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Publication Date

2012-07-20

Supplemental Material

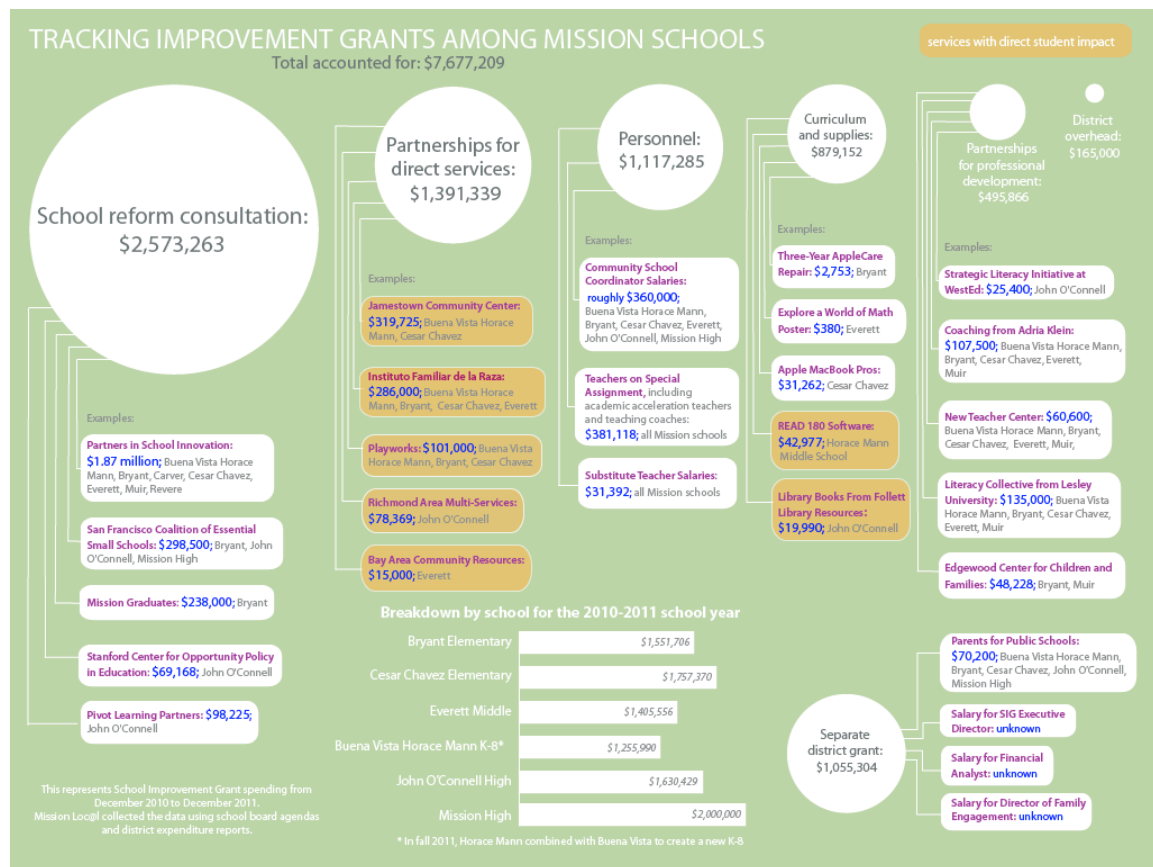
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A Multimillion-Dollar Education Bet

By Lisette Mejia

**This thesis is a series of one infographic, five articles and one comic strip that tracks a federal School Improvement Grant among the Mission's schools.*

Infographic:



Article 1: A Multimillion-Dollar Education Bet

When students at some of the Mission District schools arrived at school this fall, they may have noticed a few changes — new equipment, new after-school programs, new faces in tutors and teaching coaches.

It's all part of a multimillion dollar challenge. Can grants that average \$1.6 million a year, for three years, vastly improve the education and outcomes at six struggling district schools?

The setup for the wager began in 2009, when the state announced a list of more than 100 low-performing schools and demanded change. The lure from the federal government was cash, but with a catch.

To get the Student Improvement Grant (SIG) money and survive as public schools, the districts had to agree to close schools, turn them into charter schools or opt for one of two options: a turnaround or transformation model.

A turnaround model meant replacing the principal, evaluating the staff and rehiring no more than half the teachers. With the transformation model, principals who had been in place for less than two years could remain.

In both situations, the plan was to improve the school through such strategies as comprehensive curriculum reform, professional development and extending learning time.

The demands were not always positive, said Guadalupe Guerrero, assistant superintendent for the school district's Mission Zone. "It was certainly destructive in a lot of communities that were forced to make decisions about getting rid of teachers and, in some cases, principals."

In the Mission, four schools underwent the transformation model, two the more drastic turnaround model.

The district made changes as well. San Francisco established one special superintendent zone to oversee the district's 15 worst schools. (One of the schools, Willie L. Brown Jr. College Preparatory Academy in the Bayview, has since closed, bringing the number to 14.)

This zone was divided into two area teams: The Mission Zone, which operates out of Mission High School and is run by Guerrero, and the Bayview Zone, led by Assistant Superintendent Dr. Patricia Gray, which operates out of the Metropolitan Arts and Technology High School in the Bayview.

The Mission Zone includes six schools: Bryant Elementary, Cesar Chavez Elementary, Everett Middle School, Horace Mann (now Buena Vista Horace Mann K-8), John O'Connell High School of Technology and Mission High. Guerrero also supervises John Muir Elementary in the Western Addition and Leonard R. Flynn Elementary in Bernal Heights, because they too are classified as underperforming schools, even though Flynn receives no grant money.

The Bayview Zone includes five schools in that district: Bret Harte Elementary, Dr. Charles Drew Elementary, Dr. George Washington Carver Elementary, Malcolm X Elementary and Thurgood Marshall Academic High. Paul Revere College Preparatory School K-8, another under Gray's supervision, is in Bernal Heights. Of these, only Dr. George Washington Carver and Paul Revere are receiving the grant.

The first distribution of the award money was midway through last school year and, if progress is made, two more waves of money will arrive over the next two years: the second this December and the third in December of 2012.

The framework for the Mission's overhaul is based on a strategic plan of five factors, including improving family and community ties, professional capacity and instructional guidance and coherence.

"A few key elements needed to be focused on — for example, paying attention to leadership, how you create school communities where teacher leadership is supported and cultivated," said Guerrero. "It's no surprise that with failing schools, sometimes they don't have a clear academic agenda."

The solution here has been to integrate a common core curriculum, using national and state standards for what students should know and be able to do. This will provide a set of guidelines to teachers who lacked instructional direction.

The district's application for the grant money promised "intensive coaching in data-driven instructional planning."

As for family and community involvement, the district said that schools were committed, but lacked the resources to follow through.

Part of the solution was hiring community school coordinators for each school to act as liaisons between the community, including parents, and schools.

The position entails arranging partnerships with the city's community-based organizations to provide services to students and their families, coordinating school "climate" surveys, and convening an advisory committee of partners and community members to provide input on school support services.

For Guerrero, these issues aren't new. "Some of these schools have received quite a bit of money in the past that hasn't been used effectively."

So what will be different this time around?

An area team observing every investment made by the schools, said Guerrero. Principals who want to take the same approach in their leadership, such as hiring instructional coaches.

“When you move as a cohort in a tight, similar fashion, you can make your dollars go a lot farther, and that’s more impactful. We know we have to provide immediate relief right now, but it’s also about the long term.”

Part of that will come through reform plans across the seven schools, including federal monitoring visits, coming up with strategies to address truancy, providing mental health services for students and partnering with professional development services for teacher training in literacy, math and dual immersion.

“I think this year is going to be our year when we see the biggest dent in those achievement gaps,” said Guerrero.

In the following months, Mission Loc@l will be following the schools’ progress — including tracking where grant money is going.

Article 2: Millions of Grant Money for Mission Schools: Where is It Going?

