

February 24, 2022

Kimia Haddadan, Senior Planner
San Francisco Planning Department
49 S Van Ness Ave, Suite 1400
San Francisco, CA 94103

Re: Prioritizing Educational Equity and School Integration in San Francisco's Housing Element 2022 Update

Dear Ms. Haddadan,

On behalf of the undersigned housing and education advocates, we are writing to provide recommendations for the San Francisco Planning Department (SF Planning) to prioritize educational equity and school integration in the City's Housing Element 2022 Update. We enthusiastically support SF Planning's focus on racial and economic equity and integration in the Housing Element Update. However, we are concerned by the removal of various references to the intersection of housing and schools from Draft 2 that were present in Draft 1.¹ We urge the City to re-incorporate and expand attention to the schools-housing nexus in the final 2022 Housing Element. In doing so, the Housing Element will better plan for San Francisco's families and, in turn, be a leader among California cities. This letter describes how connecting housing policy with education goals can advance housing equity in San Francisco and offers three sets of strategies to bring this goal to fruition.

The persistent link between where students live and where they go to school means that housing and educational inequities cannot be solved in siloes. As a result of policies and practices that have limited access to high-opportunity neighborhoods, students of color and low-income students in San Francisco are more likely to live in low-income neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city where low-performing schools are concentrated.² Despite the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD)'s decades-long attempt to break the link between neighborhood and school quality through its choice-based school assignment policy, many students in low-income neighborhoods continue to attend schools close to where they live due to convenience, lack of transportation, and lack of time and information to navigate the complicated school application process.³ As a result, San Francisco's neighborhoods and schools

¹ For example, Draft 1 of the 2022 Housing Element Update included a goal to "Support and incentivize housing, especially permanently affordable housing with multiple bedrooms for families, near existing high-rated public schools."

² San Francisco Planning Department. (2020, March). *San Francisco Housing Affordability Strategies*. San Francisco Planning Department. https://default.sfplanning.org/publications_reports/Housing_Affordability_Strategies_Report.pdf.

³ Knight, H. (n.d.). Learning Together, Living Apart: Is desegregation dead? *San Francisco Chronicle*. <https://www.sfchronicle.com/schools-desegregation/>.

remain highly segregated.⁴ The resulting inequities in housing and education threaten the City's future economic and cultural vitality.

Affordable housing strategies that increase access to high-performing schools can simultaneously address housing and educational equity. Housing is made more equitable because high-performing schools tend to be located in high-opportunity neighborhoods with other amenities like good jobs, safe public spaces, and clean air that facilitate positive long-term outcomes. Education is made more equitable because increasing access to high-performing schools promotes school integration, which has long-term educational and economic benefits for low-income students and students of color, and social and civic benefits for all students.⁵ Furthermore, the benefits of school and housing integration extend across generations – children who attend integrated schools are more likely to live in integrated neighborhoods and send their children to integrated schools as adults.⁶

The current moment offers a unique opportunity for San Francisco to meet its goals of housing affordability and equity while promoting school integration. At the same time that San Francisco is updating its Housing Element, SFUSD is implementing a new zone-based school assignment policy for elementary schools starting in the 2023-2024 school year.⁷ Both plans center racial and economic equity and integration as key goals. Additionally, the federal Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule and the State of California's AFFH law have introduced stronger requirements and accountability for cities to address segregation through their housing policy.

The following strategies are recommended for incorporation into the 2022 Housing Element Update:

- 1. Increase affordable housing, especially multi-family housing that can accommodate families with school-aged children, near high-performing schools.** To aid this strategy, the City should:

⁴ Menendian, Stephen, and Samir Gambhir. (2018). *Racial Segregation in the San Francisco Bay Area, Part 1*. Othering & Belonging Institute. <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/racial-segregation-san-francisco-bay-area-part-1>.

