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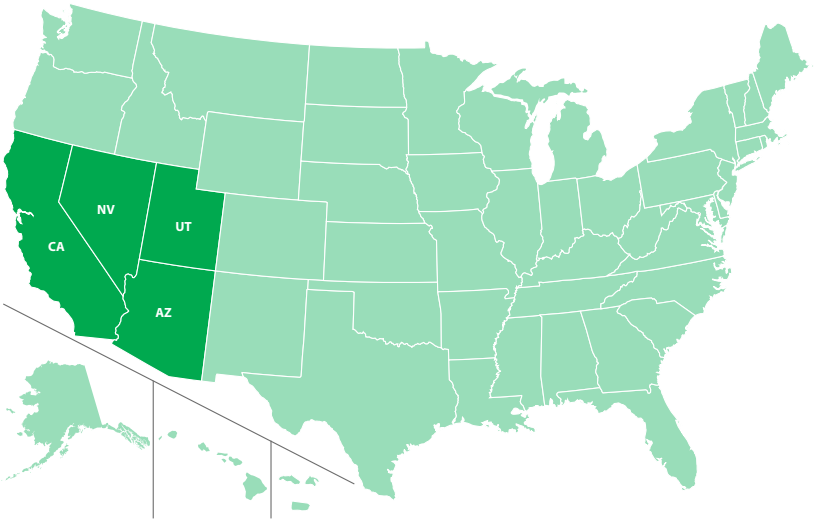

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Summary

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Implementation of the weighted student formula policy in San Francisco: a descriptive study of an equity-driven, student-based planning and budgeting policy

This report describes the planning and implementation of San Francisco's weighted student formula policy, an equity-driven student-based planning and budgeting policy. It examines one district's policy goals, planning and implementation considerations, and how the policy interacted with other local, state, and federal policies.

A weighted student formula policy is a districtwide student-based planning and budgeting process. Replacing the traditional budgeting process that uses standardized staffing ratios to allocate resources to schools, a weighted student formula allocates resources based on differentiated student needs. Students are "weighted" according to their education needs, with more money assigned to those who traditionally need additional resources—such as low-income students, English language learner students, and students with disabilities. In addition to receiving resources based on the composition of the school student populations, schools gain budgetary and curricular autonomy.

This report explores how the San Francisco Unified School District implemented a weighted student formula policy as a pilot program in 2001/02 and then as a districtwide program in 2002/03. Revealing the complex details that a district considers when developing an equity-driven student-based planning and budgeting policy, the report shares lessons from San Francisco's experience.

Although limited to one district, the report raises questions that might help education policymakers decide whether and how to implement a weighted student formula policy.

The report addresses the following research questions:

- What are the goals of San Francisco's weighted student formula policy?
- What considerations did San Francisco face in planning and implementing the weighted student formula?
- How does San Francisco's weighted student formula policy interact with other

local, state, and federal education reform policies?

- What have school and district officials learned from San Francisco's implementation of a weighted student formula policy?

- What are the main areas for further research of weighted student formula policies?

To address these questions, researchers collected data from interviews with a small cross-section of stakeholders in the district—among them district administrators, school board members, union leaders, school principals, and school site council members—relevant district documents, and district training sessions.

Analysis of these data yielded the following findings:

- San Francisco implemented a weighted student formula policy to increase equity—by providing additional resources to students whose education often demands such resources—and to increase the effectiveness of decisionmaking—by allowing for more school-level autonomy.

- The key considerations in implementing San Francisco's weighted student formula policy were:
  - Calculating school allocations.
  - Calculating school salaries.
  - Determining school-level discretion.
  - Establishing links with the academic planning process.
  - Ensuring school participation.
  - Ensuring district participation.
  - Building school site capacity.
  - Encouraging community involvement.

- Education reform programs at the local (school supervision and intervention, funding streams, labor contracts, and enrollment policies), state (categorical programs and budgetary cycles), and federal (the No Child Left Behind Act) levels affected San Francisco's weighted student formula policy.

- The weighted student formula policy has been widely accepted among educators. However, school and district officials have learned that the policy requires more frequent and comprehensive review and that the weighted student formula policy cannot offset declining federal, state, and local school district revenues.

- Further research might explore how weighted student formula policies may burden administrators, vary in implementation in different types of district, and affect the district's distribution of resources over time.

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This report describes the planning and implementation of San Francisco's weighted student formula policy, an equity-driven student-based planning and budgeting policy. It examines one district's policy goals, planning, and implementation considerations, and how the policy interacted with other local, state, and federal policies.

WHY THIS STUDY?

Since state and federal policies hold individual schools accountable for student performance, policies that provide differentiated funding and greater discretion to schools have become increasingly important. Historically, districts allocated resources at the school level. However, some districts have now implemented policies—such as a weighted student formula—that shift responsibility for allocating resources away from the central office and toward the schools. A weighted student formula is designed to give schools more decisionmaking authority and to give students more equitable distribution of resources.

This report discusses San Francisco's weighted student formula policy, which began as a pilot program in 2001/02. In 2002/03, as part of a larger set of multiyear reform efforts to improve academic achievement—known as Excellence for All[1]—the San Francisco Unified School District's weighted student formula program was implemented throughout the district.

What is a weighted student formula?

A weighted student formula, by allocating funding based on student characteristics at the school, is designed to replace the traditional budgeting process, which allocates resources to cover schools' operating costs based almost entirely on the number of students enrolled at each school. In the traditional model districts calculate the staffing required for the total number of students enrolled at the school based on the desired student-teacher ratio. The district then also allocates administrative and support staff as well as additional funding for specific programs and supplies.

In a weighted student formula district officials weight each student according to education needs (box 1): students who require greater resources—such as low-income students, English language learner students, and students with disabilities—receive heavier weights. School districts then assign funds to each school based on the school's student

BOX 1

Assigning weights in the weighted student formula

In a weighted student formula policy students are assigned weights based on the needs of each student. Each weight carries a monetary value. Developing these weights is a challenging task, which can result in varying weights depending on the district. For instance, three districts with a weighted student formula policy assigned different weights to different student populations (see table). The differences occur because administrators flag different types of students, at varying rates, to receive additional resources. For example, gifted students receive an additional weight in Cincinnati and Houston, but not in San Francisco or Seattle.

Even with similar student populations, however, districts can assign widely varying weights to student populations. This inconsistency in weights between districts stems in part from different base amounts expended for each student. The base amount, for example, is larger for high schools in Cincinnati (1.20 × the base per pupil cost) and San Francisco (1.19 × the base per pupil cost) than for high schools in Seattle (0.89 × the base per pupil cost). The differences in weights also stems from the different methods used to calculate the weights. While Houston mirrored the weights from its state education agency, Seattle derived the initial weights from the district's budget from the prior year (Cole 2005). However, a report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2006) suggests that districts use expert valuations of student performance in successful schools within a district to calculate that district's weight scale.

Sample weights in three weighted student formula districts by student populations

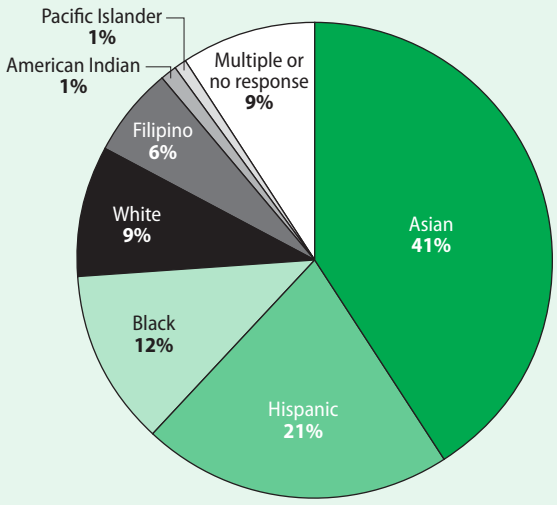
Student population	Cincinnati	Houston	Seattle
Base	Kindergarten: 1.20	1.00	Kindergarten (half day): 0.50
	Grades 4–8: 1.00		Kindergarten (full day): 1.00
	Grade 9: 1.25		Primary school: 1.00
	Grades 10–12: 1.20		Intermediate school: 0.95
			Middle school: 0.89
			High school: 0.89
Low-income students	0.05	0.20	0.0435–0.223
English language learner students	0.47	0.10	0.13–0.39 (depending on grade level)
Gifted students	0.29	0.20	0
Students with disabilities	0.20– 0.70	0.10–5.00	0.95–7.76 (depending on grade level)

Source: Authors' compilation based on Cole (2005).

population. In theory, weighted student formulas provide a more equitable distribution of resources by correlating school funding with the specific needs of students at the school. In addition, schools gain autonomy in developing their own academic plans and corresponding budgets. This decentralized component is often referred to as site-based management. Parents can also gain a measure of autonomy, as they are typically involved in the increased decisionmaking at the school site.