They belong to a club where membership hinges on low reading and math skills, and high drop out rates. They’re some of the worst performing schools in the state, even the country, and to shape up, the Mission’s six struggling schools took drastic measures to have share of a \$45 million grant. Those included firing principals and replacing half the staff.

In December of 2010, Bryant, Everett, Buena Vista Horace Mann, Mission High and John O’Connell began receiving an average of \$1.6 million a year for three years from the new federal School Improvement Grant.

Over the past several months, Mission Loc@l has sought to understand where, exactly, the money is being spent and why. To do so, we’ve searched through SFUSD school board agendas for budget proposals, spoken with the district’s School Improvement Grant Executive Director Kevin Rocap and looked into specific organizations receiving contracts. Our oversight of what is happening at Mission schools will continue through the three years of the grant as we illustrate

how the money is being spent. It is far too early to draw any conclusions about a strategy's success, but we felt it was important to report on the issues, explain the underpinnings of some of the strategies and offer residents information on a major reform that is underway.

So far, we have tracked more than \$7.7 million from December 2010 to December 2011. The biggest expense: outside consulting.

Rather than in-class personnel or direct one-on-one services to students, more than \$2.5 million has been spent on third-party organizations providing advice related to school reform.

Rocap said that, because the grant money was released halfway through the last school year, funding in the second year will reflect fewer partner contracts and more full-time and part-time hires.

The hiring didn't start until the winter and spring months of 2011, he said. Plus, the district only spent 32 percent of its budget in year one. The remainder carried over.

"That meant there were more people to hire in year two," Rocap said.

The School Improvement Grants – including SFUSD's total award of \$45 million over three years – are meant to improve the schools that rate in the bottom five percent of the country.

Assistant Superintendent Guadalupe Guerrero, who oversees the Mission Zone of underperforming schools, said that five key factors guided the framework for where the money would be spent.

These are based on a study called "Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago." The report, which followed schools over a seven-year period starting in 1990, looked at several hundred underperforming Chicago schools to discover what elements proved most effective to devise a rubric of five key elements: "School leadership sits in the first position," the study concluded. The four other elements: "parent and community ties, professional capacity of the faculty and staff, a student-centered learning climate and an instructional guidance system." Guerrero said their goal is to put in place all five elements – a goal that the Chicago study said is important because those schools that only pursued one or two elements were less successful. Those that accomplished all showed great

progress. Improved schools reached up to 95 percent attendance, while the top elementary schools averaged a 10 percent improvement in reading and a more than 30 percent improvement in math in certain grade levels.

But some, including last year's principal of Horace Mann Middle School, say basing the Mission's reform on the Chicago study is wrong.

"That's not the kids we're talking about," said Mark Sanchez, who's now the principal at Cleveland Elementary School in the Excelsior.

"Chicago is so huge – and they already had a lot of resources in place," he said. "They put a lot into school city councils."

Those councils developed after 1988 when the Chicago school system decentralized, giving significant authority to local school councils on school finances, principal selection and more.

That, he said, was a benefit to begin with.

In the Bay Area, students and their families have specific needs related to housing and jobs that are different than those in Chicago.

Still, said Rocap, the research is relevant and significant.

"They are urban schools that are highly diverse with large numbers of students of color; that's more relevant than some suburb somewhere," he said.

"We don't want to just stick with something we've never heard of before," he added. "We know what kind of a track record this has and how many people found it to be valuable and to make a difference," he continued.

"On what other basis would we make decisions?"

Who decides where the money is spent is two-fold: first, federal requirements, which were outlined in the district's original grant proposal, dictate to a significant degree what is considered an allowable expenditure, Rocap wrote in an email. For example, schools should only invest in materials, practices and partnerships with a proven effectiveness. "So we may think it may be great to purchase something, but if there is not a good evidence- or research-base we can point to for that investment, it is not a good fit with SIG," added Rocap.

Secondly, requirements called for the creation of a ‘turnaround’ office to lead the reform. The Mission Zone, as it is called, is led by Guerrero. In keeping with federal and state requirements, as well as the proposal from SFUSD’s grant application, Zone leaders work with principals to authorize spending, Rocap said. They also seek input from other school members.

When it comes to monitoring the district’s spending, the California State Department of Education does not require detailed expense reports. And it has continued to struggle with monitoring the grant’s implementation, according to a report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

The report found that as a result of California’s budget crisis, the amount of school improvement funds available for state administration dropped from the allowable five percent to 0.5 percent, “limiting the number of staff available to administer the program and monitor districts.”

At the end of each year, California assesses whether or not to renew the grant to districts and schools. After the 2010-2011 year, it did not base this decision on whether test scores had gone up and met their goals. In fact, the Chicago study demonstrates that significant improvement in test scores failed to occur until after the second or third year of reform. And, those schools that showed promise after only one year, were often not in the top performing schools after three years.

So, how did California decide whether it should renew grants to the 92 School Improvement Grant schools in the state? “One telephone conversation with each district at the end of the year,” said the report.

The report continues: “Prior to those conversations, the state had limited interaction with most districts for the purpose of assessing their implementation and was unable to conduct SIG monitoring visits for budgetary reasons.”

Below is a breakdown of the different areas where the grant money has gone. Compiled using expenditure reports provided by Rocap that show expenses through June 2011, a public records request response document, and our own compilation of proposals brought before the SFUSD school board, it traces expenditures from December 2010 to December 2011.

To understand the grant’s potential impact, it helps to look at this figure:

There is enough money for each school to hire roughly 27 more teachers each year. Instead, the district, sometimes complying with federal regulations, decided

that the money would be better spent hiring consultants to advise teachers and administrators. This decision was again based on the Chicago experience.

While spending so much money on capacity building rather than direct services seems counterintuitive, the Chicago report underscores its importance. It notes for examples two schools, two miles apart, that used many of these same approaches. One, Hancock, succeeded in raising test scores; the other, Alexander, failed. “The sustained focus on instruction and professional capacity building at Hancock also stands out as notable,” the report concluded.

It’s important to note, said Rocap, that these expenditures may change, depending on several factors including whether the district ended up hiring for a given position. He also stated that district overhead through June 2011 amounted to \$165,000 and that the district received its own grant of more than \$1 million. This went toward expenses such as salaries for people like Rocap and other personnel, including a financial analyst, a clerk and a director of family engagement.

Chunk 1 – School Reform Consultation: \$2.57 million

To help with the goal of turning around the schools, the district has so far spent the largest part of the grant on consultants. Their role has been to aid the transformation process through academics, organization and changing school culture.

Take, for instance, a contract with Partners in School Innovation, a San Francisco-based organization specializing in school reform.

In the Mission, nearly \$1.8 million has provided resources to Bryant, Cesar Chavez, Buena Vista Horace Mann and Everett schools from December 2010 to June 2012. On the ground, this means consultants like Cameron Stephenson, one of the lead Partners, spends a day and a half at Buena Vista Horace Mann, John Muir Elementary and Everett Middle School. Throughout her time, she’s helped teachers and administrators learn how to read data, advised an English teaching coach, restructured teacher planning time, helped monitor the principal’s email inbox and led classroom observations.

Then there’s a \$179,750 contract between Bryant, John O’Connell and Mission High, and the San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small School. The organization’s job is to support guidelines written into the School improvement Grant and come up with individual strategies for each school.

The organization, said Rocap, works with groups of teachers to revise lessons, target underserved students and help improve their scores.

Pivot Learning Partners has too profited from this type of work, earning \$98,225 to work at John O'Connell to assess "the current status of O'Connell's transformation and to provide mentoring, coaching and planning support for the transformation effort."

It's the high school equivalent of Partners in School Innovation, Rocap said.

"Last summer, they worked with the principal and other leadership to do a very in-depth detailed plan for reform within the school," he added.

They helped determine "what things we want to accomplish and timelines and who's responsible and how are we going to get it done?"

Such reform consultations were required from the State Department of Education, stated Rocap.

