (if not impossible) to develop a YRS approach that would increase Hillcrest’s capacity. In addition, the YRS approach appears to be adopted more often where there is a lack of capacity *in a district overall*. Because OUSD has experience with year-round school schedules, the LRPC hopes the district can conduct an analysis to see if YRS could in fact be used to increase Hillcrest’s capacity.

Academic case for YRS. The academic argument for YRS rests on combating the “summer slump,” in which students lose academic ground during the summer and require significant review at the beginning of each school year. YRS supporters suggest that this is particularly important for low-achieving students. YRS detractors argue that the start-and-stop effect of YRS, with short periods of instruction followed by periods of academic inactivity, works in the opposite manner. Evidence to support either position is inconclusive.

Costs. Both supporters of YRS and supporters of traditional calendars cite cost-efficiency to support their viewpoints. YRS supporters cite more efficient use of space and labor. Traditional calendar supporters cite additional administrative and labor costs as well as the

²⁶ http://www.wcpss.net/year-round/capacity_gain.html

facility maintenance costs and inability to conduct longer-term maintenance that is normally done during a summer break and now must be paid for as overtime.

Moving Classrooms. A common characteristic of YRS is that teachers and children must move classrooms at the end of each period. Supporters of the traditional school calendar see this as disruptive, especially to younger children. The Hillcrest principal and one teacher indicated to the LRPC their belief that 50% of teaching young children is the classroom environment, and that the structure of the room is extremely important to making children feel safe, enabling them to take risks in their learning.

Scheduling and Childcare. The year-round model shifts the times of the year when students are not in school. This has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, it allows families to vacation outside the traditional summer period, which may reduce vacation costs or provide other advantages. On the negative side, there may be difficult in obtaining childcare during the 3-4 weeks that a child is off-track, particularly if other children in a family are on-track or on a traditional school calendar. Also, students may not be able to attend summer camps or participate in enrichment activities (like music, sports teams, etc.) that occur while they are off-track. At the elementary school level however, the latter could probably be worked around since sports teams are not as prevalent. In addition, creative childcare solutions could be developed.

Teacher Perspective. Some teachers indicate that they like the year-round model while others do not. One result of YRS is that teachers who depend on income earned during the summer would no longer be available to work separate summer jobs. Although there was an initial indication of concern about this aspect of YRS from one Hillcrest teacher, the general perspective of Hillcrest teachers as a group is not known at this time. It would be a significant concern to the LRPC—and very likely to the broader Hillcrest community—if the majority of teachers would be against YRS, because Hillcrest’s teachers are intrinsic to the school’s success.

(b) Applying a YRS schedule to Hillcrest

Members of the LRPC did an initial analysis to see if, and how, a YRS approach could work at Hillcrest. The following spreadsheet represents this analysis; but it is not the only way that tracking could be accomplished.

Class	Track	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Total Days
K	A	20	20	20	off	20	20	20	Off	20	20	20	off	180
K	B	off	20	20	20	off	20	20	20	off	20	20	20	180
K/1 Split	C	20	off	20	20	20	off	20	20	20	off	20	20	180
1	D	20	20	off	20	20	20	off	20	20	20	off	20	180
1	E	off	20	20	20	off	20	20	20	off	20	20	20	180
	Tot. Pupils	60	80	80	80	60	80	80	80	60	80	80	80	

This example shows how YRS accommodates 50 kindergarteners and 50 1st graders (distributed in two K classes of 20 students each, two grade 1s of 20 students each, and one K-1 split with 20 students total) in four classrooms, year-round, for a total of 180 class days per student per calendar year.

Most research on YRS states that five classrooms per grade are generally required in order to see any meaningful increase in school capacity by moving to a YRS schedule. However, the website www.wcpss.net/year-round/capacity_gain.html, which outlines Wake County's approach to YRS, shows some very modest capacity gain if a school can provide three classes per grade. In general, a set of three classrooms can be used by four different classes. Space utilization is most efficient when the available number of classrooms is a multiple of three, in which case one can in principle accommodate 33% more attendees through YRS. It is possible that different configurations could increase capacity, but these would need to be the subject of further exploration.

However, in a school of Hillcrest's size and with its current inequitable distribution of students (the total current population of 318 is heavily front-loaded, with some 150 children in the grades K-2), it isn't clear how one could smoothly phase in YRS through the grade bands to achieve a long-term sustainable YRS. Hillcrest would not be able to dedicate three classrooms to each grade band.