Over the past decade weighted student formula policies have become attractive alternatives to traditional school funding policies. A well publicized brief by the Fordham Institute advocates widespread implementation of weighted student formula policies (Thomas B. Fordham Institute 2006). In 2007/08 New York City's public schools began implementing a weighted student formula policy. The Nevada state legislature recently gave select schools—Empowerment Schools—more budgetary and planning discretion (Nevada Office of the Governor 2007). And the California state legislature has discussed a statewide weighted student formula policy (California State Senate Republican Caucus 2004; EdSource 2004).

FIGURE 1
Student racial/ethnic demographics in San Francisco Unified School District, 2006/07



Source: Education Data Partnership 2007b.

Meanwhile, San Francisco, the eighth largest school district in California, enrolling approximately 55,000 students with varying ethnic and cultural backgrounds in 104 schools (figure 1), has been using a weighted student formula policy since 2001/02.

Research literature: understanding implementation of weighted student formulas

The literature on weighted student formula policies and site-based management policies, while limited, identifies four areas that explain how districts implement and manage weighted student formula policies: intended goals, key policy considerations, interaction with other policies, and lessons learned.

Intended goals. A weighted student formula policy aims to distribute resources equitably, efficiently, and effectively. By linking school allocations to provide all students with similar access to programs and resources, it can improve horizontal equity—treating similar students in similar ways (Baker and Thomas 2006; Hawley Miles and Roza 2006; Roza and Hill 2003; The Metro Organizations for People 2006). And it can improve vertical equity—treating different types of students in systematically different ways that reflect their needs—by providing additional resources to students with greater education needs (Baker and Thomas 2006; Rubenstein, Schwartz, and Stiefel 2006; Snell 2006; Rubenstein and Miller 2005; Committee for Economic Development 2004; National Association of State Boards of Education 2003).[2]

Weighted student formula policies can also improve the efficiency and effectiveness of funding systems. Schools with weighted student formula policies delegate planning and budgetary authority to personnel most familiar with the school—thus creating the possibility for a more cost-effective use of resources (Brown 2003; Ouchi 2003; National Association of State Boards of Education 2003; Odden and Picus 2000; Fermanich, Odden, and Archibald 2000; Mohrman, Lawler, and Mohrman 1992). A weighted student formula policy tends to make a district's budgeting process more transparent, resulting in a more efficient organization (Rubenstein and Miller 2005; The Metro Organizations for People 2006). Since a weighted student formula policy is a participative decisionmaking model, the policy connects individuals to the organization's overall performance (Mohrman, Lawler, and Mohrman 1992; Lawler 1986). Finally, the weighted student formula policy can increase the effectiveness of a school, as measured by a more positive school climate and, ultimately, improved student outcomes (Ouchi 2003).

Key policy considerations. Previous research accounts for key policy considerations in implementing a weighted student formula policy. One concern has been whether schools have adequate capacity to make effective resource allocation decisions (Cooper et al. 2005; Childress and Peterkin 2005; School Communities That Work 2002a). Other policy concerns focus on how to calculate salaries for school personnel in school budgets (Baker and Thomas 2006; Committee for Economic Development 2004; Roza and Hill 2003; Leschly 2002),

how to calculate base funding levels for schools of different sizes and different grade spans, and how to monitor a school's budget procedures (Baker and Thomas 2006; Hawley Miles and Roza 2006; Cooper et al. 2005; School Communities That Work 2002a). Another challenge is how to identify the appropriate student populations and select the appropriate methods for calculating their weights (see box 1; Baker and Thomas 2006; Rubenstein, Schwartz, and Stiefel 2006).

One challenge of the weighted student formula policy is how to identify the appropriate student populations and select the appropriate methods for calculating their weights

There are also political considerations to implementing weighted student formula policies. When weights yield decreased funding for a school, parents and community leaders are apt to criticize the policy (Petko 2005; Cooper et al. 2006; School Communities That Work 2002a). School leaders and the local community may also compete over school site discretion during formulation of a school's academic plan and budget (Childress and Peterkin 2005). School officials can clash with district officials when schools with weighted student formula policies request more funding (Cooper et al. 2006). A weighted student formula policy is also bound to receive blame for allocation shortfalls (Childress and Peterkin 2005). In addition, it is unclear whether the policy creates an incentive to mislabel students to gain the extra funding attached to special populations and whether the policy increases staff training costs (Petko 2005).

Interaction with other policies. The third key area identified by previous research is how weighted student formula policies interact with local, state, and federal education reform programs. Competing district policies can have an impact on the design of a weighted student formula policy. For example, Cincinnati, while implementing a weighted student formula, also directed incentive payments to high-performing schools and district intervention support to low-performing schools (Hawley Miles and Roza 2006). Because both policies tailored resources to the needs of the schools, they affected the amount of resources and support schools received. Statewide collective bargaining agreements and hiring policies are also significant because they tend to keep teacher distribution static. This can make it difficult for the district to distribute resources equitably (Rubenstein, Schwartz, and Stiefel 2006; Fermanich, Odden, and Archibald 2000). State policies may affect weighted student formula implementation. Categorical funds that limit school leaders' decisionmaking on resources can steer funding priorities away from weighted student formula–defined goals (Committee for Economic Development 2004; Ouchi et al. 2003; Leschly 2002). Budget shortfalls can minimize the level of support and autonomy provided to schools during implementation of a site-based budgeting policy (Honig 2003).

Lessons. The literature suggests the importance of learning from implementation of previous weighted student formula policies (Petko 2005). While research to date on the outcomes of such policies has not shown any negative impact, available empirical data also cannot clearly outline their positive effects. Measuring the effects proves difficult because of competing reform initiatives. The literature focuses on changes in resource allocation and on the views of school and district staff. For instance, inequities in district allocations to schools declined after implementation of a weighted student formula policy in some districts (Hawley Miles and Roza 2006; Committee for Economic Development 2004; School Communities That Work 2002b; Goertz and Stiefel 1998). Increasing site-based autonomy appears to allow schools to change instruction and budgeting practices, including changing instructional practices and programs (for example, adding new courses, an all-day kindergarten, a gifted and talented program, and new technology or reducing class size), to better serve the needs of the students in the school (United States General Accounting Office 1994; Leschly 2002; Fermanich, Odden, and Archibald 2000).

Researchers report a sense of empowerment and institutional trust among teachers and staff who take an active role in a school's financial decision-making (Newcombe and McCormick 2001; Fermanich, Odden, and Archibald 2000; Odden and

Busch 1998; Odden and Kelley 1995). Financial transparency also affords these officials a clearer sense of what they need and can ask for from the central office (Fermanich, Odden, and Archibald 2000; McBeath 2001). It has also been suggested that weighted student formula policies have brought about more cooperative relations between central district offices and schools (Ouchi et al. 2003).

Research questions

This study builds on the existing literature by applying the findings of previous research to San Francisco's planning and implementation of a weighted student formula policy. The report explains how the weighted student formula policy has been implemented in the San Francisco Unified School District and describes the key considerations that the district has faced in implementing the policy. This information, which could be useful to other districts as they implement similar policies, was obtained from a variety of sources, including reviews of relevant district documents, semistructured conversations with a small cross-section of stakeholders in the district, a focus group with school site council members, and observations of district training sessions (see box 2 and tables A1 and A2 in appendix A).

The central research questions of this report are:

- What are the goals of the San Francisco's weighted student formula policy?
- What considerations did San Francisco face in planning and implementing the weighted student formula?
- How did San Francisco's weighted student formula policy interact with other local, state, and federal education reform policies?
- What have school and district officials learned from San Francisco's implementation of a weighted student formula policy?
- What are the main areas for further research of weighted student formula policies?

BOX 2

Study methods

For this report researchers conducted a comprehensive review of journal articles, education databases, and other web-based repositories for articles about weighted student formula and site-based management policies that were published between January 1974 and August 2007 (see table A1 in appendix A). Although weighted student formula and site-based management policies are not synonymous, weighted student formula policies incorporate an element of site-based management policies, so the term was included in data searches.

Researchers also collected data from official district documents, semistructured conversations with school and district officials, a focus group with a small cross-section of stakeholders in the district, and observations of district training sessions (see table A2).

Researchers then analyzed the data and produced a matrix of information about implementation of the weighted student formula policy in the San Francisco Unified School District. Each piece of data was coded with one of nine labels: school-level participation, calculation of school allocations, school-level discretion, calculation of salaries, capacity of school site, interaction with other policies, district-level participation, alignment of the planning and budgeting policies, and community involvement. Researchers used patterns of coded data to isolate qualitative findings about San Francisco's implementation of a weighted student formula policy.

