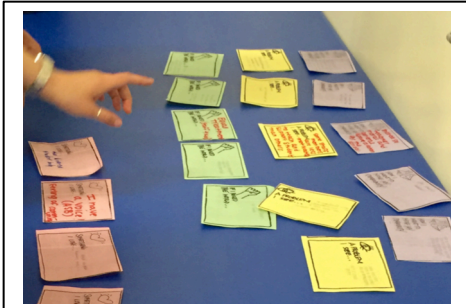
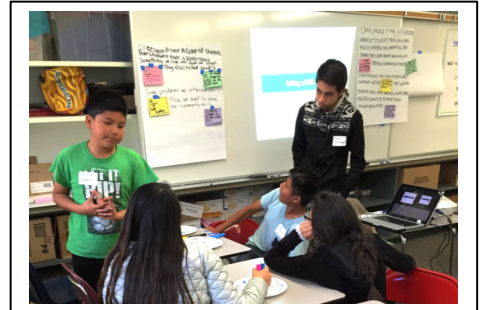
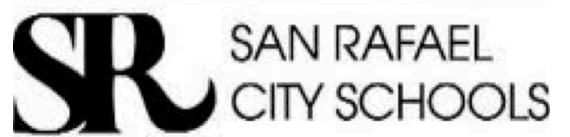


# COMMUNITY LISTENING REPORT, 2015



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## San Rafael City Schools Background

San Rafael City Schools (SRCS) was founded in 1861, in accordance with the City Charter, the San Rafael City Schools represents two separate school districts: San Rafael City Elementary School District (ESD) for grades K-8 and the San Rafael City High School District (HSD) for grades 9-12, which together form SRCS. Together, the two unique districts serve the city of San Rafael with a population estimation of 58,162, the largest city in Marin County, located just north of San Francisco.<sup>1</sup> Both Districts are governed by one five-member Board of Education and a common central administration.

Up until the 1990's, the district served primarily white middle class students and families. Marin County is one of the most affluent counties in the nation, with a median household income of approximately \$100,000. However, the median income in San Rafael is \$52,000, about half of that of Marin County; 16% of San Rafael residents have incomes below the poverty level, double the 8% poverty rate for the county as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

Most of these low-income individuals reside in the Canal neighborhood in San Rafael, an approximately two square mile area bounded by the San Rafael Canal on the north side, the San Francisco Bay on the east, and highways 101 and 580 on the south and west, respectively. The area is physically isolated from the rest of the city by these boundaries, and few opportunities for jobs, shopping, education, health, or other services exist in the neighborhood. Twenty-five percent of the city's residents live within the Canal area, which means approximately 15,000 individuals are crowded into just two square miles.<sup>3</sup> Most housing in the area is renter-occupied, and although the majority of residents have incomes near or below the poverty level, rents are no less expensive than comparable apartments in other parts of San Rafael. Because of the extremely high housing prices, frequently multiple families will occupy a single housing unit, with adults and children sharing bedrooms as well as utilizing living and dining rooms as sleeping quarters. The majority of the Canal residents are Latino/Hispanic; in fact, 30% of the San Rafael population is Latino/Hispanic and over 70% of the Latino/Hispanic residents live in the Canal area. The remaining San Rafael population is 58% white, 6% Asian, and 3% black/African American. Furthermore, the SF-Marin Food Bank reported distributing 13% more food over the past year than in 2013, with children representing 24% of the people it serves, reflecting the growing number of families in living conditions that fail to meet basic human needs.

To be at the forefront of its students' and families' diverse needs, SRCS has embraced a Full Service Community Schools approach as part of a broad-based initiative to address the needs of students and families, such as the issues of poverty, health, access, and education at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, with a very intentional targeted universal approach.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S Census Bureau. Population 2013. [www.factfinder.census.gov](http://www.factfinder.census.gov).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Leigh Brown, Patricia. "In Marin County, Poverty Exists Alongside Wealth." February 16, 2012. California Watch.

## Introduction

San Rafael City Schools has spent the past several years working with stakeholders to develop and refine their *Paving Our Roadmap to the Future* for all students and families community schools approach and fostering new types of collaborations. During the 2012-2013 school year, SRCS adopted community schools as the district's strategic plan toward continued improved outcomes for students and families. In addition, the SRCS Board adopted three main strategic priorities: 1) Achievement for all, 2) One school community, and 3) Parent engagement.