SFUSD's promise to engage in these practices were a major factor in receiving the grant, he added, because it showed an understanding of what's required for effective school transformation.

The hope, added Rocap, are that these investments prove to be effective.

Chunk 2- Partnerships providing direct services: \$1.39 million

The work of groups providing consultation can only go so far, and there are organizations offering more direct services, many of which fit into a community-school model of turning schools into a one-stop shop to provide health, parent education and other services. The Chicago report concluded "reconnecting local schools to the parents and community that they are intended to serve is central for reform."

This includes, stated Rocap, tutoring programs and mental health and wellness services that change the school experience.

For example, Instituto Familiar de la Raza received \$286,000 to enhance the mental health at Everett, Buena Vista Horace Mann, Bryant and Cesar Chavez schools. Hosting individual counseling sessions with students, however, is a small component of what the group does. More often, said program coordinator Cassandra Coe, it's trying to instill a positive environment at the school. Again

this follows the Chicago model that found creating a safe environment and healthy day-to-day social dynamic key to success.

The non-profit accomplishes this by having one representative from the organization at the school to intervene when there are fights or problems involving students and to talk to teachers about why bullying is happening in their classroom. Instituto also leads meetings called mental health collaboratives where 13 faculty – including the school nurse, a special education teacher and the principal – meet to discuss how they can make students and parents feel comfortable at the school. The organization also implements an anti-violence curriculum at Cesar Chavez called Second Steps, which focuses on problem solving and anger management.

Then there's the \$320,000 that went to Jamestown San Francisco, an organization that works at Buena Vista Horace Mann and Cesar Chavez Elementary. There, Jamestown staff have hosted two extra after-school classes for 40 children, started a student council class, led morning homework help sessions and more.

These efforts, including others like summer school sessions and classes for parents, said Rocap, are intended for students to be socially, emotionally, physically and academically healthy.

Chunk 3 – Personnel: \$1.12 million

Throughout the year, new faces made their way into the struggling schools. That's because nearly \$1.2 million of the budget has gone to new hires, but many of these new hires work directly with teachers rather than students. The money also pays for substitutes and current staff who've picked up extra hours.

Here's one example of new personnel: a teaching coach. Across the six schools, 17 coaches work with teachers, training them to improve their classroom management skills, providing them with strategies on how to teach difficult lessons and observing their teaching styles. Essentially, they see how a teacher works before giving him or her feedback and suggestions on how to improve.

There's more. Two new types of teachers have come on board, thanks to the grant: academic acceleration teachers and equity release teachers

The first teachers go into different classrooms either to act as a second teacher in the classroom and work next to the main teacher, or to pull out groups of students in need of targeted instruction. The point is to free up the regular classroom

teacher so he or she can focus on smaller groups of students. There are currently 27 full- or part-time academic acceleration teachers working at all of the Mission schools.

An equity release teacher is comparable to an on-site roving substitute, stated Rocap. The job is to come in and “release” teachers by letting them step out for short periods of time for “reform purposes”— for example, to review student test scores with a consultant. Four equity release teachers work at Cesar Chavez, Buena Vista Horace Mann and Mission High.

“The value of having an on-site equity-release teacher is that he/she gets to know the school, the students and the styles and approaches of the teachers in a way that a randomly assigned substitute would not...” added Rocap. Using release teachers also proved effective at Hancock Elementary School in Chicago.

During the first year of funding, the district spent more than \$320,000 on salaries for what’s called ‘teachers on special assignment’ – or teachers hired for a purpose other than a typical classroom teacher role, such as these academic acceleration teachers and teaching coaches. Less of these teachers were hired last school year than this year.

And across the Mission schools, more than \$27,000 went toward substitutes.

There are more newcomers: Community School Coordinators. One exists at every school and they’re making close to \$60,000 a year to act as liaisons between the community and the school. Their main job is to oversee partnerships with community-based organizations like the Jamestown Community Center that provide after-school classes. But they also organize workshops for parents, oversee mentoring programs, host college nights and even make home visits to talk to parents about their kids’ grades.

Chunk 4 – Curriculum and Supplies: \$880,000

Through June 2011, Rocap said that almost \$880,000, went toward instructional supplies and materials, and student assessments.

Elementary schools have created classroom libraries; middle and high schools use READ 180, a software to improve reading skills in students who score below grade level. To be specific: John O’Connell spent nearly \$20,000 on books from Follet Library services for library books; and last year, Horace Mann Middle School used close to \$43,000 for READ 180.

Other expenses went to laptops for teachers and math manipulatives such as pattern blocks, designed so students understand math concepts by manipulating them with their hands. High schools have also used this money to help students start online advance placement classes when they're not available at their school. Students are assessed through various forms, including oral language tests and software that gives end-of-chapter questions.

And when laptops break, Bryant Elementary can rely on the more than \$2,7000 it spent on three-year AppleCare repair.

Chunk 5 – Professional development: \$496,000

Teachers and administrators need instruction, too, and that's where professional development comes in. It often means providing learning opportunities for school staff, whether that be through one-time workshops or mainstay partners who come up with ways to evaluate teachers.

For three days of workshops and five days of coaching for three teachers, John O'Connell paid \$25,400 to Strategic Lit Initiative at WestEd. The goal: to establish a Reading Apprenticeship Academic Literacy Course for 75 students below grade level.

One of the main emphases, said Rocap, was helping teachers across different subjects find ways to get students writing, like providing prompts in social studies reading.

Specific data on these students were not available, but Rocap said the district tracks grade-level data often. The workshop will not take place again, he added.

A professor emeritus from Cal State San Bernadino, Adria Klein, earned \$107,000 to work at Bryant, Cesar Chavez, Muir, Everett and Buena Vista Horace Mann from August 2011 to June 2012. Her job is to coach coaches, implement a literacy framework and help principals create "structures for collaboration and peer coaching among teachers."

Effective professional development is an important key to turning around schools, said Sam Redding, the director of the Center on Innovation and Improvement, which has provided extensive guidance to states, districts and schools on implementing their School Improvement Grants. A team, including the outside consultants, works together to implement long-term improvements, and

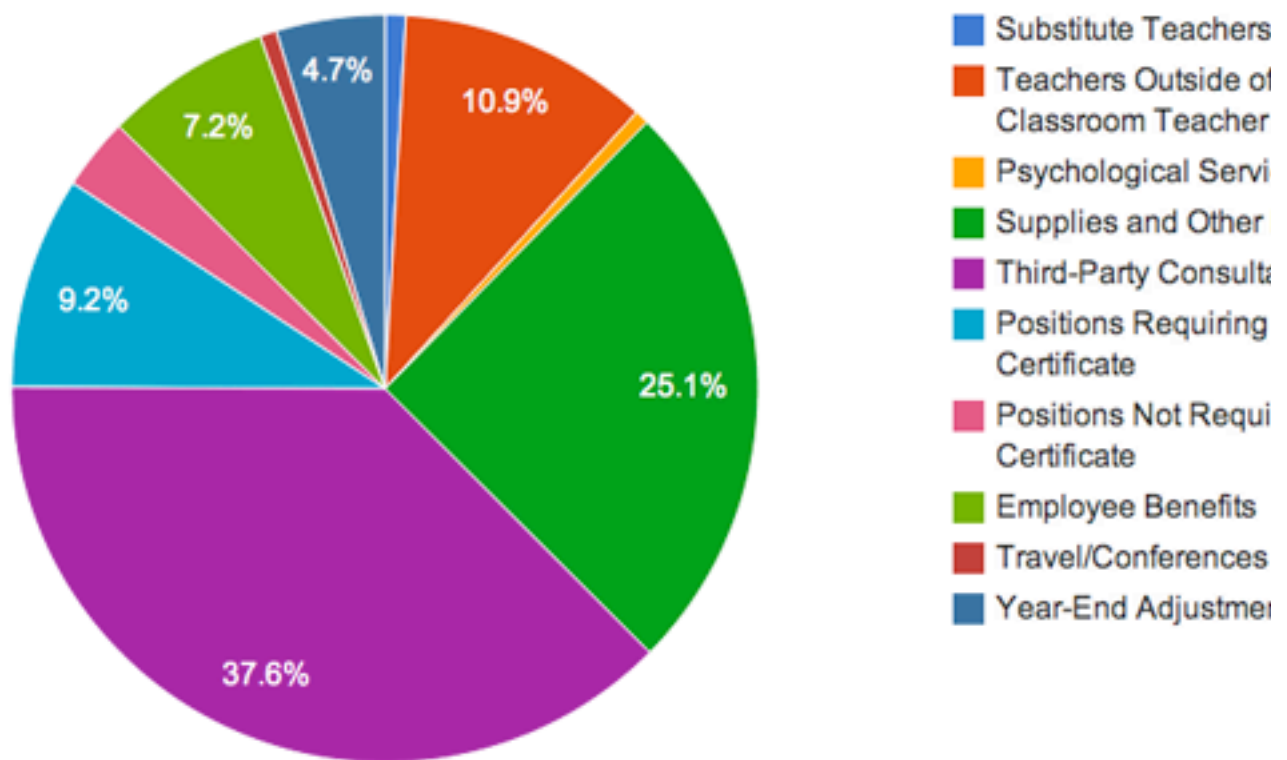
professional development is important because it means the school isn't just relying on one leader, like the principal, to make important decisions.