Based on only eight conversations with district officials, four conversations with external stakeholders in the district, five conversations with school principals, and one school site council focus group—all within San Francisco—the findings presented here are limited by the small sample size and by the perspective of a single school district. Nonetheless, San Francisco respondents provide valuable insight into the real-life context of considerations that affect planning and implementing a student-based planning and budgeting policy.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The San Francisco Unified School District implemented a weighted student formula policy to increase equity—by providing additional resources to students whose education often requires such resources—and to increase the effectiveness of decisionmaking—by allowing for more school-level autonomy.

San Francisco's key considerations in planning and implementing a weighted student formula policy were:

- Calculating school allocations.
- Calculating school salaries.
- Determining school-level discretion.
- Establishing links with the academic planning process.
- Ensuring school participation.
- Ensuring district participation.
- Building school site capacity.
- Encouraging community involvement.

In addition, education reform programs at the local (school supervision and intervention, funding streams, labor contracts, and enrollment policies), state (categorical programs and budgetary cycles), and federal (the No Child Left Behind Act) levels significantly affected San Francisco's weighted student formula policy.

Conversations with school and district officials suggested two goals of the weighted student formula policy in San Francisco—to allow districts to distribute resources more equitably to schools and to allow schools more autonomy to distribute resources as needed at the school site

The weighted student formula policy has been widely accepted among educators. However, school and district officials have learned that the policy requires more frequent and comprehensive review than the traditional budgeting process and that the weighted student formula policy cannot offset declining federal, state, and local school district revenues.

Further research might explore how weighted student formula policies may burden administrators, vary in implementation in different district types, and affect the district's distribution of resources over time.

The following sections explain the findings in detail.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF SAN FRANCISCO'S WEIGHTED STUDENT FORMULA POLICY?

Conversations with school and district officials suggested two goals of the weighted student formula policy in San Francisco—to allow districts to distribute resources more equitably to schools and to allow schools more autonomy to distribute resources as needed at the school site. Ten respondents—six district administrators, two principals, one school board member, and one union leader—mentioned that the policy was intended to improve the equity of the distribution across schools. Nine respondents identified school-site flexibility and autonomy as a key justification for implementing a weighted student formula policy. While this goal was generally seen as positive, one school site council member commented that the increased autonomy at the school site was intended to shift the blame for poor performance away from the central office and toward school decisionmakers.

Initial implementation of the weighted student formula policy in San Francisco

Numerous participants mentioned that superintendent Dr. Arlene Ackerman was the driving force behind the weighted student formula policy. Ackerman developed and implemented a weighted student formula policy while superintendent in Washington, D.C. As a deputy superintendent in

Seattle she oversaw implementation of a weighted student formula policy in the late 1990s. According to two respondents, the San Francisco school board had considered a school-based budgeting policy in the late 1990s. These respondents indicated that the district had appointed Ackerman superintendent partly to implement a weighted student formula policy as a means of addressing inequitable resource distributions.

Ackerman retained staff who had worked with her in Washington, D.C. and instructed them to convene a weighted student formula committee in the 2000/01 school year to discuss the policy with stakeholders. Committee members—including district-level staff, school principals, union members, and parents—met several times that year to discuss the policy's components and implications. They also attended "study tours" to observe similar budgeting policies in the Seattle Public Schools and the Sacramento City Unified School District.

On the committee's recommendation the district introduced a pilot program for 27 schools in the 2001/02 school year. The pilot schools received additional funding of $100 for every student in their school. Also, officials from participating schools received two days of training.

According to three respondents, district officials informally studied the pilot program to identify potential problems before expanding the policy throughout the district. One district administrator and one school board member noted that the pilot program taught administrators to develop schools' capacities to participate in planning and budgeting.

Officials also recognized the need for a "loss limit" to ensure that schools were not disproportionately negatively affected by the policy's redistribution of funds. To this end the district would make up any decline of more than $25 per student in a school's total allocation in the first year the new policy was implemented. According to one district respondent, the district also added plans for further professional development to support the schools' planning and budgeting processes. However, there were also some negative reactions: one respondent believed that the district ignored principals who wanted more time to prepare for the districtwide expansion of the weighted student formula policy.

Weighted student formula and San Francisco's current planning and budgeting process

San Francisco schools follow a six-step process provided by the district to develop academic plans and budgets (box 3). The academic plan must provide two or three key objectives for the coming school year, data and strategies to achieve these objectives, and an action strategy to implement the academic plan. This section outlines each of the six steps in the planning and budgeting process (San Francisco Unified School District 2007a).

Step 1: gather information. Each January the district requires at least three school site council members to attend the district's School Site Council Summit, a day-long event where principals, teachers, parents, and community members from each school share strategies, best practices, and general information on planning and budgeting.

At this summit, the district distributes draft budget allocations for the upcoming year based on each school's projected enrollment data (table 1).

BOX 3

Six-step planning and budgeting process

1. Gather information.
2. Seek input.
3. Develop draft academic plan.
4. Develop draft budget.
5. Seek feedback.
6. Finalize academic plan and budget.

Source: San Francisco Unified School District 2007a

TABLE 1
Sample school site budget summary for school year 2007/08

Funding source	Allocation
Weighted student formula—unrestricted funds	$1,390,347
Weighted student formula—special education	$2,387
Targeted instructional improvement block grant	$25,827
Title I schoolwide program	$74,462
Arts, music, and physical education equipment	$21,832
Economic impact aid—limited English proficient students	$26,115
School and library improvement block grant	$74,770
Discretionary block grant	$10,431
Instructional and library materials, and education technology	$7,069
Proposition H arts	$8,470
Total	$1,641,710[a]

a. This total does not reflect the total amount of money spent on this school. Other funds, such as special education and Title I money spent on districtwide expenditures, are not included.

Source: Authors' template based on budgets provided to principals by the central office.

In particular, according to respondents' explanations and district documentation, the schools receive the following types of funds:

- *Weighted student formula allocation, unrestricted funds.* These funds are based on the total general purpose funding available for the weighted student formula at the district level. A "foundation allocation" (equivalent to salaries for a principal and a clerk) is determined for the schools, to which the weighted allocations are added based on grade level and the school's population of English language learner students and high-poverty students and any additional funding needed to meet basic level ("floor plan") or minimum funding for the school's basic operation.

- *Weighted student formula for special education.* A small amount of money, based on a very low weight for projected students with disabilities (separate from the majority of the school's special education funds, which are budgeted and planned for centrally), is provided for professional development and supplies, according to one district-level respondent. The weighted student formula and the weighted student formula for special education funds constitute approximately 74 percent of the total funds a school receives in its budget (San Francisco Unified School District 2007c).

- *Targeted instructional improvement block grant.* Also known as consent decree funds, these grants are required by a desegregation lawsuit settled in the mid-1990s.

- *Categorical and block grants.* These allocations, which vary by school, include district, state, and federal funds designated specifically for low-income or English language learner students and for special programs such as art, music, and library programs. Districtwide expenditures from categorical program funds can also be budgeted centrally and distributed to certain schools. For example, programs for recently arrived immigrants can be funded with Title III funds.

Step 2: seek input. According to district documentation and responses from three district administrators, the district requires each school to meet with community members in February to solicit input on the academic plan. District staff attend these meetings to provide assistance and to ensure that schools are soliciting community feedback. The school then completes a state-developed needs assessment tool—known as the Academic Program Survey—to identify areas for improving student achievement (San Francisco Unified School District 2007a).

Step 3: develop draft academic plan. The principal, school site council, and other interested school staff then process the information gathered in step 2 to draft an academic plan outlining goals and strategies for the upcoming school year. The school

must submit the plan to the district for review by mid-March (San Francisco Unified School District 2007a).

Step 4: develop draft budget. After developing the draft academic plan, schools must align proposed goals and strategies for the upcoming school year with the weighted student formula and categorical and block grant funds. Administrators must also follow all regulations attached to these grants (San Francisco Unified School District 2007a).

Step 5: seek feedback. The school must hold a second community meeting in March to solicit feedback on the draft academic plan. At the end of the month principals attend a mandatory review session with a team of district staff, including the assistant superintendent assigned to the school and other central office staff (San Francisco Unified School District 2007a).

Step 6: finalize academic plan and budget. After the school site council approves the final plan and budget, the principal submits both documents to the district by mid-April. The district is expected to approve the budget soon thereafter. In the fall the school receives a revised budget based on the "10 day count"—the enrollment figure for each school calculated 10 days after the school year begins. According to one district respondent, no change is made if the revised budget is within the "buffer" of $15,000 above or below the budget approved in the spring. If there is a discrepancy of more than $15,000 the school must rebudget according to enrollment figures.

