

MEMO

Date: February 2, 2011
To: Regional Advisory Working Group
From: Miriam Chion, Principal Planner
Subject: **Priority Development Area Assessment: Completeness – Schools**

This report provides a preliminary assessment of schools performance in Planned Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and the rest of the region. This is one component of the PDA Assessment. Access to quality schools is one of the elements of the Assessment that addresses the development of PDAs as complete communities. The assessment was designed to inform the FOCUS program and the development of policies and incentives to support Priority Development Areas.

Local jurisdiction and regional representatives have indicated the importance of access to high quality schools in the development of complete communities. In the PDA Assessment survey and interviews, many local planners identified schools as a significant neighborhood quality factor that impacted the PDA's development potential. MTC's *Choosing Where We Live* report corroborates this finding; residents surveyed for the study highlighted access to quality schools as a key value in choosing their neighborhoods. While childless singles and couples form a significant portion of the demand for housing in walkable and transit-oriented neighborhoods, families with children also represent a sizeable market.

At the regional level, schools are a critical component of sustainable growth that affects equity, the economy, and the environment. The City of San Francisco's Mayor's Office of Housing has identified education as a primary challenge related to successful infill development in large neighborhood planning areas. ABAG and MTC have no direct role or responsibility relative to schools. However, the regional agencies recognize that school location and quality have a significant impact on neighborhood and community development and therefore on the Bay Area's ability to accommodate growth in a sustainable manner.

Schools currently account for 35% of all statewide infrastructure spending¹ and 12% of all vehicle trips made in the Bay Area.² At the local level, in several Bay Area communities' city governments and schools districts have initiated joint planning efforts that integrate schools as part of the community planning process to accommodate additional infill development. One of

¹ Vincent, Jeffrey M. School Construction Policies to Support Sustainable Communities: California's Golden Opportunity. Testimony at the Joint Informational Hearing for the California Senate Committee on Housing and Transportation and the Senate Select Committee on State School Facilities: "Schools as Centers of Sustainable Communities: A Vision for Future School Facility Construction," December 15, 2009.
<http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/reports/Vincent-testimony-121509.pdf>

² 2000 Bay Area Travel Survey (http://www.mtc.ca.gov/maps_and_data/datamart/survey/)

the most notable examples is Emeryville where school improvement has been identified as an important factor for community development and new school facilities are being developed as community assets and neighborhood centers.

The purpose of this analysis is to assess the role schools play in neighborhood, community, and regional development. Some work has already been done to examine the link between transit-oriented development and schools. The UC Berkeley Center for Cities & Schools, a consultant for this work, identified the following core connections in their 2010 report, *Putting Schools on the Map: Linking Transit-Oriented Development, Families, and Schools in the San Francisco Bay Area*:

1. School quality plays a major role in families' housing choices.
2. A wide housing unit mix is needed to attract families.
3. Housing unit mix, school enrollment, and school funding are intricately related.
4. Children often use transit to get to and from school and after-school activities.
5. Multi-modal transit alternatives support access to the increasing landscape of school options.
6. Mixed-income Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) provides opportunities for educational workforce housing.
7. TOD design principles support walkability and safety for children and families.
8. TOD brings amenities and services that can serve families closer to residential areas.
9. When schools are integrated with TOD planning, opportunities emerge for the shared use of public space.
10. TOD offers opportunities for renovating and building new schools in developments, which draws families.

PDA Assessment: Analysis of Schools

In order to understand school issues in Priority Development Areas, regional agencies staff identified the following indicators:

1. School Quality—Average school quality in Planned PDAs compared to schools region-wide regarding four measures: school, student and staff characteristics, and school performance. All data is from the California Department of Education (CDE).
2. Physical Accessibility—Identification of the number/proportion of schools to which students living in a PDA can either walk or take transit.. A joint effort between MTC and ABAG examined the following metrics to measure accessibility:
 - a. Schools within ¼ mile of a bus or rail transit stop serving a PDA within the school district geography.
 - b. Schools within a half mile of a PDA via MTC's walkable streets network.
 - c. Residential PDA acres within a half mile of a school.
3. School Choice: CDE and American Community Survey data shows the proportions of students in Public, Charter, and Private Schools for each jurisdiction.

4. Collaboration—Data from PDA Assessment Survey addresses the current state of City-School collaboration in PDA jurisdictions, including shared facilities, transit coordination, impact fees or involvement in planning activities.

PDA Assessment Findings

The following are highlighted findings from the PDA Assessment and suggestions for how they may impact the development of Priority Development Areas. It is important to keep in mind that the first two categories, school quality and physical accessibility, only apply to the public and charter schools, covering approximately 86.5% of all students in PDAs.