Critics, however, say professional development is costly and that its goals are vague.

Some consultant groups make a difference because they embed themselves in schools and form true collaborations, said Dr. Patricia Campbell, an associate professor of math education at the University of Maryland. But on the other hand, she said, some professional development partners take on a "one size fits all approach" where they carry out strategies that don't address a specific school's challenges.

"Are they really partners? They're a vendor with service to deliver," added Campbell, who received a National Science Foundation grant to research how teachers develop better understandings of their subjects.

The effectiveness of professional development is unclear. A study from 2009 in the Elementary School Journal found that students in schools whose learning teams relied on formal protocols for meetings, such as those often provided by professional development, improved more than those in a comparison group of schools where that structure was lacking. But in a 2007 review of more than 1,300 professional development studies, only nine met rigorous scientific standards set by the What Works Clearinghouse, a branch of the federal Institute of Education Sciences, which reviews research on program impact.



School Improvement Grant expenses among Mission schools through June 30, 2011. Figures reflect the district's expense report.

Whether for professional development, reform consultation, or both, private consultants are receiving a significant amount of School Improvement Grant money. Within San Francisco, the district hired outside parties directly, almost always based on their track record of success. Often times, schools have worked with the parties in the past, as in the case with Partners in School Innovation. The federal government makes no stipulations about how much districts can spend on consultants and doesn't monitor how much these outside groups have received; nor do most states, according to a study published in *The Denver Post* in February.

Nationwide, the only comprehensive report comes from a collaboration between *The Education Writers Association*, *Education Week* and *The Hechinger Report* released in April. In 15 states that agreed to tally spending, said the article, an average of 25 percent of all SIG money went to private consultants. More locally, the trend of spending most of the money on consultants within year one is the same in the Bayview, said Rocap.

For schools to spend 20 to 30 percent of grant money on outside consultants is normal, said Jeremy Ayers, the associate director for federal education programs at the Center for American Progress. The biggest problem however, said Ayers, is the lack of supervision from the federal government, states and districts.

“The question should be – where is the oversight for these outside providers. What are the goals they’ve set up front? What is the accountability?”

The same U.S. Government Accountability Office found that the federal government does not review the work of outside contractors during the time they are hired, and states vary in supervision.

Chad Portney, a State official who monitors SFUSD’s School Improvement Grant, said that state wide, a majority of the grant has gone to paying teachers for extra school time. But for cases where there’s a need for ‘expert’ advice, some districts use people within the schools already. Others are encouraged to use outside providers and to report to the State the screening process.

Districts are required to file quarterly expenditure reports, added Portney, which are compare to their original proposals to see if the expenses line up. He conducted site visits to SFUSD schools in February with another State official and last school year, the federal government did the same. Officials interviewed administration, parents, teachers, coaches and students; and conducted classroom observations.

They continue online monitoring by requiring districts to upload evidence on an internal system. For example, they look at staff lists to see if names have changed and new personnel have been brought on; they review benchmark test scores and look for growth; they require documentation that schools have extended the school day; and more.

As for the district’s internal monitoring system, Rocap stated that School Site Councils – school governing bodies composed of school staff, parents and other members of the community – review and approve grant plans and expenditures by providing feedback on whether or not they accomplish their intended purposes. “If we said we were providing a certain kind of professional development at their school, did we actually provide it? And is it making a difference?” he added.

However, a monitoring report filed by the Portney following his visit to the schools stated that SFUSD did not meet its Leadership Team Approval Requirements:

“The evidence provided does not demonstrate that the SSC [School Site Council] /Leadership Team annually develops, reviews, updates, and approves the SIG components, including proposed expenditures.”

The district needs to show improvements, it added, by “providing notice, agenda, and minutes of SSC [School Site Council] meeting indicating how program services are identified, developed, implemented, monitored, evaluated, and improved...”

The councils have always monitored grant spending, Rocap said. But schools were not aware that these assessments needed to be written into each school’s plan for student achievement. The district is making those changed, he added.

Ultimately, one question remains: can any amount of grant money help turn around a struggling school?

The answer, however, depends on whom you ask.

There’s such a thing as too much money, said the Sanchez, the former principal at Horace Mann. “We got what we wanted,” he said, referring to the school’s expenses last year, and yet there was still money that hadn’t been spent.

The biggest problem, he said, is that the leftover money couldn’t go to other schools that needed it – instead, it rolled over to the next year.

There are other ways he would spend the grant money, too. “I’d give extra money to teachers—some for materials and a baseline amount of money just for doing their job.”

“They deserve it because they’re there,” he added.

For Rocap, the answer is different.

“We like to talk about how to take [School Improvement Grant] money and make it sustainable, build capacity that we know will last longer.

But can you always sustain this without more money?”

As for Guerrero, who oversees the Mission Zone, that answer is no.

“I’m going to scratch up all the money I can find after SIG — even if it’s not 45 million.”

Article 3: In School Reform, Partners Prove Pricey

Everett Middle School Principal Richard Curci likes to compare his staff to an orchestra. But instead of him leading the group, he calls Cameron Stephenson the conductor, someone who makes sure everyone knows their role and plays to the same beat.

But Stephenson isn’t a San Francisco Unified School District employee; she’s a guest conductor — one of five consultants working at the Mission schools that the state has designated as underperforming. They each receive part of a citywide \$45 million School Improvement Grant that averages out to \$1.6 million a year for three years.

The five consultants come from Partners in School Innovation, a 19 year-old non-profit based in San Francisco. So far it has received the largest grant — nearly \$1.87 million — to consult at Bryant, Carver, Cesar Chavez, Muir, Revere, Buena Vista Horace Mann and Everett for two school years.

While Everett’s principal, Mr. Curci, is pleased with the consultants, some teachers and outsiders wonder: are they worth the close to \$130,000 a year per school the district is spending for the consultants?

Because Partners is the largest grantee, according to school board agendas, Mission Loc@l decided to take a look at exactly what they do.

Unlike grants for supplies or those that hire employees to work directly with students, Partners consults with the faculty, the administration and in some cases, with other consultants. It employs five of its School Innovation Partners, as the consultants are called, to work a day and a half at each school; and since most Partners work at more than one school, they spend approximately three and half days in the field and one and a half days working at the organization toward larger objectives, said Linda Ponce de Leon, Partners’ senior district partnership director.

Their services are aimed at implementing “sustainable practices,” said chief program officer Malika Starr. The logic is that these will improve administration and teaching to the overall benefit of students.

“Sure you can have tutors but how are they going to know what to tutor, what needs to assess and analyze?” said Principal Curci, referring to spending money on more direct services.