Beginning with the annual school site council summit in January the district provides ongoing support to the schools—training new school site council members, principals, and others on budgeting software. The district issues several documents to clarify planning and budgeting. Through the district's technical assistance team, the central office also works with principals and school site council members on an as-needed basis. Finally, the district reviews and revises different components of the planning and budgeting process during implementation. For example, three years after the weighted student formula policy went into effect, the central office responded to feedback and developed the floor plan mechanism to ensure that schools at minimum received funds necessary to operate.

WHAT CONSIDERATIONS DID SAN FRANCISCO FACE IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING THE WEIGHTED STUDENT FORMULA?

San Francisco encountered many of the key considerations identified in the literature in planning and implementing its weighted student formula policy. Researchers identified these eight considerations in San Francisco's experience from semistructured conversations, a focus group with school site council members, district documentation, and observations of training sessions (see box 4).

Calculating school allocations

Implementing the weighted student formula forced San Francisco to redesign allocations to

BOX 4

Key considerations in San Francisco's weighted student formula policy

- Calculating school allocations
- Calculating school salaries
- Determining school-level discretion
- Establishing links with the academic planning process
- Ensuring school participation
- Ensuring district participation
- Building school site capacity
- Encouraging community involvement

Source: Authors' analysis based on semistructured conversations, a focus group with school site council members, district documentation, and observations of training sessions.

schools. Officials faced several questions as they calculated the foundation funding and weighted funding that each school receives.

What is the minimum amount of funding needed to operate a school? According to one district administrator, the district faced the question of how much base money a school needs, at a minimum, in order to operate. Base money, apportioned according to the size of the student body, remains a contentious issue for small schools. Because of limited enrollments small schools might not receive adequate operational funds. As one district administrator noted, the loss limit—which protects schools from suffering large financial losses with the switchover to weighted student formula—was designed in part to offset this problem.

What student populations need additional weights? Initially, the weighted student formula committee relied on one district administrator's knowledge of the weights used in Seattle and Washington, D.C. to develop San Francisco's weights for specific high-need student populations (table 2). One district administrator recalled that the process was "more an art than a science," noting that the weights should be revisited with more rigor to ensure that they reflect the needs of different students.

To determine student weights, district officials assign a numerical value to each grade and for specific student characteristics. Consider the example of a low-income, "advanced" English language learner student in grade 1. This student's grade level weight is 1.33. The weight for advanced English language learner students is 0.0605, and the weight for poverty status is 0.09. The student's composite weight is now 1.4805. Therefore, this student's formulaic weight is 48.05 percent higher than the basic grade 4 or 5 student (see table 2).

Certain respondents felt that other student populations should be added to the weighting system. Two respondents believed gifted students merited increased weight. One district official

TABLE 2
Weights used in the weighted student formula for high-need students in the San Francisco Unified School District, 2006/07

		English language learner students				Students with disabilities[a]		
Grade level[b]	Base weight	Long-term nonredesignated[c]	Beginning/ intermediate (based on CELDT)	Advanced/ transition (based on CELDT)	Low-income[d]	Resource specialist program	Special day class, nonsevere	Special day class, severe
K	1.33	na	0.0781	0.0605	0.09	0.0097	0.0179	0.0315
1–3	1.33	na	0.0781	0.0605	0.09	0.0097	0.0179	0.0315
4–5	1.00	na	0.0781	0.0605	0.09	0.0097	0.0179	0.0315
6–8	1.14	0.937	0.0937	0.0605	0.09	0.0097	0.0189	0.0315
9–12	1.19	0.937	0.2070	0.0605	0.09	0.0097	0.0189	0.0315

na is not applicable.

a. Students with disabilities receive a very small amount of money for expenses, such as extra instructional supplies and professional development activities, because special education staff are centrally budgeted.

b. Weights are higher for grades K–3 than for grades 4 and 5 because the class size reduction requirements for grades K–3 in California require more teachers and, therefore, more resources.

c. Long-term nonredesignated means that, after several years, an English language learner student's performance on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) has not led to the student being redesignated as a fluent English proficient student. Weights for the different levels of the CELDT increase with grade level because less time remains for students to achieve proficiency, it is harder for students to simultaneously master more difficult content and English language skills, and it is harder to master English at a later age.

d. Students eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program.

Source: San Francisco Unified School District 2007b.

recommended new weights for middle school students who currently do not receive additional weights and therefore have bigger class sizes. Certain school officials recommended a weight for low-performing students and students living in a one-parent home.

Several respondents also recommended changes in the weights for students already receiving additional funds. For example, two principals noted the need for additional weights for English language learner students. One principal argued that an additional weight for "newcomer" students was necessary. Another principal advocated decreasing the weight of students nearing English proficiency to lessen the incentive to maintain students' English language learner status in order to retain funding for those students. One school board member also suggested that a weight be added for students in "extreme poverty" (as measured by residence in public housing) over and above the current weight for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Calculating school salaries

Weighted student formula policies require districts to calculate the cost of school staff by averaging staff salaries or aggregating actual salaries. San Francisco followed the example of most other districts nationwide and used school personnel's average salary in their budgeting calculations.

Using average salaries to calculate the cost of school staff poses challenges. First, average salaries make it difficult to accurately calculate cost differences between schools. Experienced teachers, who have higher salaries, may not be distributed evenly throughout the district. Schools with the highest percentages of low-income students (high-poverty schools) often have the least experienced and, therefore, the lowest paid teachers in the district. The district's use of average salaries to cost out personnel at the school site artificially inflates high-poverty schools' staff expenditures. Actual personnel expenditures are lower at high-poverty schools. Conversely, low-poverty schools may spend more on school staff than they appear to be spending according to the budget. Some officials worried that these disparities allowed the district to use revenue from low-achieving schools to "subsidize" high-achieving schools.[3]

Using average salaries to calculate the cost of school staff makes it difficult to accurately calculate cost differences between schools

The district used average salaries to calculate the cost of school staff because of the legal and political implications involved in using actual salaries. Two union leaders, two school board members, one district administrator, and one principal indicated that using actual salaries would have provoked significant administrative and privacy challenges at the district and school level. There were also concerns that public knowledge of staff salaries would generate tensions at the school and within the community. Using actual salaries might also have required changes in the district's collective bargaining agreements.

Recently, the district incorporated teachers' retirement benefits in calculations of average salaries. The average salary for the district for the 2007/08 school year was $77,000. Of that amount approximately $21,000 came from benefits for current and retired teachers. One school principal believed that the district's decision to include retirement benefits in the average salary placed an additional burden on the schools.

Determining school-level discretion

Another consideration facing San Francisco has been the discretion afforded to school sites. This report divides discretion into two categories. Budgetary discretion is the school's ability to decide how to spend funds received from the district. Planning discretion is the school's ability to make programmatic or staffing decisions.

Budgetary discretion. There are two funding sources subject to budgetary discretion. One is "no strings attached" money—the proportion of total

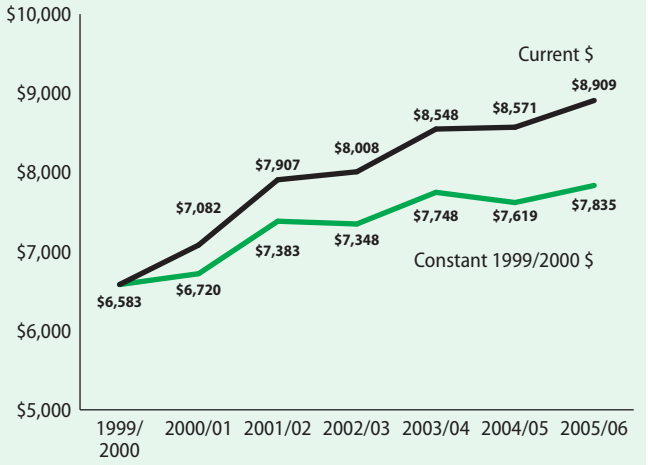
spending at the school level allocated through the unrestricted weighted student formula funds. The district was unable to provide the exact amount of money spent beyond the school-level budgets, so researchers could not estimate the amount of discretionary funds schools received. Since the central office also provides resources and funds to the schools apart from the school budget (such as for district-provided professional development), it is also difficult to quantify what proportion of the school's total budget is within its control.

The second funding source subject to budgetary discretion is money that remains after deducting the cost of the school staff. One of the largest components of any school's budget is the cost of salaries and benefits—approximately 80–85 percent of the total education expenditures. After accounting for existing school staff, ostensibly adequate budgets may leave schools with limited discretionary funds. In San Francisco eight respondents—three district administrators, two principals, one school board member, and two union leaders—felt that after accounting for personnel expenditures schools had little budgetary discretion after subtracting personnel costs. As one principal indicated, with less money every year in the system, the only discretion at the school site was deciding what to cut from the budget.