We recommend simply that the OUSD evaluate the feasibility of initiating YRS at Hillcrest. Items needing evaluation include the logistics of how classes would move throughout the school year, the nature of a phase-in schedule, and the overall implications of instituting a YRS program. Any investigation would also have to examine the attitudes of Hillcrest staff, faculty, administration, parents, and the overall community toward such an approach.

(iii) Redirection and diversion

The most common approach to solving overenrollment seen during web research is the adoption of space limits and redirection policies. Some districts maintain, and publicize, lists of schools that are closed to intradistrict transfers, as well as lists of schools where redirection is distinct possibility for potential applicants. The manner in which this is done is discussed in more detail in Section b., below.

(iv) Increased Hillcrest physical capacity off-site

Another option would be to use what appears to be underutilized space within OUSD buildings that are located close to Hillcrest. These could be used to split the Hillcrest campus if they were available. The Far West campus may be one example.

b. Communications and Space Allocation/Redirection Policies

Many school districts locally and nationwide use redirection as a way of managing overenrollment at a given school or set of schools. It is helpful to understand how these schools communicate to families that space may not be available at a particular school, and also how

they decide what happens when space is not available. The subcommittee explored the current OUSD approach to communication and space allocation/redirection policies, and the entire LRPC discussed this issue with district staff at an LRPC meeting in August. Findings of that research and discussions are below.

(i) Information currently provided by, and policies of, OUSD

Currently, parents can obtain information on the enrollment process by calling an OUSD school, calling the OUSD assignment office, visiting the OUSD website, visiting the websites of individual schools, or by attending the annual Enrollment Options fair. Prior to the institution of the open enrollment Options program, enrollment was handled at the school, rather than the district, level; and the school had the ability to limit enrollment directly when a particular grade was oversubscribed.

The OUSD website offers the following information on enrollment priorities.²⁷

How will assignments be determined?

If schools have space, everyone who applies attends that school.

If there are more applicants than spaces, a priority system will determine admissions (see below):

First priority - *Neighborhood (students who live in the neighborhood boundary of a school; see mapstacker.ousd.k12.ca.us for your neighborhood school).*

Second priority - *Sibling (students who have an older sibling living at the same address who is already attending the applicant's first choice school and will be continuing at that school in the Fall of 2006).*

Third priority - *Program Improvement neighborhood (students who live in a neighborhood where the local school[s] is[are] Program Improvement school[s]).*

Fourth priority - *Open lottery.*

Parents can identify their neighborhood school through the OUSD's online School Finder tool. However, the tool does not tell parents whether their identified school may be overenrolled, and there is no indication on the Options program portion of the OUSD website of which schools are closed to intradistrict transfers. The assignment policy reprinted above is predicated on the assumption that there is always space at a school to accommodate all students within a particular attendance area. This message was also evident in a December 2006 letter from State Administrator Kimberly Statham to parents and caregivers, in which she stated: "Families will continue to have first priority to attend their neighborhood schools. Students who want to attend a non-neighborhood school where a sibling is already enrolled will have second priority. After that, students who live in a neighborhood where all options are "program improvement" schools will be given priority. After these priorities, a lottery will be held for remaining spots." The letter did not specify a policy for students who live in an attendance area where the demand for school enrollment exceeds the supply of available spaces.

²⁷ enroll.ousd.k12.ca.us/

The LRPC was informed by OUSD staff that as a matter of practice, when a school is overenrolled, OUSD attempts to divert to the next closest school that has space available, taking into account that school's attendance-area enrollment. This statement is consistent with the approach that OUSD took in redirecting students who were not originally allotted space at Hillcrest for 2007-2008; these prospective students were redirected, in two groups, to either Chabot or Kaiser Elementary. As discussed below, other districts take a similar approach to that OUSD has implemented in practice but have included this more explicitly in their written materials and on their websites.

The OUSD website also indicates the following:

Seats will be saved during the initial application window for families moving into the neighborhood of a school after the initial Options process. Families will also be able to select from seats that remain available in schools outside of their neighborhood on a space available basis (taking into account that some seats are reserved for neighborhood applicants).

This practice has not been followed at Hillcrest for the past several years because the demand during the enrollment period was greater than the number of spaces available at the school.

In the explanation of the Options program, OUSD's website states the following:

Learn about your Options.

- *Read the descriptions of the [Elementary School Options](#) to learn about all of the elementary school programs that Oakland has to offer (a brochure with a map will available in January of 2007).*
- *Attend the Oakland School Options Fair on January 11, 2007 anytime between 9a.m. and 8p.m. at the Oakland Marriott City Center (1001 Broadway).*
- *Attend the Elementary School Open Houses at the schools you are interested in selecting (contact the schools directly for times, dates, and locations).*

The "Elementary School Options" link directs readers to a listing of all schools in the district, with a description of each. This part of the website does not indicate whether a school is closed to transfers or subject to potential redirection due to overenrollment.