Mark Sanchez, the former principal of Horace Mann, said consulting can be a waste of money. “To have all these people not interacting with kids at all — that’s wrong,” said Sanchez, who also served on the school board for eight years and is now the principal at Cleveland Elementary School in the Excelsior.

Sanchez worked with Partners in School Innovation at Horace Mann last school year, but the organization’s relationship with the school was different. For instance, Sanchez used the consultant provided by Partners to take over a classroom where the teacher was ineffective. He used other grant dollars, not Partners, to aid in the classroom.

The other consultant from Partners, he said, came in about once a month to offer consultation. It was expensive advice. Horace Mann still had to pay the same amount of money that other schools were using from their School Improvement Grant budget.

“There was so much money rolling over,” Sanchez said of the grant.

Stephenson agreed that “there have to be people working with kids.” But, she added, “the changes we’re helping them put in are going to be long lasting. And that money is supporting the kids in the long term.”

To get a better sense of how Partners works with the schools, Mission Loc@l focused on Everett Middle School, talking to the principal, faculty and other outsiders to understand what the money is buying. Everett has 347 students; 24.2 percent are advanced or proficient in English Language Arts and 18 percent in math, according to its 2011 test scores, which rose nearly six points in both Language Arts and math since Partners started working there in August 2010.

Stephenson — who began working there in the fall of 2010 — said that in the day and a half she spends at Everett per week, she has made the teachers’ common planning time more effective, become a sounding board for teachers, offered

presentations on how to read school testing data, improved staff management and helped plan a mid-year retreat. She's even helped Principal Curci manage his email inbox.

Stephenson restructured the teachers' common planning time — the period teachers use to plan lessons and discuss what's worked — so that in addition to other meetings, English teachers meet by subject and grade level twice a week. So, for example, teachers from different subjects for one particular grade meet on Mondays and Wednesdays to discuss grade-level concerns such as behavior; and on Fridays, the nine English teachers meet by department. But now, in addition to that, the three English teachers from each grade meet separately on Tuesdays and Thursdays to focus on curriculum and common standards.

It took half a year to figure out, but Everett now has an effective structure for how to run the meetings, said Stephenson, who's spent 11 years as both an assistant principal and a teacher.

"Two years ago, they weren't reflecting back on student achievement," she said, referring to the teachers. "Every teacher was doing their own thing in their own class with no alignment across grade levels."

She's trying to develop a mindset so that teachers "know what's going to help them, by looking back and forward and planning and adjusting."

It's working, said Alex Algonos, an 8th grade English and social studies teacher. Students in the same grade used to complain and ask why their friends were working on different projects than they were. Now, he said, there's consistency. "If I'm doing a project, the other teachers are doing the same."

Meeting by grade and subject level also means less time is wasted, Algonos said. Instead of sitting through meetings irrelevant to his teaching, common planning time is focused. Teachers know what to expect; there's an agenda.

Before the consultants arrived, he added, there was no sense of camaraderie among the teachers; instead, there was competitiveness. Partners encourages teachers to express their ideas and lesson plans. Now, he said, most teachers are open minded about other teaching strategies.

"In general as a staff we're closer," he said. "It just feels better going into school knowing I'm supported by the 8th grade team."

But the better rapport might also have been affected by the fact that half the teachers at Everett are new, which was a stipulation for receiving the grant.

Ultimately, the goal is for common planning time to be owned by teachers and for them to run themselves, said Stephenson.

But they also did this without Partners, said Algonos and others. “We did things on our own and we liked autonomy,” said Algonos, who sees other benefits of Stephenson’s work. “We felt we were more creative and went about our own strategies.”

Although Stephenson often attends, she doesn’t lead the common planning time sessions. In the English department – that’s the job of the school’s instructional literacy coach Shipley Salewski.

Salewski is paid with School Improvement Grant funds and is one of 17 coaches who work at the Mission’s struggling schools, either part or full time.

Stephenson, in effect, coaches the coach who in turn is coaching the teachers. For her part, Stephenson works with Salewski in the English department offering support and recommendations on how to be effective with teachers.

For instance, Salewski started working at Everett this school year. In the beginning, Stephenson would conduct classroom observations with her, posing suggestions on what to observe and how to give feedback to teachers. With Stephenson’s guidance, Salewski started a system in which she would observe teachers from one grade level per week on a rotating basis.

Algonos, the social science and English teacher who’s been at Everett for seven years, said that the roles of the consultant and coach are similar, except that Stephenson is more of an outsider giving perspective whereas the instructional coaches, although recently hired, work for the school district.

Algonos said Stephenson has made him more accountable, helping him identify new teaching strategies when students fair poorly on a test.

“Some teachers feel like, ‘I can do this on my own and I don’t need help and it’s condescending,’” he said. But, “There’s got to be a certain degree of humility and you don’t have that until an outside source comes in.”

Kathleen Florita, an 8th grade English teacher in her first year at Everett, agreed that some teachers have been resistant to the coaches. Stephenson, she said, has eased tensions between coaches and teachers, urging coaches to serve the needs of the teacher.

When someone comes in to observe your class, you are a better teacher – someone’s holding you completely accountable, Florita said. “It’s having another adult there not to evaluate you or judge you but someone to say ‘This is what I see; this is an area we need to improve on.’”

But why do the schools need two people – a coach and an outside consultant who both help with common planning time and give advice to teachers – to do nearly the same thing?

The two are in a complete partnership, so of course there’s overlap, said Principal Curci.

Stephenson is the accountability part of the partnership, making sure that teachers follow through on suggestions from the coach, he added.

Last school year, Partners received nearly \$1.1 million to do its job at the seven elementary and middle schools. This year, it received \$794,000. The reason for the difference is that each year, the organization pulls back and tries to make the school less reliant on its services.

“We know that at certain schools – Everett is one of them – less time needs to be spent there. And with the time that is spent there, what are the most strategic things we can do?” said Stephenson, who works at two other schools: Buena Vista Horace Mann and John Muir Elementary.

The \$1.87 million in award money doesn’t directly pay for salaries for people like Stephenson, but goes toward Partners’ larger budget. Stephenson said that as a full-time employee of Partners, she gets paid more than a teacher’s salary but slightly less than an assistant principal. Within SFUSD, that can be the difference between a \$67,000 and \$86,000 salary for someone with 11 years of teaching and administration experience, although chief officers at Partners like Starr make more than \$150,000 per year.

On a visit to Everett, a Partners consultant in the math department talked with a teaching coach during their weekly check-on sessions.

Harini Ara — the math instructional coach — said that coaches create plans on how to help teachers, but that they also consult with the School Innovation Partners. Ara, for example, asked Partners consultant Hansa Kaipa: “Should I do research around conceptual math strategies?”

Kaipa said that would be a good idea because conceptual problem solving is more difficult to teach than procedural math problems like subtracting x from both sides of an equation.

Teachers in the math department meet with the coach Ara twice a week for their common planning time, said Aurora Sakine, who is in her first year at Everett and teaches 6th grade math and 8th grade algebra.

Kaipa, who is now on maternity leave but then served as the Partners consultant, would come about twice a month to the meetings, said Sakine. Throughout the school year, she observed Sakine’s class two or three times and gave her constructive feedback. “I’ve never felt like she was judging my classroom,” she said.

Other than those instances, Sakine couldn’t recall specific examples in which Kaipa had worked with her directly.

Kaipa also worked at Bryant Elementary and Buena Vista Horace Mann, and Sakine said that allowed her to bring in an outsider’s point of view – to tell the math teachers what other struggling schools are doing that’s working for them. But Kaipa left in February of this year and might not be back until August. She has no replacement, said senior district partnership director Ponce de Leon, because Ara is capable of taking over the responsibilities.

Ara and Kaipa also said the common planning time encouraged math teachers to decide on their own to review an earlier test in the classroom as preparation for the California State Tests that the students take in the spring.

Beyond working with coaches and setting up common planning period, the Partners consultants have been sounding boards for the teachers and helped to manage the staff.