As part of their efforts, SRCS has embraced full service community schools as a critical response to intervention—the FSCS approach includes rigorous academics with a wide range of services, supports, and opportunities; resources for students to develop socially, academically, physically and emotionally. Building on this momentum, SRCS has centered its full service community schools efforts around all stakeholders having a voice toward SRCS's vision of paving a *Roadmap to the Future* where all our students and families are healthy, successful, happy, and thriving. To accomplish this, SRCS designed and facilitated a series of community listening sessions with students, parents/families, and community partners.

The purpose of this report is to help San Rafael City Schools describe the process for collecting and analyzing data from key stakeholders to further inform the planning and implementation of full service community schools district-wide. This report documents the findings and recommendations to further expand support for the SRCS full service community schools approach. However, prior to delving into the findings from the listening sessions, an overview is provided in the next section to explain the context and process of the data collection methods and analysis.

## Process Overview

**Planning** the community listening sessions occurred from December 2014 – January 2015. During this time, members of San Rafael City Schools leadership defined the purpose of the community listening sessions as follows:

- To provide recommendations to better support SRCS students and families;
- To identify existing strengths; and
- To provide guidance for further development implementation of full service community schools district-wide.

SRCS full service community schools efforts have been centered around all stakeholders having a voice in the vision of paving a *roadmap to the future* where all students and families are healthy, successful, happy, and thriving. That voice is anchored in the community and as such, SRCS students were involved as co-facilitators of the listening sessions. Four middle school students and five high school students were identified to co-facilitate with an SRCS community partner to integrate collaborative student leadership throughout the process. A training titled: Youth Facilitation Tips and Techniques 101 was conducted on February 4, 2015 to equip the student facilitators with the skills necessary to confidently facilitate listening sessions among their peers. Finally, a timeline for the listening sessions was established. Please see Appendix A.

**Identifying** student participants required a close working partnership with school site administration. Students who participated in a listening session were strategically recruited to represent a diverse representation reflective of the students that attend each respective school in which a listening session was held. Parents/families were invited to participate with support from both a local existing community partner agency and listening session hosted school site. The target stakeholder included:

- Elementary School Students
- Middle School Students
- High School Students
- Continuation High School Students
- Parent/Family and Community Members

**Storytelling** was the method for conducting the listening sessions to collect qualitative data to support and inform the San Rafael City Schools implementation of full service community schools district-wide. Research has found that the process of storytelling—sharing stories— can be a valuable data collection technique (Labonte and Feather, 1996). Moreover, Paulo Freire encouraged storytelling when working with diverse communities, specifically communities considered disadvantaged and/or marginalized, highlighting the power of narrative/language in shaping or informing thoughts and actions.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, storytelling is a process of self-discovery, reflection, and community building, and learning for both youth and adults alike. Building on the value of storytelling, the school-community listening sessions sought to uncover assets, challenges/issues, and opportunities to create a more safe and supportive community-school environment for all students and parents within San Rafael City Schools. Additionally, when similar stories are told, there is a cumulative effect that breaks down the reflexive instinct to dismiss an experience and/or perspective as an isolated individual context. Storytelling can be an essential strategy in shifting a change movement from defending practices that may not be designed to improve outcomes for students and families to focusing on solutions/actions that will. Close collaboration with the SRCS department of Education Services served in the design of the storytelling protocol for students and parents/community members.

**Conducting** a total of eleven school-community listening sessions took place over the course of three months (February – April, 2015). Altogether, more than 200 youth and adults participated in the listening sessions. In each of the student-centered listening sessions, a student leader co-facilitated alongside an SRCS community partner adult. In such settings, research suggests that peers will relate better to other members of their peer group (Geertz, 1973; Krueger, 1994; Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Training and support was provided to students to develop their facility in conducting the sessions with their peers.

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<sup>4</sup> Paulo Freire, a leading educator and philosopher of critical pedagogy, has influenced people working in education, community development, community health and various other fields. Freire developed an approach to education that links the identification of issues to positive action for change and development.