Indeed, San Francisco's student enrollment has declined over the past 13 years—from 61,351 in 1994/95 to 55,497 in 2006/07 (San Francisco Unified School District 2006). Despite declining enrollment, the district's real revenue per pupil, adjusted for inflation, has stayed relatively constant between 2003/04 and 2005/06 (figure 2). So, although respondents' perceptions of dramatic declines in real dollars are not wholly accurate, these perceptions may stem from increased costs for the district, such as health care, leading to a decline in the purchasing power of their general fund budget.

Because of lack of data, researchers were unable to calculate the amount of each school's budgetary discretion after deducting salaries. However, one district administrator estimated that discretionary funds ranged from 1 percent to 30 percent of the budget. One principal commented that after spending on staff salaries and benefits the previous year, the school had $15,000—out of a school budget of more than $1.5 million—remaining for additional school expenses.

FIGURE 2
Total general fund revenue per pupil for the San Francisco Unified School District, 1999/2000–2005/06



Source: Revenue data from Education Data Partnership (2007a); consumer price index data for inflation adjustments from California Department of Industrial Relations (2008) and the Association of Bay Area Governments (2008).

Planning discretion. Planning discretion has also posed challenges for San Francisco's schools. For example, should the district retain control over staff such as school counselors? Maintaining centralized control for certain school costs could decrease school discretion over academic planning but could ensure a more coherent, systemwide vision for the school district. Also, schools' control over staffing and programmatic decisions is not determined solely by central office staff; collective bargaining agreements, hiring practices, and other programmatic decisions made by federal, state, and local education agencies have an impact. "What's in" and "what's out" of the schools' planning and budgetary control indicate the discretion that the district cedes to schools and that which it retains at the district level (table 3).

TABLE 3
Distribution of budgeting responsibilities between schools and district central office in the San Francisco Unified School District, 2006/07

Budget item	School responsibility	Central office responsibility
Personnel	• General education teachers, English language learner school-based teachers, and paraprofessionals • Elementary advisors and parent liaisons • Librarians • Counselors • Building administration, leadership • Building administration, office support • Substitutes for staff development absences • Extended calendar for nonathletic student activities • Security aides not funded by general funds • Benefits for all positions funded by site	• Special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and related service providers • Star[a] schools' staff (except parent liaisons) • Vocational education and Regional Occupation Program staff • Food and nutrition staff and services • Custodial, maintenance, and other facilities staff* • Noontime supervisors (elementary schools)* • Substitutes for non–staff development absences • Athletics coaches • General fund security personnel • Benefits for all centrally funded positions • Half-time nurses, social workers, and learning support specialists for elementary schools • Part-time arts teachers for middle schools
Services and supplies	• Instructional materials • Library books • Replacement textbooks • Computer hardware • Special education professional development and supplies (excluding assistive technology) • Optional test preparation or other assessment-related activities • Extended learning opportunities (after school and Saturday school programs) • Language translation for school-based communication and events • School-based professional development	• Equipment (purchase, repair, and maintenance)* • Furniture (purchase, repair, and maintenance)* • Basic textbooks (new core adoptions) • Information technology network support and technical assistance • Assistive technology for special education • Districtwide assessment • Transportation • Telecommunications and telephones • Professional development institutes • Business services, human resources, legal services • Capital outlay–parts and materials* • Utilities

* These items continue to be provided centrally at a base level, but schools may supplement them with their weighted student formula funds.

a. Star schools (like Dream schools) are the lowest-performing schools in the district that receive additional resources.

Source: San Francisco Unified School District 2007a.

School and district respondents were generally content with the current balance of central and school expenditures. As one principal explained, "Now we can actually have discussions about what we really want [for our staff.] If we don't want to hire a librarian, and we want to hire an extra teacher that works as a part-time librarian, we can do that." Another principal approved of the district retaining budgeting control of custodial costs because the school required these services regardless of who paid for them. As one principal commented, "Schools should not have to decide between clean schools and instructional programs." While some district administrators also expressed their agreement that the current budget balance between schools and the central office was generally effective, some felt that it was time to think about decentralizing special education planning and budgeting to the school site.

There was evidence that discretionary planning caused conflicts between the Board of Education and school site councils. According to two district administrators, in one recent school year certain school site councils terminated many paraprofessional positions because of shrinking budgets. The Board of Education, which has ultimate control over layoffs, did not approve the decision. After this incident several school and district administrators questioned whether school sites really had discretion over budgeting and staffing decisions.

Establishing links with the academic planning process

Respondents suggested that a weighted student formula budgetary process provides an opportunity to reexamine academic planning. As one district administrator noted, "[The weighted student formula policy] is a structural change of how you distribute resources, but if you don't link [the policy] with increasing achievement, it won't allow the district to improve student achievement."

As outlined in the section, *Weighted student formula and San Francisco's current planning and budgeting process*, San Francisco schools are required to prepare an academic plan each year. Implementation of the weighted student formula policy changed the way school staff viewed the plan. Three district administrators and one principal noted that the weighted student formula policy caused officials to rethink their school's academic plan. One district administrator noted that "before this, the academic plan was a sort of 'dust it off, change the names, and put it on the shelf' [document] that no one looked at." Under the weighted student formula policy academic plans are "living documents . . . that drive [the weighted student formula policy]." Despite this view, three principals indicated that school site discretion had its limits. Without adequate revenue schools could not implement even the best conceived academic plan.

Initially, while some principals felt overwhelmed by budgetary responsibilities that might detract from the quality of classroom instruction, most respondents were comfortable with the increased autonomy

Ensuring school participation

Weighted student formula policies rely on schools to carry out the bulk of planning and budgeting. The additional work for principals and school site councils has been an important consideration in San Francisco.

Initially, while some principals felt overwhelmed by budgetary responsibilities that might detract from the quality of classroom instruction, most respondents were comfortable with the increased autonomy. According to one principal, budgetary discretion meant that schools did not "have to plead with the district to help fix things." Another principal praised the transparency that weighted student formula policies imposed on the budget process. Budgetary discretion made it clear to the staff that there was no money "hiding under [the principal's] desk."

According to two district administrators, a possible explanation for the initial buy-in from San Francisco's schools was the inclusion of principals on the weighted student formula committee during the formation of the policy. These administrators reported that their participation provided a certain level of knowledge and acceptance from the outset. Increased funding and professional development opportunities also appeared to help. Two district administrators, one school board member, and one union leader indicated that, because the pilot schools received a small amount of additional money and more professional development for making resource allocation decisions, the initial reaction was generally positive at the pilot school sites. According to one district administrator, because the majority of schools gained money or at least remained stable during the policy's initial implementation (due both to the "loss limit" feature and to additional overall funding in the district), the frustrations arising from "winners" and "losers" among the schools was not much of an issue. In fact, even one principal whose school lost a substantial amount of money—and 19 staff positions—during initial implementation saw how the policy increased equity. However, one principal

and one union leader were uneasy about how some schools felt left out of the initial process.

Ensuring district participation

Under San Francisco's weighted student formula policy school officials often turned to district officials for support. Therefore, San Francisco needed to consider how to gain district staff understanding of the district's weighted student formula policy and ensure their support. One district administrator noted that district officials should "be clear about the culture of [their] central office. If [they] don't have the support" of school-site officials, "don't do it." A weighted student formula policy "changes the role of the central office to support the schools rather than telling them what to do."

One district administrator observed that certain district staff who provided assistance to schools in the planning and budgeting processes became less supportive of the policy over time. As these district officials became more familiar with schools' individual needs, they came to believe that schools should receive additional money beyond their weighted student formula allocations.[4]

Building school site capacity

Given that a weighted student formula policy requires school staff to become much more involved in the planning and budgeting process, it has also been important for San Francisco to ensure that the schools have the capacity to participate in this process.

District respondents saw their role as providing technical assistance to the schools. In January San Francisco held training sessions on academic planning at the annual school site council summit. In February principals received training for budget-template software around the technicalities of budgeting.

However, it was unclear whether the supports from the district had been effective in preparing school staff for the planning and budgeting process, as several of the conversations with respondents indicated varying levels of capacity at schools across the district. One principal indicated that the complex process of translating an academic plan into a budget proved too complicated. One district administrator believed that the central office had not effectively communicated to the school site councils and school staff the knowledge necessary for planning and budgeting. Another district administrator estimated that only 20 percent of school sites had the capacity to develop a coextensive academic plan and budget. Yet another district administrator commented that "schools still [had] a long way to go to share the data from their schools so [the community could] understand where the needs are."

Given that a weighted student formula policy requires school staff to become much more involved in the planning and budgeting process, it has also been important for San Francisco to ensure that the schools have the capacity to participate in this process

Encouraging community involvement

Lastly, San Francisco sought to ensure that parents and community members were adequately prepared and motivated to participate in the budget process.