1. School Quality in PDAs

- Taken as an average, schools in PDAs have a lower Academic Performance Index (API) rating than schools outside of the PDAs, both elsewhere in the region and statewide.
- PDA Public schools have a greater number of students receiving free or reduced-cost lunches because of their family's income level
- School demographics vary widely among PDAs, but overall schools in PDAs have more students of color than schools outside of PDAs.

School quality issues in PDAs have several notable impacts. The perception that a community or neighborhood has low performing schools may restrain the amount of new development the market will support in these areas. From an equity standpoint lower API scores in PDAs that also have a concentration of students of color reflect an education achievement gap and a significant equity concern. PDA Assessment survey results suggest that school quality and the perception of school quality serves to attract or repel households with children from some PDAs. In several communities served by reputable school districts, local planners have indicated that families have moved to new housing in PDAs that was not marketed or thought to be attractive to households with children. In other jurisdictions where school quality measurements are low planners noted that developers have described an ongoing pattern of childless couples being drawn to their projects but vacating their units after they have children or their children reach school-age.

2. Physical Accessibility

- About half of PDAs have schools within a half-mile walk of their residential or mixed-use neighborhoods.
- Similarly, 45 out of 92 PDAs assessed have one or more transit routes that stop within a ¼ mile of a school in their area.
- Although most PDAs have at least one transit or walk-accessible school, there are 7 Planned PDAs that do not have any schools within a half-mile distance of their residences or frequent transit service providing school connections.
- Two Planned PDAs have no transit connection to schools in their district.

Improvements to school accessibility are clearly needed in many of the Planned PDAs to become complete communities that include schools or adequately address the need of school-age children. School accessibility is a complex issue in many Bay Area cities due to school

assignment policies that result in many students not attending a neighborhood schools. If Priority Development Areas are to evolve as complete communities that serve a diversity of incomes, ages, and household types, pedestrian, bike and transit access to schools will need to be a consideration related to neighborhood planning and development.

3. School Choice

- Of the region's 1839 Public Schools, 11% are within the PDA boundaries and an additional 7% are within a half mile buffer of the PDAs.
- Nearly one-fifth of PDA schools are Charter schools, compared to 6% of schools elsewhere in the region.
- Jurisdictions with PDAs have proportionately more students in private schools than non-PDA jurisdictions (13.5% students in private school compared to 8% statewide.)
- The range of students attending private or parochial schools varies widely. In some large PDA jurisdictions (e.g. Oakland and San Francisco) 20-30% of school-aged children attend private schools. These rates are among the highest in the nation.
- Most school districts use a neighborhood-based assignment policy, but inter-district transfers and other programs in several large districts to improve access to quality schools and address diversity issues are common.

The high percentage of charter and private school students in PDAs appears to be in keeping with lower overall measures of school quality in PDAs. The ability to opt out of public school systems is a strategy available to and utilized by a substantial number of households with children in PDAs. Given cost factors of private school education issues of school choice and school quality result in significant inequities for lower and likely many moderate income households with children.

4. Collaboration

- A substantial number of local jurisdictions surveyed have Joint Use Agreements for school facilities that provide community access to schools for community uses not directly related to school programs. However, most local jurisdictions do not have a strong vision or specific programs that address the relationship between potential new development and the school district.

Even in cities that have regularly scheduled meetings between planning agencies and school districts, there may be misconceptions about the positive and negative impacts of new infill development relative to the school system. School districts and parents of current students may oppose new development due to uncertainty over its impacts. Enrollment, school quality challenges and school capacity issues will differ from school to school, but in general, unexpected changes in enrollment—increases or decreases—are difficult for districts to manage and can be cause for tension.³ These challenges also affect cities trying to implement new development. For example, while the number of students expected to live in future development

³ Ariel Bierbaum, Jeffrey Vincent, and Deborah McKoy, Center for Cities & Schools. "Linking Transit-Oriented Development, Families and Schools." *Community Investments*: Vol. 22 No. 2: Summer 2010

increases substantially when the units are affordable, school districts may require impact fees that substantially raises the cost of new homes and in some cases deters development.

Questions for Informing the Sustainable Communities Strategy

Although some PDAs have excellent neighborhood schools, the PDA jurisdictions as a whole have school-related issues pertaining to physical access, quality, and the relationship of schools to neighborhood planning and development. The results of this analysis raise questions related to the development of the PDAs as complete communities and by extension to the development and long-term implementation of the SCS:

- Given the regional agencies lack of jurisdiction related to schools what planning efforts, investments, and interagency coordination within and across local jurisdictions are needed to support the planning and development of the PDAs as complete communities? How might the 1st SCS support these efforts?
- Is there a role for school-based planning in facilitating the creation of stable, sustainable, mixed-income neighborhoods? Are there existing school-based programs that are complementary to the goals of the SCS?
- Can PDAs attract the majority of the region's growth if the schools are perceived to be lower quality or less stable than non-PDA schools?