While OUSD's enrollment options overview form²⁸ does not indicate that there are schools within the district for which even neighborhood students may not be admitted, the enrollment application form does contain the following statement: "Students may not be assigned to any of the schools selected due to limited space availability."²⁹ It further requires the parent to sign a statement that includes the following statement: "I also understand that this is only an application and that my student may or may not be assigned to one of my selected schools."

28 enroll.ousd.k12.ca.us/forms/Overview%20options%2012.12.06.pdf

29 enroll.ousd.k12.ca.us/forms/Universal%20Options%20application%2020072008%20HLS%20altered%20_12.8.06_.pdf

(ii) Analysis of other districts' approaches

School districts use a variety of means to communicate their admission and redirection policies in the event that they have overenrolled schools. Web research conducted by this subcommittee and other members of the LRPC identified lotteries and redirection of students to nearby schools as the most commonly applied method of addressing overenrollment in districts across the US. (Other methods used are “first come, first served” policies requiring parents to literally stand in line to secure a spot for their children.) Web searches on the topic of school lotteries produce thousands of hits, often for newspaper articles about the pros, cons, and outcomes of lotteries. There is limited information of a scholarly nature available on the topic.

Some observations from web research are as follows:

- **Lotteries can be contentious.** Because they are random, lotteries can lead to assertions that the process was unfair, or that one student or another was admitted to the school “outside” the lottery process.
- **Effecting transparency is challenging.** Because of the issue of contentiousness, some schools abandon sophisticated computer-based systems in favor of highly transparent processes such as pulling utility bills from a hat, or having applying families conduct the lottery themselves.
- **Redirection/diversion policies must be impeccably clear.** Representatives of other local districts that use lotteries emphasized the need for very clear policies on the process of the lottery as well as the ancillary diversion policy. The most common diversion policy is to give involuntarily diverted families priority in choosing to attend their next geographically closest school.

(a) San Ramon Valley School District

With respect to communication and space allocation, one school district that was cited as having a clear enrollment policy that helps address parent expectations of guaranteed enrollment in neighborhood schools is that of the San Ramon Valley (SRV) Unified School District. Specifically, the SRV documents are very clear that ***redirection may occur***, and they establish a clear policy regarding the priorities for students who are diverted from their neighborhood school.

The SRV policy states:

Assignment of students to schools is conducted according to Board of Education established attendance boundaries, which have incorporated available classroom space and long-range planning needs of the District.

Students who are residents of the District shall be enrolled according to a prioritized sequence subject to the availability of space in the schools.

The parents or guardians of each school-age child who is a resident in the district may select the school the child shall attend, irrespective of the particular location of the parents' or guardians' residence within the district, subject to the following priorities:

Priority A - Students who reside within the attendance area of a district school.

Priority B - Students who are diverted to other than resident schools.

Priority C - Students for whom changes in school assignment are requested through the intradistrict transfer process.

Definitions:

Resident School The school, which a student would attend, based on his/her home address and the established district boundaries in the attendance area directory.

Diversion The procedure for assigning students to schools other than their resident school due to lack of space in their grade level.

School of Attendance The school in which a student is presently enrolled.

Intradistrict Transfer Transfer from resident school to another school within the SRVUSD boundaries.

The above policy clearly sets guidelines about diversion to other schools and gives diverted students priority over intradistrict transfer requests in selecting a second-choice school. In addition, the SRV District includes the following policy that applies when a family moves out of the attendance area but remains within the district.

- ***Students Moving to Another Attendance Area Within the District***

*Students who move to another attendance area within the district during the school year may remain at their current school of attendance for the remainder of the school year. Should they desire to remain at that school in succeeding years **they must do so by the intradistrict transfer procedure on a space available basis.***

In addition, the materials distributed to incoming families by the SRV District regarding enrollment are clear that diversion may occur.

This is different from OUSD policy, which is as follows:

Once enrolled, a student shall not be required to apply for readmission. Administrative Regulation 5116.1 - Intradistrict Open Enrollment

(b) Clarkston School District

Another example of an enrollment diversion policy is the following in which students are actually transferred out of a school to bring class sizes back down when an overenrollment situation has occurred. This is the policy of the Clarkston School District in Washington State.³⁰

30 www.csdk12.org/BoardPolicies/Content/3000-Students.pdf

DISTRICT ATTENDANCE AREAS

The board of directors shall annually review the geographic attendance areas designated for each building in the district. As population and enrollment shifts within the district, changes in attendance areas or transfer of students may become necessary. By mid-May of each school year, the next year's estimated enrollment should be forecast for each attendance area. Students shall attend the school designated for their respective residential areas unless individual requests for transfers have been approved according to Policy 3131.