Stephenson, said Algonese, is “sort of like a conduit to administration.” When one teacher, for example, took issue with the number of hours she was working after the principals asked her to take on another class, the teacher spoke first to

Stephenson, who then facilitated a conversation with the teacher and Principal Curci.

Then there's the data analysis. At least every other week, during planning time, Stephenson gathers the three English teachers per grade level to analyze results from quizzes, in-class tests, student projects and more formal preliminary standardized tests to see what's working. Sometimes the solutions to a problem lie in coaching; sometimes it's through curriculum adjustments.

Under Stephenson's guidance, said Algonos, English teachers will identify four of five students in each class to focus on – they are usually students on the cusp of reaching the next level of test scores, from far below basic to basic, or proficient to advanced.

“Based on the results, we have an idea of where other students are and what we need to reteach or focus on,” Algonos said.

Kaipa - the School Innovation Partner who works in the math department – also compiles data and presents it to teachers to analyze during planning time.

“We have focal African American students and we see how their scores have progressed through benchmark tests,” said Sakine, the math teacher. Kaipa, she said, arranges the data so that it's easy to read.

And Stephenson similarly looks at the English data by grade level to make sure the same standards are being met, said Florita. If students aren't learning, they'll decide if they need to reteach the whole class or if it's just a small group of students who need attention.

Administrators also meet weekly with Stephenson. During one meeting, the principal and two assistant principals reviewed an agenda that Stephenson had planned and printed out. They discussed payrolls and teaching schedules, and Stephenson made sure each principal had done their evaluations from a recent day in which they observed classes. Another point of the weekly meetings is to look at data and see how they're working with staff.

“It's all about monitoring adjustment and reflecting what you're doing on a leadership level,” says Stephenson.

Another initiative Stephenson helped reshape at Everett was an instructional leadership team composed of a teacher from every grade. This team meets monthly and has participated in two walkthroughs where they've sat in on classes to see teaching in action and provide recommendations.

Florita, who's on the leadership team, says there are other responsibilities, like noting which 8th graders will graduate and which will need summer school, but that a big part of the job is communicating teachers' needs to administration and vice versa.

They're liaisons, said Stephenson, and give input on decisions on behalf of the teachers.

For instance, administration and coaches wanted to develop end-of-the year projects for students. They presented the idea to the leadership team and asked teachers for their opinions until they decided that students across all grades would have to produce projects that were research based.

Principal Curci said the leadership team existed before, but wasn't as structured.

But Algones, who's been on the team in the past, said that the practice of leadership team members acting as teacher representatives has always existed. And now that there are extra people, like coaches and department leaders who do that job, the current leadership team members spend more time explaining why things need to be done.

Stephenson said she also planned the agenda for the midyear staff retreat, took part in hiring new teachers last year and even helps Principal Curci monitor his email inbox of more than 3,000 unread messages.

She sometimes sends out a few of the day's emails for him so that, for example, a particular email about an upcoming meeting will get out on time to the appropriate teachers, and it's one less thing for the busy principal to worry about.

At the end of the day, he's busy because the ultimate challenge is to turn around one of the city's poorest performing schools.

"At Everett, for so long it was all about behavior. They were putting out fires and crazy behaviors, and it's not like that any more," says Stephenson. "We give them

a place to reflect on quality of instruction and give them a way to stay focused on what their students are achieving.”

In a report that monitored School Improvement Grant implementation, which came out in March 2011 after Partners had been at the school for seven months, the State Department of Education found:

“Everett Middle School’s need assessment indicated that there was a general lack of rigor in instruction and wide variations in student engagement. Moreover, the analysis indicated that the curriculum was not rigorous across all academic areas, there was little coherence among grade levels about the content to be taught, and teachers rarely evaluated their practice in light of the curriculum. The analysis also highlighted that the lack of instructional leadership contributed to poor choices in the use of materials within the classroom.”

There was a lack of direction with regard to clear goals and data assessment, it added, but in interviews with the district and school staff, it noticed an indication that the school was starting to analyzing data put together by Partners in School Innovation.

How district members hold Partners accountable is a multi-layered approach, Rocap said in an email: they make sure Partners is doing its work by conducting site visits and meeting with school supervisors. The district also looks for Partners’ impact on school practices and student success by directly observing whether a teacher who didn’t know how to read data before now uses it to revise and improve his or her teaching; by seeing if schools actually use documents created by Partners that outline reform efforts; and by looking at the minutes of common planning time meetings to make sure Partners is attending and facilitating.

Ultimately, however, the goal is improved student learning, and the district reviews assessments, like standardized test scores, for evidence.

While it’s difficult to attribute success to one aspect of school reform, said Rocap, the district has seen signs that teachers who really learn how to use data under the guidance of Partners see achievement gains in their students.

In the end that is the ultimate goal. Partners had been at Everett for nearly eight months when students took state tests in April 2011. During that school year, the number of students scoring proficient or advanced in English improved more than

six percentage points, from 17.9 to 24.2 percent; in math, the percent of students scoring proficient or advanced went up from 12.3 to 18.4.

For Curci, part of that challenge means one day succeeding without the help of Partners in School Innovation.

“They’re there to build capacity and structures and overhauls through communication and assessment and planning,” he said. “That doesn’t happen in one year.”

But, he said, he knows “They can’t be around forever.”

Article 4: Bridging the Gap Between School and Community

Vanessa Marrero prepared for an important job one Tuesday in January. In leopard kitten heels and a beige trench coat, she grabbed a folder and hopped into a waiting car outside of John O’Connell High School.

She was heading to a student’s home in the Bayview to talk to his mom. As a community school coordinator, Marrero had Carlos’ records in hand.

Half an hour later, inside a small apartment furnished with a light lime green couch, two school certificates tacked to a wall and family pictures in heart-shaped frames, Marrero began the conversation with Carlos’ mom Angela in Spanish.

He wasn’t in trouble, she reassured Angela. No, this was going to be a different kind of visit.

Marrero was there along with Jose Villalobos, the school’s parent liaison, to connect with Angela; to tell her about the resources available to her and her son; and to discuss Carlos’ grades and attendance.

Marrero holds a position created last year as one of several ways to reform the city’s underperforming schools — six coordinators work in the Mission District, each earning about \$60,000 a year from the \$45 million district-wide School Improvement Grant that will continue until the end of the 2012-2013 school year.

A coordinator is responsible for different types of parent and community engagement, said Kevin Roca, the executive director of the School Improvement

Grant, in an email. This involves managing the work of various community-based organizations, including after-school and mental health partners that work at the schools.

The improvement plan aims to turn the school into a one-stop shop of sorts, more than just a place for academics. If students and families — even outside community members — needed food, there'd be a food bank. If they needed counseling, there'd be services for that, too.

It's about rethinking how to build a school that supports students, parents and the community, said Brian Fox, the coordinator at Mission High School.

The coordinator is key, say many. Each plays a slightly different role, because every school is at a different stage when it comes to community engagement.

For Fox, formerly the director of strategic partnerships for the San Francisco Education Fund, the job at Mission High means overseeing the curriculum of an advisory program for students preparing for college and careers. He also works directly with teachers: along with a college and career counselor and a coordinator from the college-prep program GEAR UP, Fox holds Monday meetings to review lesson plans and discuss common problems.

Carlo Solis, who works as a coordinator at Cesar Chavez Elementary, attended Buena Vista Elementary School as a child and later worked as the director of an after-school program there. At Chavez, he spends his time evaluating partnerships with community-based organizations. For example, he oversees workshops for anywhere from 20 to 60 parents on topics like enrollment and puberty. Solis also opens up the school to the community; recently, he hosted a free haircut day for the neighborhood organized by City College students.

And then there's Marrero, a former social worker who worked at Horace Mann Middle School for five years, who runs a breakfast club at John O'Connell High School every Tuesday morning, cooking omelets and other dishes for any student who's at school half an hour before the bell rings.