The planning and budgeting process requires two communitywide meetings open to the public to solicit feedback on the needs of the school and the school plan, as well as ongoing involvement from the elected members of the school site council. Researchers identified confusion about the role of the school site council in deciding school priorities. As one district administrator indicated, communities "embraced" the weighted student formula policy but remained unclear about their role at school site council meetings. For example, did the principal or the school site council have the final say about academic planning? Some believed that the school site councils were merely "rubber stamp[s]." Three district administrators, one principal, and one

union leader remarked that several years into the policy the community was only sporadically involved in planning and budgeting decisions.

To address these problems, the central office was developing more workshops to engage parents from the community on school site councils. One school board member also recommended that the district provide financial incentive to school site council members to increase participation (although others noted that this would not be feasible since the money would likely have to come from shrinking school budgets).

HOW DID SAN FRANCISCO'S WEIGHTED STUDENT FORMULA POLICY INTERACT WITH OTHER LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL EDUCATION REFORM POLICIES?

San Francisco's weighted student formula policy is just one of many district policies that affect district planning and budgeting. Likewise, other district, state, and federal policies affect the weighted student formula policy.

Interaction with district policies

School intervention processes, funding streams, collective bargaining agreements, and open enrollment policies are district-level policies that have affected San Francisco's weighted student formula policy.

School supervision and intervention processes. San Francisco designed intervention and support strategies for schools failing to meet state and federal accountability requirements. Because these strategies require different resources for different schools, they affect the district's weighted student formula policy. Conversations with various stakeholders suggested a mixed reaction to the coexistence of these tiered support systems and the weighted student formula policy. One principal commented that because the lowest performing schools in the district received additional resources beyond the weighted student formula funding, the district's funding mechanisms were not as equitable as the weighted student formula policy intended. However, one district administrator argued for continued extra support for low-performing schools, noting: "[Remaining] entirely decentralized in their funding and in their programs . . . is not a keen approach to develop a vision for a school district that addresses differential needs for schools."

School intervention processes, funding streams, collective bargaining agreements, and open enrollment policies are district-level policies that have affected San Francisco's weighted student formula policy

Other funding streams. Other funding sources interact with weighted student formula funding. For example, the Public Education Enrichment Fund of 2004—a ballot initiative known as Proposition H—provided additional funding for libraries and art, music, and sports education among other programs. As one district administrator mentioned, separating these funds from the weighted student formula funds contradicts the policy's aim of providing flexibility to schools in their budgeting: "If we had just pumped that money into the [weighted student formula] we would have been able to make class sizes smaller and have schools devise plans [on site] that are particular to them, as opposed to having things imposed upon them." However, another district administrator argued that this grant "keeps the school focused on what it should be doing" and so should be maintained as a separate grant.

The district's consent decree funds—required by a desegregation lawsuit settled in the mid-1990s—are another distinct funding stream. Among other criteria for distributing these funds, high schools receive funding for 0.20 extra full-time staff positions for every 20 Advanced Placement exams taken by students at the school. For example, if a high school has 200 Advanced Placement examinees, the school receives Consent Decree funding for two extra staff positions. One district administrator commented that this funding formula skews the amount of money high schools receive and makes the distribution of resources less equitable than envisioned by the weighted student formula policy.

Collective bargaining agreements. Five district administrators and one school board member explicitly noted that San Francisco's collective bargaining agreements interfere with the district's ability to move a teacher from one grade to another without first asking the teacher to volunteer to move or without considering factors such as district seniority, credentials, and other special qualifications. The collective bargaining agreements also restrict principals from removing an experienced teacher when a less experienced teacher could handle the same subject area. One district administrator noted that such limitations on school employment decisions diminished the weighted student formula policy's goal of increasing the equity of resource allocations. In short, as one district staff member noted, "Every conversation of giving schools more discretion is meaningless if you're not talking about staffing [decisions]."

Open enrollment policies. Under San Francisco's open enrollment policy parents can apply for almost any school in the district for their child through a lottery system. Two out of three students are assigned to their first choice, which in the majority of instances is outside the students' traditional attendance zone (San Francisco Unified School District 2007d). This enrollment policy affects budget allocations for each school. A school's enrollment determines its budget under a weighted student formula policy. The district provides funds to schools based on the 10-day count at the beginning of the year, rather than using enrollment weighted by average daily attendance. Certain low-performing schools struggle to maintain sufficient students to provide an adequate operating budget.

Interaction with state policies

Respondents noted two state policies that affected weighted student formula policy: state categorical programs and the state budget funding cycle.

State categorical programs. As explained by a district staff official to schools at the 2007 school site council summit, the weighted student formula funds are "like getting cash for your school," while the one-time state block grants are like "getting a gift card to a specific store." Cash is easier to spend and has more flexibility than gift cards. The more gift cards a school receives, the less flexibility and autonomy the school has to make decisions. California districts can receive funds from more than 220 state and federal categorical programs (Timar 2006).

Respondents noted two state policies that affected weighted student formula policy: state categorical programs and the state budget funding cycle

The district divides funds from the different categorical sources into blocks. Seven district- and school-level correspondents mentioned that the different blocks of money, with so many different regulations and requirements, posed challenges for the budget process and countered the weighted student formula policy goal of providing money to schools with few strings attached. One district administrator said, "Abiding by the rules the state has put on us, you are going to have a hard time using the money in the right way," while another asserted that the categorical funds "feel like a noose around your neck."

Two district administrators recommended rolling the categorical funds into the weighted student formula funds to counteract categorical program restrictions. This measure would increase school-site discretion. As one district administrator stated, "If the categorical [program dollars] were dumped into the [weighted student formula] funds, it wouldn't change the results, but it would change the perspective of the people [at the school site] who have to use the funds."

State budget funding cycle. The state budget cycle is not aligned with the district's budgeting cycle, making it difficult in general to accurately estimate the level of funding the district will receive from the state. In addition, tardy state budgets affect school funding. The state legislature is expected to approve the state budget in July. However, according to one district administrator, since

2001 the board has only once met its July deadline. Thus, schools complete their academic plans and corresponding budgets based on budget estimations in the spring, long before knowing the true amount that the district will receive from the state.

Interaction with federal policies

The No Child Left Behind Act also affects San Francisco's weighted student formula policy. Two principals noted the act's impact on the school budgeting and academic process. In times of declining enrollment staffing decisions are made on the basis of qualifications defined by the act rather than by the specific needs of the schools. One district administrator and one school board member noted that the act tends to reduce the elective courses offered by a school.

WHAT HAVE OFFICIALS LEARNED FROM SAN FRANCISCO'S IMPLEMENTATION OF A WEIGHTED STUDENT FORMULA POLICY?

Several lessons from San Francisco's experience may prove useful for attempts to implement weighted student formula policies elsewhere.

Commitment to weighted student formula

San Francisco school and district staff expressed strong support for the weighted student formula policy. All but one respondent—a union leader—would rather maintain the policy than revert to the old planning and budgeting model. As one district administrator noted, "The [weighted student formula policy] is not going away. There is a strong commitment to it and [to] the underlying idea of the school-based decision-making." While respondents suggested that the overall lack of money in the system dampened enthusiasm for the policy over time, it is noteworthy that such a large portion of respondents accepted the permanency of the policy.

San Francisco's weighted student formula policy cannot offset the effects of declining school district revenues from federal, state, and local sources

Need for ongoing review of the policy

Despite districtwide changes in revenue, enrollment, and leadership, and a noted need to revisit the design of the policy, San Francisco has not adequately reviewed or modified its weighted student formula policy. Notably, the district's weighted student formula committee, which is supposed to meet annually, did not convene during the 2006/07 school year. If such review is undertaken in the future, respondents recommended revisiting weighting formulas, average or actual salaries, community involvement initiatives, and school-site discretion.

The relationship between a weighted student formula and declining revenue

San Francisco's weighted student formula policy cannot offset the effects of declining school district revenues from federal, state, and local sources. One district administrator noted that the district was fortunate to have implemented this policy for two years when there was "new money" available to provide schools with additional discretionary funds. Other respondents discussed the serious implications of declining enrollment and declining revenue in the district. In almost every conversation respondents echoed the sentiment that any budget, including one defined by a weighted student formula policy, is deficient if it cannot provide adequate funds to districts or schools.

In short, while most respondents wanted to retain the weighted student formula, support for the policy appears to have eroded as the district's financial situation worsened. Two union leaders came to mistrust the policy, noting that in schools with declining enrollment and revenue, staff were burdened with having to decide which positions to cut. As another district administrator commented, "I don't think the policy would have survived the criticism that came about after we were losing money if it didn't already have a wide support basis from the first couple of years [when] people were able to make important decisions." In addition, a district administrator noted that any

changes to the actual weights, even if they were to better reflect the education needs of the students, seemed pointless with the current level of funding in the system. As one district administrator noted, "Flexibility does not matter if there is not enough money to be flexible."