⁵ Johnson, Rucker C. 2019. *Children of the Dream: Why School Integration Works*. New York: Basic Books; Turner, Margery Austin, Matthew M. Chingos, and Natalie Spieva. (2021). *White People's Choices Perpetuate School and Neighborhood Segregation: What Would It Take to Change Them?* Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

⁶ Braddock, Jomills H., II, and Amaryllis Del Carmen Gonzalez. (2010). "Social Isolation and Social Cohesion: The Effects of K-12 Neighborhood and School Segregation on Intergroup Orientations." *Teachers College Record* 112 (6): 1631–53; Goldsmith, Pat Rubio. 2010. "Learning Apart, Living Apart: How the Racial and Ethnic Segregation of Schools and Colleges Perpetuates Residential Segregation." *Teachers College Record* 112 (6): 1602–30.

⁷ San Francisco Unified School District. (2020, December). *San Francisco Unified School District and County Office of Education, Board Policy 5101.2, Elementary School Student Assignment*. San Francisco Unified School District. [https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/sfusd/Board.nsf/files/BVYUGB7BF68F/\\$file/BP%205101.2%2C%20Elementary%20School%20Student%20Assignment.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/sfusd/Board.nsf/files/BVYUGB7BF68F/$file/BP%205101.2%2C%20Elementary%20School%20Student%20Assignment.pdf).

- a. Acquire existing multi-family rental properties near high-performing schools and support developers to remove them from the market and restrict them as permanently affordable housing.
- b. Acquire land near high-performing schools and facilitate development of affordable housing on those sites.
- c. Target areas near high-performing schools for upzoning to enable denser housing construction (and thus more units).
- d. Increase inclusionary zoning requirements in areas near high-performing schools to generate additional affordable units.

2. Strengthen housing policies and supports that help low-income families live near high-performing schools. The City should consider the following to achieve this goal:

- a. Pair new housing units built in areas near high-performing schools with project-based vouchers (PBVs) to ensure affordability.
- b. Provide voucher holders with information about units near high-performing schools through mobility counseling.
- c. Increase voucher exception payment standards for areas near high-performing schools to the highest level possible to ensure that the level of assistance is sufficient to afford rent in expensive areas.
- d. Remove barriers to moving to neighborhoods with high-performing schools by providing families with grants for security deposits and moving expenses.
- e. Offer one-time cash payments to landlords who rent properties near high-performing schools to voucher holders.
- f. Incorporate waitlist preference for families with young children to maximize the effects of moving to high-opportunity neighborhoods and enrolling in high-performing schools.
- g. Increase the level of first-generation homeowner downpayment assistance offered to families buying homes near high-performing schools in order to increase the feasibility of moving into more expensive neighborhoods.

3. Increase coordination between MOHCD and SF Planning and SFUSD and SFMTA to pursue strategies that increase access to high-performing schools for students living in assisted housing. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

- a. Collaborate with SFUSD to identify priority for students who live in assisted housing or historically underserved areas in the new zone-based school assignment policy.
- b. Collaborate with SFUSD and SFMTA to ensure the provision of efficient transportation options for students living in affordable housing who want to attend high-performing schools outside their neighborhood.

While these strategies have the potential to substantially improve both housing and educational equity, they should not take the place of investment in housing and schools in low-income communities and communities of color. These investments have opportunity-enhancing effects on the surrounding area and are critical for meeting the needs of people who cannot or do not want to move.⁸ Simultaneous pursuit of the coordinated housing and school integration strategies outlined in this letter and investment in historically disinvested neighborhoods is the most promising path to equity.

Again, we applaud the prioritization of equity and integration demonstrated in the current draft of San Francisco's 2022 Housing Element Update. We welcome the opportunity to further discuss how our recommendations can advance those goals with you and your colleagues. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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⁸ Diamond, R., & McQuade, T. (2019). Who Wants Affordable Housing in Their Backyard? An Equilibrium Analysis of Low-Income Property Development. *Journal of Political Economy*, 127(3), 1063-1117.