Since she first started working at John O'Connell last April, she's led a mentoring program for at-risk youth, hosts school tours and hangs flags in the atrium to represent the different cultures at the school. She also meets families in their homes. Since the school year began, Marrero has visited more than half of the homes of the 91 ninth graders.

Inside her apartment, Angela was nervous. She didn't know what to expect from the visit, even though her son promised he hadn't done anything wrong. That's a normal reaction, Marrero said, because parents are used to school staff only showing up when there's a problem. But meeting in a setting outside of school has benefits.

"It's a positive outreach that's about building trust and connections, getting away from the familiar idea of home visits," said Carrie Rose, the executive director of the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project, based in Sacramento.

After hearing Marrero's intentions, Angela opened up. She works a lot, she explained, and was under stress. That's why she had missed an earlier meeting at the school about Carlos's low attendance.

That type of dialogue is an eye opener for Marrero. It helps her stay in touch with the parents' concerns, and it makes her more sympathetic. She sometimes calculates how long it takes her to get to their homes by car and then wonders how long it takes students when they travel by bus or BART. Could that be why some are always late?

Grades, of course, are always a subject of conversation.

Carlos's have never been the best, his mother explained. He's shy and doesn't like to ask questions. But during his first year at John O'Connell, he's become increasingly comfortable and has been doing better in his classes. That's true, Marrero gently reminded Angela, but only to a certain extent. His grade in College and Career dropped from an A at the start of the semester to an F.

Why? Did he lose motivation?

Angela knew. They had gone to Nicaragua for three weeks during his final exams. She hadn't paid attention to the school calendar when she booked the flights and, when she realized the error, she didn't want to disappoint him.

Angela sent a letter to the school requesting makeup work, but Carlos never received any.

His absence probably wasn't approved, Marrero later said, because that type of request is only for emergencies. Missing 10 days of school because of vacation is never okay.

Making such connections that get to the *why* of a student's past behavior is crucial, said Rose from the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project.

Villalobos, the parent liaison who works with Marrero, remembered one student who was chronically absent. Turns out she had a medical condition and was undergoing surgical procedures. The school had no idea, but once Marrero found out, she offered help.

The student now tells Marrero when she has medical appointments and takes part in school activities such as a mentoring group. That's the sort of engagement that Marrero's trying to foster: getting disinterested students involved, and she credits the community school model for that.

"You offer a service to kids three times and it's like 'Ok, they don't get it,'" she said. "And some people don't do anything. But we don't want to do that. We want to keep exploring ways to get them engaged." Handing out perfect attendance awards, like gift certificates to Game Stop, the video game store, is one way. If kids have something to look forward to at school, they're going to come, Marrero said.

As with all relationships, a good one between student and school, and parent and school, should go both ways. During the meeting, Marrero encouraged Angela to visit the school to see what was happening on the inside. Angela said Carlos tells her not to, because he's embarrassed. It's okay to give him space, Marrero replied, but that shouldn't stop you from getting involved.

Sometimes it's the parents who are embarrassed, especially by their economic situation. Last year, more than 60 percent of students in the district were on the free or reduced lunch plan. Some request family conferences at the school because they live in a studio where there's not enough room. Marrero can't reach others because their phones are disconnected.

Being sensitive to cultural differences, as well as economic status, is critical. Marrero remembers one Asian father who lived in the Bayview who offered her a specialty tea. During that visit, Marrero learned of custody disputes between the boy's parents who were separating. He was often late to school when he stayed in the Richmond with his mom. Marrero may never have learned this without the home visit because, she said, the Asian community is one group the school doesn't reach as well as it should. In the Mission, the emphasis often is on Latino outreach.

Back at Angela's apartment, the conversation continued about school ambiance. Angela said Carlos had been offered marijuana.

He can talk to counselors when that happens, Marrero said. It's important to maintain the security of the school, despite the stigma attached to snitching, Villalobos added.

Angela agreed. Carlos guaranteed her that he hadn't accepted the offer; he knows the consequences of engaging in that type of behavior, she said.

All of this goes back to another one of Marrero's goals: creating an atmosphere of trust and respect for students, parents and staff.

When Marrero reminded Angela about a college night that was coming up and the different parent groups that she could join, Angela said that would be difficult, because she works every day until 5 p.m.

This exchange was similar to ones Marrero and Villalobos often have during home visits.

"Sometimes you get frustrated," Villalobos said. "Is anything achieved after that meeting?"

Community school coordinators face other challenges. Marrero said that because the community school strategy is new, some people are having a hard time understanding both her job and their role in the undertaking. She finds herself frequently explaining her duties to parents and John O'Connell staff. Some school positions have been restructured since she came into the picture and others, like school social workers, will look at the community school strategy and ask, "Where am I in all this?" Marrero said.

And Fox, the coordinator at Mission High, faces a balancing act between promoting internal and external efforts. It's tough to decide between spending time directly with students and teachers and building relationships with outside organizations.

Any progress is slow. After the visit with Angela, Villalobos said it's not like after one visit, students will start getting As in class. That sort of immediate turnaround isn't realistic.

But once families feel engaged and respected, said Carrie Rose with the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project, they come through in new ways. For the first time, Villalobos has noticed some inactive John O'Connell parents attending events and showing up at school in search of resources.

Angela thanked Marrero and Villalobos for coming. "I try to guess what's happening but work is stressful, and it's hard to find a way to visit," she said. "I'll try more."

On the way back to John O'Connell from the home visit, Marrero was happy with how the session had gone.

"If what we want to do is engage the community, then we've got to go into the community," she said. "This strategy starts on the ground, knocking door to door."

"I haven't had anyone chase me out of their house just yet."

Article 5: Teaching Parent Engagement, One Class at a Time

On a Tuesday morning in December, a group of five parents gathered around a table with milk cartons, hot sauce and pastries inside a bungalow at Bryant Elementary School to learn how to read the school's academic data.

The four mothers and one father weren't happy.

Not one second-grader, they realized, was advanced in reading or writing. What's more, Bryant's Academic Performance Index score – one that measures school performance based on state tests – was at 696, when the target is 800.

"We're so low! We have to work harder," Ana Montoya said in Spanish. Monica Ramirez, a soft-spoken woman from Mexico, had some consolation.

"But we were worse before," she said, referring to the school's API score of 642 in 2007-2008. "We're trying," said another mother.

So too are these parents. This particular group meets about once a month at Bryant for a class led by Jamilah Campbell Sanchez, from the organization Parents for

Public Schools of San Francisco. But it's not just here: In five of the Mission's struggling schools, now rich with funds from a federal School Improvement Grant, parents are gathering in bungalows and spare classrooms to learn how to become advocates for their children.

The idea is that educating parents will make them more active in their schools, more demanding of the school district and more helpful to their children. Directed by Sanchez, the parents receive eight lessons in which they learn how to read bar graphs of test scores, where the school's budget comes from and how to break down education lingo.

The class is called School Governance, and it's designed for parents who are currently involved, or want to get involved, in each school's Site Council — a governing body composed of school staff, parents and other members of the community.

School Site Councils have a big job: Among other things, they analyze student data, help the principal develop the academic plan and approve the school budget before it's submitted to the district for review. This is why parents need to be well informed before running for a position on the one of the councils, which vary in number, up to 16 at some schools.

But council seats are only one possibility. Classes are open to all school parents, said Annie Bauccio, the interim executive director of Parents for Public Schools. So classes cover other topics, like explaining to parents how the school's money is being spent and whether the budget is serving their child's best interests.

Ramirez, who has a son at Bryant, is not involved in the School Site Council but comes to the classes anyway. You can't help your children succeed if you're not informed, she said.

While Parents for Public Schools has been around since 1999, this class started last school year at the Mission's schools thanks to \$70,200 from the district's own \$1 million School Improvement Grant from the state.

The district's award is separate from the \$45 million School Improvement Grant spread across the city's struggling schools. The state grant can be used for partnerships among all poorly performing schools.