At the school level one principal complained that the district provided more autonomy but inadequate funding, leaving the school with "nonfunctioning machines and less money than last year." Another school simultaneously struggled with declining enrollment and large budget cuts. According to the school's principal, the planning and budgeting process was complicated by ongoing revenue losses: "[Y]ou can't squeeze blood out of a rock." This principal felt that community involvement in planning and budgeting was a "cruel joke." Because there was so little money in the budget for any creative decisions, parents did not actually feel empowered.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH OF WEIGHTED STUDENT FORMULA POLICIES?

This report raises questions that may help other districts decide whether and how to implement a weighted student formula model. Other areas of research are necessary to develop a clearer picture of this policy.

Because researchers examined a weighted student formula policy in only one district, it is unclear how other contexts might affect implementation. How have other jurisdictions faced similar considerations in implementing weighted student formula policies? Also, because this report and most of the literature on weighted student formulas focus on large urban school districts, additional research on smaller districts in suburban or rural areas is needed to highlight similarities and differences in implementation across different sizes and types of districts.

Additional research on smaller districts in suburban or rural areas is needed to highlight similarities and differences in implementation across different sizes and types of districts

Researchers for this study were not able to address some of the concerns raised by the literature—including whether the policy places too much additional burden on school leaders, creates an incentive to mislabel students to gain the extra funding attached to special populations, or increases staff training costs. Further study of districts with weighted student formula policies might clarify these issues.

Finally, one of the biggest issues for district administrators is how a weighted student formula policy affects a district. How have resource allocation patterns across schools changed since the policy was implemented? Have programmatic offerings, staffing patterns, or the school climate changed with an increase in school-based decisionmaking? Additional research should query whether the intended goals—equity, efficiency, and effectiveness—have changed in districts implementing weighted student formula policies.

Future research will leave districts better armed to decide whether a weighted student formula policy is appropriate for their goals and communities.

NOTES

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1. The Excellence for All set of reforms included increasing the salaries of teachers and other staff, focusing on teacher recruiting incentives for hard-to-fill positions, expanding art and music programs, implementing a high school redesign initiative, and creating an intervention program for low-performing schools across the district.

2. Increasing the equity of resource, however, might not translate to a more equal distribution. Students with greater needs might receive systematically greater allocations of resources to meet a systematically greater need.

3. To understand average salaries, imagine that School A has a large pool of veteran teachers whose actual salary cost for its 10 teachers totals $800,000. In the same district School B with the same number of teachers has a large pool of new teachers whose actual salary cost totals $400,000. Further, assume that the average teacher salary in the district is $50,000. If the district were to use average teacher salaries for budgeting, the teacher costs for both schools, each employing 10 teachers, would be $500,000. School A's actual teacher costs (and therefore the money the school would receive) would be $300,000 more than the budgeted amount, while School B's actual teacher costs (and therefore the money the school would receive) would be $100,000 less than the amount reflected in its budget.

4. Researchers attempted to interview central office staff who provided support to the schools, but they declined to participate.

APPENDIX A METHODOLOGY

Information for this study was obtained from a variety of sources, including reviews of the literature on weighted student formula policies, relevant district documents, semistructured conversations with a small cross-section of stakeholders in the district, a focus group with school site council members, and observations of district training sessions.

Literature review

To compile the studies, reports, and articles on the topic of weighted student formula and site-based management policies, researchers conducted a comprehensive review of journal articles, education databases, and other web-based repositories. The search included articles published between January 1974 (the year that the weighted student formula was first implemented in Edmonton, Canada) and August 2007, with the objective of locating all published and unpublished studies on weighted student formula and site-based management policies. Some researchers (such as Petko 2005) believe that there is a clear distinction between site-based management policies and weighted student formula policies, as a weighted student formula policy is a method of distributing revenues and decentralizing decisions about resource use to the school level while site-based management is simply a system for managing resources already allocated to the school. However, since weighted student formula policies inherently incorporate an element of site-based management, the review of the literature included research on site-based management, with the understanding that these policies are not exactly synonymous.

Researchers searched education journal databases, including JSTOR and Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), and conducted searches using Google, Google Scholar, and other search engines. In addition, titles in the reference section of studies already found through the database searches were examined, and promising citations were explored. Researchers also asked content experts for literature recommendations. In addition, the review included case studies of districts and issue identification briefs. Once compiled, the literature was reviewed for common topics and findings—such as descriptions of the goals of a weighted student formula policy, challenges of implementing the policy, and measures of the weighted student formula's impact on communities.

Data collection

Reviews of relevant district documents, semistructured conversations and a focus group with a small cross-section of stakeholders in the district, and observations of district training sessions provided the data for this study (table A1).

Information from the document review (see table A1) was used to develop additional topics for the discussion guide used in the semistructured conversations (table A2). Information from these documents yielded an overall assessment of the weighted student formula policy in San Francisco.

Observation of district training sessions. Researchers attended two training sessions for observation purposes. One session was a districtwide all-day session providing information to school site council members and school principals to assist them in their planning and budgeting. Another was a voluntary afternoon district training session to assist principals with budget planning software. Researchers took detailed open-ended notes, which were then reviewed and coded for relevant information. Researchers also reviewed the handouts and PowerPoint presentations from these meetings.

Semistructured conversations. Researchers held semistructured conversations with five school principals, one focus group with school site council members, eight respondents at the district level, and four external stakeholders. To protect their privacy, no names are provided in this report.

School principals. Researchers first selected principals from six schools in the district to achieve a diverse sample. To locate these principals,

TABLE A1
Data collection by type and source

Data type	Data source
Document review	San Francisco Unified School District 2002, 2004, 2006a, 2007a, b, c, d Handouts from observed training sessions
Semistructured conversations (*n* = 17)	*District level (n = 8):* Former superintendent (by telephone) Interim superintendent (in person) Chief of policy and planning (in person) Former special assistant to the superintendent (by telephone) Special assistant to the superintendent (by telephone) Director of policy (in person) Director of special education (in person) Director of parent relations (by telephone) *School level (n = 5):* Four school principals (in person) One assistant school principal (in person) *External stakeholders (n = 4):* Two school board members (by telephone) Two union leaders (by telephone)
Focus group (*n* = 1)	School site council members from one middle school including (*n* = 5): Two teachers Two parents One student
Observation of district training sessions (*n* = 2)	Districtwide all-day training for school site council members and principals Afternoon budget training for principals

Source: Authors' data collection plan.

researchers divided San Francisco's schools into poverty quartiles. Researchers randomly selected one high-poverty (fourth quartile) and one low-poverty (first quartile) school from each grade span (elementary, middle, and high). Since there were not enough low-poverty middle schools, the two middle schools were the second lowest poverty level (the second quartile) and the highest poverty level (the fourth quartile). The list of sample schools was approved by the district. Principals from all six selected schools were invited to participate in an hour-long conversation. Five of the six principals agreed to participate.

District-level respondents. Researchers used a purposive sampling strategy to select district administrators. Researchers reviewed the district's staff list for relevant job titles, examined the district contacts listed in the technical assistance materials provided to school sites, and solicited recommendations from senior district staff involved with the weighted student formula policy. Researchers then solicited participation from this list of respondents and conducted eight conversations with the former superintendent, the interim superintendent, the chief of policy and planning, the former and the current special assistant to the superintendent, the director of policy, the director of special education, and the director of parent relations. Three district administrators declined to participate and were replaced.

External stakeholders. District office staff identified school board members who would be most aware of the policy. Union leaders were selected based on their high rank in the teachers union. Researchers then conducted conversations with two school board members and two union leaders.

School site council members. Researchers attended a school site council meeting at one of the sample schools and convened a focus group of all present

council members, including two teachers, two parents, and one student.

For all the conversations and the focus group two researchers used a semistructured discussion guide and open-ended questions to conduct one-time only focused conversations (Glesne 1999; Creswell 2003). Topics were based on the literature review and researchers' own questions (see table A2). Researchers tailored questions from the discussion guide to each respondent's role in the district and to the respondent's duties in the weighted student formula policy. An iterative process for each respondent ensured that the guide was not static; information received during a conversation further shaped the questions asked during the following conversations.

Conversations lasted approximately one hour and were recorded and transcribed with each respondent's written permission (all respondents signed an interview consent form). All school-level conversations were held in person. Most district-level conversations were held in person; conversations with individuals who had left the district and with school board members and union leaders were held by phone.

Data analysis

Information obtained during data collection was coded for relevant themes and patterns (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). First, researchers created an Excel spreadsheet for an analysis matrix, with one column for every topic (or variable) addressed in the discussion guide and one row for every respondent and piece of data collected. Then the two qualitative researchers met to discuss the definition of each coding variable to ensure a shared understanding before coding the data. To establish reliability, the two qualitative researchers independently coded one full interview, placing the interviewee's comments into the variable categories in the spreadsheet. The researchers reviewed this input together and discussed any discrepancies. Remaining conversations and documents were similarly coded and placed into the spreadsheet matrix.