The below chart indicates the number of stakeholders that participated in the school-community listening sessions, locations, and the language in which the session was facilitated.<sup>5</sup>

Stakeholder	# of Sessions	# of Participants	Location	Language
Elementary School Students	3	35	San Pedro Elementary School Bahia Vista Elementary School Venetia Valley K-8	English
Middle School Students	2	30	Davidson Middle School Venetia Valley K-8	English
High School Students	4	55	Madrone High School San Rafael High School Terra Linda High School	English and Spanish
Parent/Family and Community	2	85	Canal Alliance Davidson Middle School	English and Spanish
Total	11	205		

Student listening sessions consisted of an inclusive facilitated structure guided by the following agenda:

1. Welcome and Icebreaker
2. Introductions, Session Overview & Group Agreements
3. Telling yOUR Story – Explanation of Process
4. Telling yOUR Individual Story – Individual Stories (testimony) through use of Story Cards
5. Telling yOUR Collective Story – Small Group Discussions and Group Storytelling
6. Report Back and Closing

In small groups, the students were asked to write a *story* that represented a collectively documented story of their individual responses. This process provided particular information to reoccurring themes as students were instructed to cluster or group similar responses captured on their individual story cards. Various topics emerged from the qualitative data collected, and the research team coded this information to document the emerging themes. The process was similar for the parent/community member listening sessions; however, adults were not asked create a group *story*, instead adults were asked to engage in small group discussion. The small group discussions appeared to be the most powerful part of the listening sessions as they yielded the highest levels of engagement. The depth of small group discussions was insightful, but varied between groups. Groups varied in size from 5 to 8 people, with group agreements enforced to ensure equitable participation during small group discussions. Each group chose their own

<sup>5</sup> Actual number of participants may be greater than reported. Participation was on a volunteered basis and while participants attended a listening session, they may have wanted to remain anonymous by not documenting contact information on sign-in sheets provided at each session.

notetaker and all members of the small group were responsible for reporting back to the whole group.

The subsequent sections focus on major themes that arose from the school-community listening sessions and recommendations that will further support San Rafael City Schools efforts to implement full service community schools district wide. It is important to note that in the subsequent sections, the word *adult* will be used to describe the parents/community members that participated in the listening sessions.

## Major Themes

Each of the *stories* told during the listening sessions were uniquely personal, but also shared common themes. While students and adults may experience an educational system and their lived environment (neighborhood/community) differently, the majority of listening session participants agreed that San Rafael City Schools are vibrant environments in which the academics, social, emotional and physical health of students is fundamental to the overall success of its students.

**Assets.** When asked to describe something they [students and adults] *love* (assets/strengths), many students indicated sports, friends, and specific classes or subjects in school (e.g. AVID, music). Students were quick to indicate the following:

- *Friends give me help with homework*
- *Friends [at school] make me happy*
- *The choice of electives*
- *[diversity] programs that help students become connected*

In small group discussion, many adults made similar statements such as the following:

- *School always available to help when needed*
- *The teachers' energy, skills and commitments*
- *es que tratan de hacer todo lo mejor para nuestros niños* (Translation: [Schools] try to do the very best for our kids)
- *la gente se respeta y contribuy en las escuelas* (Translation: People respect each other and contribute to school)

**Youth Voice.** The majority of student listening session participants agreed that the voices of students must be heard and valued for schools to improve student learning, strengthen families and increase the support services needed for healthier communities. Various quotes demonstrate this common theme:

- *Let the student be heard. Let the student speak and not immediately shut them up because they're 'talking back'*
- *Not enough opinions from students are taken into consideration*
- *Lack of motivation/support given by adults*
- *More open gatherings with kids*

**Communication.** Similarly, communication was another major common theme across all of the listening sessions. Youth and adults expressed their desire to have clearer communications between their schools and the community. In particular, communication was often connected to

relationships between students, adults, students and adults, and between diverse—sometimes noted as divided—communities within the city of San Rafael that is further explained in the section below. In many cases, communication was mentioned as a concern or area needing further improvement. Below are some of the testimonies:

- *mas comunicación y mas información* (Translation: More communication and information)
- *help parents feel more connected to the school*
- *make sure students have trusting adults to talk to*
- *teachers are never wrong, only the students are*
- *It is more difficult as a parent to feel connected to the school*
- *Mas comunicación entre padres y maestros* (Translation: More communication between parents and teachers)

**Access to Supports.** Additionally, students and adults expressed a lack of access to support services and/or enrichment opportunities. Many of the listening session participants alluded to a lack of services to help students academically, socially, and emotionally. Students in particular discussed a need for additional learning enrichment opportunities, such as sports, elective course options, and more robust learning activities or classes at school. The following quotes demonstrate this trend:

- *Newcomers would have better support when transitioning into the U.S. education system*
- *Restorative justice circles for all schools*
- *Mas personal para niños que necesitan ayuda individual* (Translation: More staff for kids that need one on one help)
- *Additional support for struggling students and/or parents. Help navigating setbacks*
- *More rigorous classes – content; more AP classes*
- *All students should be encouraged to play, participate and thrive*
- *Me gustaria mas programas y apoyo para los estudiantes que van avanzados en sus clases* (Translation: I would like more programs that would help and assist students that are excelling and advancing in their classes)

**Bridging Communities.** A reoccurring theme that surfaced among adults in particular revolved around a perception of the relationship dynamics—or sense of community—between the White/Caucasian non-Spanish speaking and Latino Spanish-speaking community in the city of San Rafael. When the discussions shifted to solutions, the most common responses related to a desire to bridge stronger communication and solidarity between the two communities. The following excerpts demonstrate this trend:

- *Dialogue sessions between White and Hispanic communities to enhance mutual understanding*
- *Cultural and communication divide between the Caucasian and Hispanic communities in San Rafael.*
- *Have manageable social gatherings for both communities [English speaking and non-English speaking] to connect and build friendships and collaborations*
- *There is hard time trying to approach issues involving race within the student body*
- *I would try to make sure that the non-English speaking students would be more well implemented [in schools]*
- *Making everyone feel included and united*



The table below represents an at-a-glance of the most prevalent themes from a student and adult perspective.

<b>Students</b>	
<b>Significant Statements</b>	<b>Meaning Unit</b>
<i>Help them with more better classes - giving them more options</i>	Increase in safe, meaningful, positive school culture/climate, and engaging activities – non-traditional engagement opportunities– for students
<i>Everybody being able to communicate and work together without fighting and just working thing out</i>	
<i>Newcomers would have better support when transitioning into the U.S. education system</i>	Alternative approaches to discipline – from punitive to restorative – and support services for students
<i>Restorative justice circles for all schools</i>	
<i>Teach people to be more accepting and empathic</i>	
<i>Let the student be heard. Let the student speak and not immediately shut them up</i>	Desire to increase opportunities to engage authentic youth voice (perspectives, ideas, experiences, knowledge, and actions) within SRCS.
<i>Not enough opinions from students are taken into consideration</i>	
<i>Lack of motivation/support given by adults</i>	Improve consistency toward improving positive teacher-student relationship
<i>Make sure students would have trusting adults to talk to</i>	

<b>Adults</b>	
<b>Significant Statements</b>	<b>Meaning Unit</b>
<i>More people to be involved – more community involvement</i>	Increase community-school collaboration on improved safety and cultural diversity conscience
<i>Diverse, but not well integrated students and parents</i>	
<i>Oportunidad de becas (Translation: Scholarship/Grant opportunities)</i>	Increase accessibility of resources and support services
<i>Workshops/programs for parents on understanding their kids</i>	
<i>Mas comunicación y mas información (Tanslation: More communication and information)</i>	Improved communications between schools and parents/families
<i>Help parents feel more connected to the school</i>	
<i>Mas personal para niños que necesitan ayuda individual (Translation: More staff for kids that need one on one help)</i>	Increase in availability of intervention/prevention support services
<i>Additional support for struggling students and/or parents. Help navigating setbacks</i>	
<i>More rigorous classes – content; more AP classes</i>	Increase in diverse rigorous academic and enrichment programs
<i>All students should be encouraged to play, participate and thrive</i>	

## Recommendations

The school-community listening sessions produced numerous recommendations that were individually reviewed and all equally valuable. To determine which recommendations to highlight, consensus had to be found. The recommendations below reflect that collective responsibility and shared accountability that are fundamental principles of successful community schools, but because community schools do not exist in a vacuum, SRCS is encouraged to use the recommendations as the basis on which to further frame its efforts toward strategic implementation of full service community schools district-wide.

**COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS:** Public schools traditionally have been structured primarily to achieve student academic success. However, public school systems are increasingly finding that before students can achieve academic success, some basic social, emotional, and health needs must be addressed, but schools cannot do it alone. Collaborative partnerships between San Rafael City Schools' staff, administration, parents, students, and agency staff should reflect cohesion and shared purpose based on shared goals that are fundamental to student and family success. In addition, external providers must be viewed as a partner in the school or district, not simply a vendor or tenant on a school site so as to help strategically align efforts for greater collective impact in addition to identifying areas where new partnerships are needed to support success and overall wellbeing of students and families.