In those cases where estimated enrollments substantially exceed class size guidelines, student transfers shall be proposed in order to operate an effective and efficient educational program during the following year. The following factors shall be considered when the district develops attendance area boundaries and considers student transfers:

- A. Minimizing disruption of students' established learning programs.*
- B. Maintaining established neighborhood groupings.*
- C. Keeping siblings in the same elementary school.*
- D. Maintaining relationship with a middle school and/or high school attendance area.*
- E. Adjusting class loads to available space.*
- F. Coordinating transportation routes with attendance areas.*

Prior to the implementation of any planned transfer of students, parents of students involved in such planned transfer shall be invited to a meeting at which the planned change shall be explained and discussed. An orientation to the new school shall be arranged for transferred students. The district reserves the right to base final decisions on the needs of all schools in the district. When fall enrollments in an attendance area substantially exceed class size guidelines, students may be required to attend a school in another attendance area.

(c) San Jose Unified School District

The San Jose Unified School District (SJUSD) website also contains explicit information on how decisions are made as to which students are redirected to other schools in the district when an overenrollment situation occurs. <http://www.sjUSD.org/school/district/info/C215>. It states in pertinent part:

Students will be redirected to their other-than-first-choice-school on a random basis by a computer. Students who are redirected will be placed on a wait list for their first-choice school. This wait list will also be produced by a computer random process. These names will be added below those already on the wait list. After the Initial Enrollment Process, students will be enrolled or wait listed on a space-available, first-come, first-served basis.

...

Elementary Wait List: *When space is not available at the attendance boundary school the student is placed on the wait list for that school. Parents will be notified once space becomes available for the student to be transferred to the attendance boundary school. A student must be enrolled in San Jose Unified School District in order to be placed on a wait list.*

(d) Irvine Unified School District

The Irvine Unified School District (IUSD) maintains a list of “closed schools” on its website and states clearly that 5% of school capacity is reserved for students who may move into an attendance area during a school year or to accommodate redirection from Irvine schools that are overenrolled. Students at overenrolled schools are transferred to other district schools. <http://www.iusd.org/enrollment/EnrollmentRestrictions-0708.html>. This website also designates "referral schools" which apparently indicate to parents seeking enrollment for their children the school to which a student would be redirected if their attendance boundary school is overenrolled.

(e) Alameda Unified School District

The closest (geographic) example of a school district also dealing with overenrollment issues at certain of its schools is the Alameda Unified School District. Unlike other districts that have historically used a lottery type of approach to allocating a limited school facility resource, the Alameda district has operated on a “first come, first served” basis. Under this approach, which remains in effect in Alameda at the time of publication of the LRPC report, parents return enrollment packets to their neighborhood school on a ‘First Come, First Served’ basis on the first day announced for submitting enrollment packets. Under this current process, siblings have seventh priority for enrolling students. Alameda has noted that as a result of this policy, some parents may spend a long time standing in line in order to be among the first to enroll their children at their neighborhood school. The wait times have anecdotally been reported to be several days, with parents camped out in front of their neighborhood school to obtain admission for their child. Some Alameda schools are very sought after and do not have enough capacity to serve all children within the attendance boundary, much like Hillcrest. Recognizing the potential for inequities that the current policy creates, the Alameda district has now proposed a new enrollment approach to address schools that cannot accommodate all neighborhood children. The proposed policy is:

*Each year during the month of January, a two-week initial enrollment period (Kindergarten Round-Up) will be held. If after the initial two week period there are more students than available spaces, first enrollment priority will be given to siblings of currently enrolled students living in the zone of attendance that have returned a completed application within the two week period. The remaining students will be assigned enrollment priority numbers through a random drawing. These students will then be enrolled until all spaces are filled. The remaining students will also be provisionally enrolled, and given a notice that they may be placed at a different school. Depending on how many students a school is over capacity, the district may open an additional class at the school, or divert these students to neighboring schools. This reassignment may take place at any time between May 1st and the 20th day of the new school year. **Note: Any random drawing would only include residents of the neighborhood school.***

AUSD³¹ further offers the following clear guidelines as proposed enrollment priorities:

Proposed student enrollment priorities

The district has a policy and practice of promoting neighborhood schools. It plans to use nine priority criteria when making decisions about when students may be enrolled in a particular school:

- (1) Children living within the attendance boundaries of a particular school.*
- (2) Students moved involuntarily from an over-capacity school.*
- (3) Siblings of students already attending a specific school.*
- (4) Fourth priority is given to parents at Title I schools in program improvement who wish to transfer their students to a higher performing school.*
- (5) Students who are victims of violent crimes or whose neighborhood school is designated as "persistently dangerous." (No AUSD schools are designated as "persistently dangerous." Ed. Code requires this statement.)*
- (6) Students approved under the district's open enrollment program (based on space available).*
- (7) Children of district employees living outside of Alameda.*
- (8) Children of people living outside of Alameda who are employed within the City of Alameda.*
- (9) Students requesting transfers into AUSD from other school districts.*

c. Relative Merits of the K-8 Educational Model

One characteristic of Hillcrest that attracts many families is its K-8 educational model. The following section provides background information on K-8 schools.

³¹ www.alameda.k12.ca.us/education/components/whatsnew/default.php?sectiondetailid=22800&sc_id=1189872462

There are many reasons cited for the adoption of K-8 models:

Dissatisfaction with Middle and Junior High Schools. Many parents are dissatisfied with the quality of education provided within the traditional models on academic and social grounds.

Desire to Improve Academic Performance. K-8 school models are adopted in an effort to increase academic performance. How this is accomplished is unclear.

Decrease negative behavior. K-8 schools are credited with reducing negative individual and group behavior patterns believed to be common at stand-alone middle schools.

Choice. The school choice movement posits that schools improve when they compete against one another and when parents have a range of options to choose from. K-8 models are being offered as a way of providing increased choice to parents.

Parental Involvement. Parental involvement, which generally goes down as students progress through a school system, has consistently been linked to school success. Middle, junior, and high schools overall have lower levels of parental involvement than do elementary schools. K-8 schools are believed to provide a mechanism for greater parental involvement in grades 6-8.

Reduced Transitions. Research is quite straightforward on the point that transitions from one school setting to another are disruptive and carry risks. The risks include drops in academic performance, social disruption or isolation, and an increase in problem behaviors. Thus, reducing the number of transitions students have in their school careers is desirable; K-8 schools reduce that number of transitions by one.

Longer Term Relationships with Peers and Teachers. The K-8 model provides opportunities for students' relationships with educators and schoolmates to extend over a longer period of time. It is also argued that students at either end of the K-8 age spectrum benefit from being in contact with one another consistently throughout the years.

Pedagogy. Because the middle-school populations in K-8 schools are smaller than in stand-alone middle or junior high schools, K-8 middle schools can more easily implement a number of pedagogically beneficial approaches, including small group instruction, co-teaching, teacher collaboration, and cross-age instruction and tutoring.

What makes a K-8 school work?

Research on achievement. There do not appear to have been any large national experiments or studies with adequate controls conducted to examine why K-8 schools are successful, so the question on the national level is open. There have been studies in several locations which suggest that K-8 models are associated with statistically significantly higher test scores than counterparts in traditional middle schools. Critics of these studies claim that they do not generalize to the larger population.

Reliance on Local Data. Because the national data on the topic is sparse, school districts have relied on local data sources on enrollment and achievement to make choices regarding K-8

school options. Several characteristics are visible at Hillcrest that indicate that all of the factors that drive adoption of K-8 models are at play at this school.

- Hillcrest's eighth graders and other upper-grade students routinely interact in a positive way with younger children. This is beneficial to both the older and younger students.
- The Hillcrest middle school is a small program that currently incorporates sixth, seventh, and eighth graders in the same classroom. The opportunities for cross-grade instruction and interaction are significant.
- The children are with the same two teachers for a three-year period. The teachers know students well, and the students work closely in small-group instruction and projects frequently.
- Parental involvement is extremely high.
- While test scores are not indicative of the total school experience, the Hillcrest test scores for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade are the highest scores in OUSD. The quality of the education is reflected in the admission of Hillcrest Students to the demanding Paideia program and the competitive and restricted-admission Engineering and Computer academies at Oakland Tech (eight of Hillcrest's twenty 2007 graduating students opted to attend Tech), and to top private schools around the Bay Area.

4. and 5. Findings and Recommendations of the Best Practices Subcommittee

Because the Best Practices Subcommittee was focused on the solutions around both communication and managing overenrollment, it did not have separate findings and recommendations from those of the LRPC as a whole.