Researchers reviewed this matrix for patterns and salient findings within each category. They developed six considerations for planning and implementing a weighted student formula policy prior to the coding—school-level participation, calculation of school allocations, school-level discretion, calculation of salaries, capacity of school site, and interaction with other policies—based on what the literature noted as important considerations in implementing a weighted student formula policy and what the researchers noted as important given their content expertise. These considerations were linked to specific topics raised in the discussion guide (see table A2). After researchers reviewed the matrix they added three additional considerations—district-level participation, alignment of the planning and budgeting policies, and community involvement—based on the respondents' comments that indicated several important areas raised in the conversations that the researchers would not be able to capture with the existing considerations. No other considerations emerged from the coding of this data. However, the data collection instrument was geared toward the considerations initially thought to be important. Further conversations with a different discussion guide might reveal additional considerations not captured in this report.

Within each consideration the authors selected findings from the matrix when at least two people mentioned a similar reaction or remark (for example, when 11 respondents felt that the lack of overall funding affected implementation of a weighted student formula policy). Findings also merited selection when one individual with a high level of involvement in designing, refining, or influencing the policy remarked on something of note (for example, when the director of policy shared an opinion on the weighted student formula policy and what elements should be changed). Finally, authors selected findings when one individual remarked on an issue that stood out as being of high importance for inclusion (for example, when only one principal commented on a large loss of money at the school site after the weighted student formula policy was introduced,

TABLE A2

Qualitative analysis plan: research questions, existing literature base, categories, coding variables, and considerations

Research question	Literature base and San Francisco Unified School District documentation	Category	Discussion guide topic (coding variables)	Considerations
na	na	Participant's background	• Job title* • Previous experience*	
na	na	School background	• Grade span* • Student demographics* • School size* • Accountability status*	
How was the weighted student formula policy implemented in San Francisco?	Childress and Peterkin 2005; San Francisco Unified School District 2002, 2004, 2006a, 2007a, b, c; handouts from observed training sessions	Description of budgeting and planning process	• General explanation of budgeting and planning process • Individual role in budgeting and planning process • Remarks on current budgeting and planning processes (satisfaction and dissatisfaction, recommendations for improvements)	• Aligning the planning and budgeting policies • Aligning the planning and budgeting policies
What are the goals of the district's weighted student formula policy?	Childress and Peterkin 2005; Cooper et al. 2005; Petko 2005; School Communities That Work 2002a	Initial implementation	• Driving force behind the policy • Policy goals • Description of pilot program • Results from pilot program	• Adjusting school-level participation
How was the weighted student formula policy implemented in San Francisco?	San Francisco Unified School District 2004, 2006a, 2007a		• School involvement in developing policy • School reactions • School reactions to possible "winners" and "losers" problem (did schools feel they gained or lost money when policy was introduced?) • Reaction of union leaders	• Adjusting school-level participation • Adjusting school-level participation • Adjusting school-level participation

(CONTINUED)

TABLE A2 (CONTINUED)

Qualitative analysis plan: research questions, existing literature base, categories, coding variables, and considerations

Research question	Literature base and San Francisco Unified School District documentation	Category	Discussion guide topic (coding variables)	Considerations
How was the weighted student formula policy implemented in San Francisco?	Baker and Thomas 2006; Rubenstein, Schwartz, and Stiefel 2006	Weights and allocations	• General process for developing weights	• Calculating school allocations
			• Impression of whether weights reflect needs of students	• Calculating school allocations
What considerations did the district face in planning and implementing a weighted student formula policy?	San Francisco Unified School District 2004, 2006a, 2007a		• Allocations to school sites beyond weighted student formula allocation	• Calculating school allocations
What considerations did the district face in planning and implementing a weighted student formula policy?	Childress and Peterkin 2005; Petko 2005; San Francisco Unified School District 2002, 2004, 2006a, 2007a; observation notes from districtwide all-day training	Details of ongoing implementation	• Level of planning and budgetary discretion at school site	• Determining school-level discretion
			• Balance of budgeting responsibilities (central office or school-level costs)	• Determining school-level discretion
			• Role of community involvement	• Encouraging community involvement
			• Central office supports to schools	• Ensuring school site capacity
				• Adjusting district-level participation
What considerations did the district face when planning and implementing a weighted student formula policy?	Hawley Miles and Roza 2006; Rubenstein, Schwartz, and Stiefel 2006; Committee for Economic Development 2004; Ouchi et al. 2003; Leschly 2002; Fermanich, Odden, and Archibald 2000)	Possible factors affecting implementation	• Ensuring school site capacity	• Ensuring school site capacity
			• District policies	• Interacting with other policies
			• State policies	• Interacting with other policies
			• Use of average or actual salaries	• Calculating salaries
How does San Francisco's weighted student formula policy interact with other local, state, and federal education reform policies?	San Francisco Unified School District 2006b; observation notes from districtwide all-day training		• Other external factors	• Interacting with other policies

(CONTINUED)

TABLE A2 (CONTINUED)
Qualitative analysis plan: research questions, existing literature base, categories, coding variables, and considerations

Research question	Literature base and San Francisco Unified School District documentation	Category	Discussion guide topic (coding variables)	Considerations
What considerations did the district face when planning and implementing a weighted student formula policy?		Lessons	• Unintended consequences of policy • Challenges and weaknesses in implementing a weighted student formula • Successes and strengths in implementing a weighted student formula • Decision to keep weighted student formula or return to previous policy • Recommendations for alterations to weighted student formula policy • Advice to other districts considering weighted student formula	
What have school and district officials learned from San Francisco's implementation of a weighted student formula policy?				

na is not applicable.

* These variables provided background information on the respondents but were not included in the final data analysis.

Source: Authors' summary of design and analysis of data.

that clearly affected his view of this policy at his school site).

Quantitative analysis

To adjust district revenue for inflation, researchers obtained the total general fund revenues for San Francisco (Education Data Partnership 2007a) and used data from the Association of Bay Area Governments (2008) to generate a consumer price index (CPI) for 2000–05 for all urban wage earners and clerical workers in the San Francisco Bay Area. Researchers also used data from the California Department of Industrial Relations (2008) to obtain the appropriate CPI for urban wage earners and clerical workers in the San Francisco Bay Area for 2006. They then rescaled the CPI series to correspond to the first year of general fund data for San Francisco (1999/2000). To adjust each year for inflation, researchers set the CPI to 1.00 for 1999/2000 and divided the actual revenue values by the corresponding CPI value to obtain the estimate of real (CPI adjusted) general fund revenues.

APPENDIX B
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Below is the list of suggested topics that researchers used to guide the semistructured conversations and focus group. Not all topics were covered in every conversation. The order of the topics and the way they were introduced varied by respondent. Researchers tailored conversations to the participant's role in the budgeting and planning process.

Participant's background

Researchers determined a participant's background by studying the following criteria: current position in the district, length of employment within the district, previous employment, and roles and responsibilities with respect to the weighted student formula policy.

School and district background

School background. Researchers determined a school's background using the following criteria: grade span, student demographics, school size, and accountability status.

District background. Researchers determined the district's background using relevant, general information on San Francisco.

Description of budgeting and planning process

Researchers arrived at a description of the budgeting and planning process by studying the district's and school sites' budgetary and planning responsibilities, individuals' roles in the budgeting and planning process, and remarks on and recommendations for the current budgeting and planning process.

Initial implementation of the weighted student formula policy

Researchers arrived at a description of specific aspects of the initial implementation of the weighted student formula policy by studying intended goals of the policy, the driving force of policy's creation, knowledge of pilot program and its results, past and present reactions from various stakeholders in the weighted student formula policy, and the initial process of developing the different weights.

Weights and allocations in implementation of the weighted student formula policy

Researchers ascertained the current process for developing the weights by measuring respondents' feelings on whether the weights reflect the current needs of the students. Respondents were also asked about the development of other funding allocations beyond the weights.

Details of ongoing implementation of the weighted student formula policy

Researchers learned about ongoing implementation of the weighted student formula policy by studying aspects of the weighted student formula implementation in San Francisco: amount of school-level discretion, the involvement of parents and community, the support and training provided by the central office to the school sites, and the use of average and actual salaries.

Possible factors affecting implementation

Researchers derived possible factors affecting implementation by studying current district or state policies that hinder or assist implementation of the weighted student formula policy. They also considered other major factors that have limited or supported the implementation of the weighted student formula policy in San Francisco.

Lessons and concluding topics

Researchers ascertained lessons learned by considering the district's overall reaction to challenges to the weighted student formula policy. They also studied respondents' suggestions regarding changes and unintended consequences of the policy and their advice for district administrators and state policymakers about budgeting preferences.

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