**IMPROVED COORDINATION OF SERVICES AND RESOURCES:** Community schools are positioned for greater long-term success when designed to operate support services through an integrated and coordinated system of support. Key strategies to consider include: a) Designing a systematic coordination to better align and integrate services to increase quality, access and positive impact of support services and resources; and b) A school-based coordinator of services dedicated to addressing the needs of students and parents in addition to the coordinating, advocating, and case managing services through a wraparound approach.

**IMPROVED COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY:** To be effective, community schools efforts must be developed and programs tailored to reflect the strengths and resources of a community. This can be achieved with meaningful involvement and communication among and between SRCS's diverse population of students and families. Develop processes for improved dialogue and interaction between schools, community, parents, and students to improve level of shared accountability and creates safe, engaged environments to break down any existing mistrust and/or lack of connection between SRCS's diverse communities. A school environment should not solely be seen as a place for students, but also as a place for parents and families.

**POSITIVE and RESTORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS:** Relationship between community and schools is critical to making a community-school environment successful. Equally important is the relationship between students and students-adults in a school environment. A positive-based approach to engaging and educating students is an essential investment toward improved education excellence. It is an approach that welcomes the opportunity to engage in practices that transform existing relationships and with a shared vision for inclusive shared success where all students and adults feel valued and appreciated.

**VOICE:** Student voice is critical even in the earliest of planning stages of any community school effort. In order for both students and adults to see each other clearly, the voices of students and adults alike must be heard and valued. We have to think anew about how we involve, and not merely engage, student voice in their educational experiences and the role adults have in ensuring the experience is meaningful.

## Building Together and Moving Forward

This report outlines key areas to assist SRCS planning, decision-making and implementing of high quality full service community schools. A final finding from the school-community listening sessions was a narrative of urgency for action. Both students and adults alike shared having participated in similar meetings or forums, however, little to no follow-up occurred as result. To build on SRCS past successes and to continue its momentum toward a full service community school district, there must be unequivocal consideration given to the recommendations provided by and for the students and adults within San Rafael City Schools. Findings from the listening sessions illustrate that students and adult are not merely recipients of the San Rafael City Schools system, but interested partners in the design of the experience.

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## Appendix A: Listening Session Schedule

Stakeholder	Date	Time	Location
Students – 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Friday, March 6th	11:20am - 1:20pm	San Pedro Elementary School 498 Point San Pedro Road San Rafael, CA 9401
Students – 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Monday, April 20th	12:45pm-2:45pm	Bahia Vista Elementary School 125 Bahia Way San Rafael, CA 94901
Students	Friday, February 27th	1:00pm - 2:20pm	Davidson Middle School 280 Woodland Avenue San Rafael, CA 94901
Students	Tuesday, March 10th	12:50pm - 2:00pm	Madrone High 185 Mission Avenue San Rafael, CA 94901
Students	Wednesday, March 11th	9:00am - 11am	San Rafael High 185 Mission Avenue San Rafael, CA 94901
Students	Wednesday, March 4th	11:30am - 1:30pm	Venentia Valley K-8 177 N. San Pedro Road San Rafael, CA 94903
Parent/Family	Thursday, March 5th	6:00pm - 8:00pm	Canal Alliance 91 Larkspur Street San Radael, CA 94901
Students 2 Session: 1) Spanish speaking students; and 2) English as a first language students	Friday, March 27th	9:00am - 11:00am	Terra Linda High School 320 Nova Albion Way San Rafael, CA 94901
Parent/Family and Community members (Spanish and English)	Wednesday, April 1st	6:30pm - 8:00pm	Davidson Middle School 280 Woodland Avenue San Rafael, CA 94901

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the San Rafael City Schools leadership and Board of Education for your endless commitment to the overall success of all students and families within the city of San Rafael.

A sincere *thank you* to the student leader facilitators that supported the listening sessions and for their dedication to making the process meaningful and fun!

A special thank you to those participants, both students and adults, who gave their time and shared their stories, which helped make the listening sessions a success!

The school-community listening sessions was coordinated by the San Rafael City Schools department of Education Services.

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