In the Mission, Sanchez teaches mostly in Spanish at Bryant, Cesar Chavez, Buena Vista Horace Mann, John O'Connell and Mission High.

Prior to the new funding, Parents for Public Schools had been offering two workshops for parents: one about the schools' English Learner Advisory Committees, which advocate for services on behalf of English learners, and one promoting parent engagement — for example, encouraging parents to organize activities within a parent club, said Bauccio.

The two workshops continue at the Mission's schools, but now, with the new School Governance class, the organization is able to reach more parents. More informed parents means that more are now approaching principals for extra literacy training for their kids, asking teachers for the academic standards that their children should be meeting and questioning why students aren't learning how to properly read or write.

"They come with smart questions, using the language they learned in the classes," said Christina Velasco, the principal at Bryant — questions about what students are learning, about the school budget and what elements it takes to have a parent body.

What's more, Sanchez has been able to provide additional consultation to parent liaisons on how to increase parent involvement. She's mediated conflicts between members of the School Site Council at Cesar Chavez and even helped start a new School Site Council at Buena Vista Horace Mann, where there was tension between the two councils that had existed at each school — Buena Vista and Horace Mann — before they were merged last year.

Challenges remain. The biggest, said Sanchez, is recruiting parents and making sure they come to classes. Attendance ranges from about five to 15 parents, depending on circumstances such as the day of the week. "I wish more parents had come," she said, referring to the session on reading school data at Bryant, where some 240 students attend.

One of the main reasons for low parent attendance is that work often conflicts with the class time. But Sanchez is starting to figure out the best time for each school community.

Another reason has to do with the effectiveness of the school staff members who are parent liaisons. While some readily post information about the trainings, many become so busy with other jobs that “not all are on top of it,” said Sanchez. So, while she makes flyers and emails them to the liaisons, some fail to put them in teacher’s boxes to distribute to the class, or don’t set the auto dialer to call parents.

Sometimes parents simply forget. But those who do attend find value in the sessions.

“You don’t know these things,” said Ramirez. “What is the school doing to better the level of education, to change things?”

Now she feels empowered to speak up. So does Montoya. “This gives me the strength to help,” she said. “We parents have the same rights as everyone else. We shouldn’t feel inferior to the rest.”

Principal Velasco agrees. “It deepens their understanding and their confidence,” she said. “Their thinking is: This is for all of us.” And they’re acting as leaders in Bryant’s community: “Parents bring parents,” she said.

“If I weren’t here, I wouldn’t know that there’s the SIG [school improvement grant] that’s paying for tutors to help our kids,” said Maria Rosales, who has a son in the third grade at Bryant.

The biggest eye-opener, said Sanchez, is when they see the school’s student data. “They’re like, ‘Whoa. This is where we’re at.’”

This was the case back at Bryant. “You see the scores and you can ask, ‘Why are they low?’” Sanchez told the class. “As parents, we have a right to know that.”

Hold people accountable, she said. Ask questions: Can you give me a copy of the state standards so I’m aware of what my child should know at each grade level? How is the after-school program also ensuring my child meets his or her goals? Each question they ask, she said, should be meant to support, monitor or advocate for their child’s education. “What questions are *you* going to ask?” she said.

The students' work here at Bryant will affect them later on — in middle school, in high school and for the rest of their lives.

“Thank you for this information. This is more than we had before,” said the father in the group, Leonel Rodriguez.

Providing parents with knowledge is Sanchez's ultimate goal. “The lack of info is huge,” she said, and the classes “allow parents to have an active voice in their child's education and be a part of reform, especially in these schools.”

“We can't allow them to drop off their kids at school and think everything's fine and dandy, because it's not. They have to be advocates for their children.”

For Rodriguez, who has a six-year-old son at Bryant, the effect of these classes is simple: “If parents don't use their voice, everything stays the same.”

Comic Strip: Jamestown SF: Tracing \$320,000 in Comic Form

If you ever visit Cesar Chavez Elementary School or Buena Vista Horace Mann K-8, chances are you'll run into someone who works for the Jamestown Community Center, whether it's a community liaison or Zach, the security guard who also teaches a weight-lifting class.

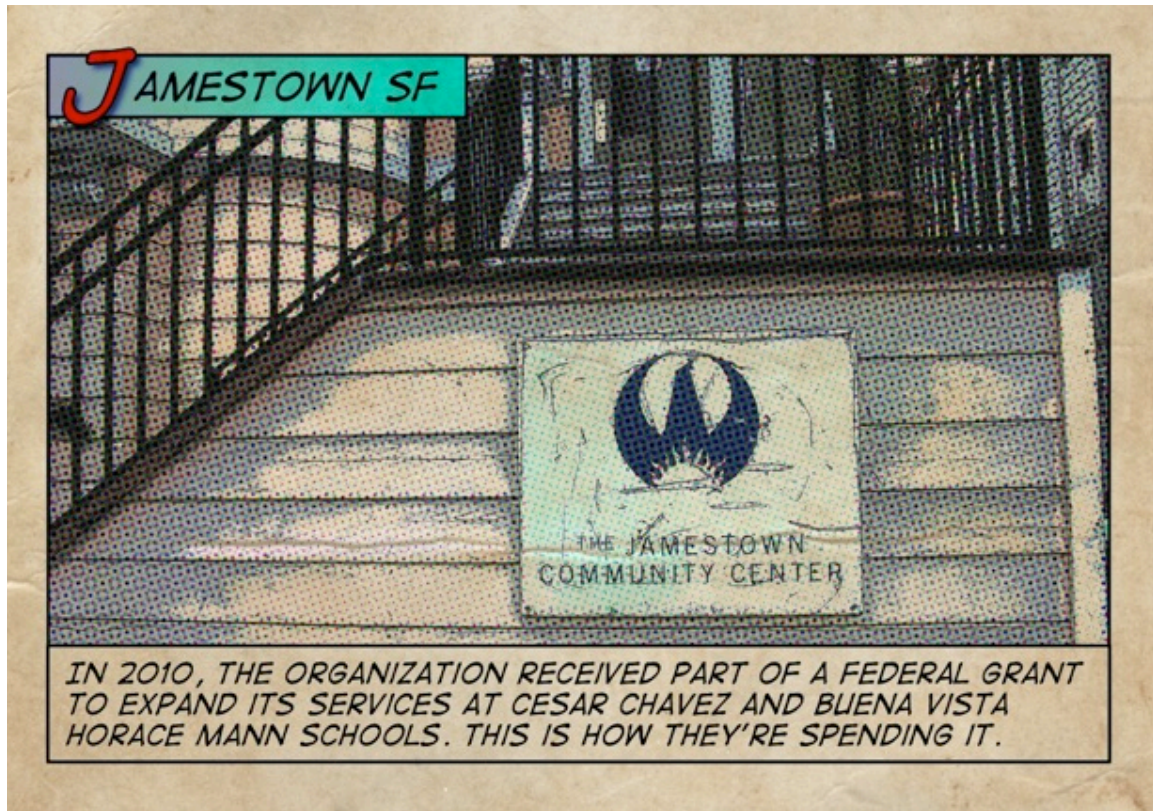
Now, thanks to the nearly \$320,000 it received last year from a federal school improvement grant — a three-year, \$45 million award given to the school district to turn around the city's worst schools — the community-based organization has expanded programs that have been in place since the late 1990s and implemented new ones at both Cesar Chavez and Buena Vista Horace Mann schools. This grant represents 20 percent of Jamestown's funding.

“It's our job to ensure that those kids in our programs are receiving the highest quality youth development experience, because it will increase their chances of success,” said Claudia Jasin, Jamestown's executive director. “Every single one of our programs is built around that framework.”

The grant is part of the city's initiative to offer after-school options to all students who want them. By this fall, 91 percent of the city's youth could find an after-school slot, according to the San Francisco Afterschool for All Initiative.

How “the highest quality youth development experience” looks on the ground can differ widely depending on the student’s background, age and previous encounters with a structured classroom.

Here are different shades of that experience in comic form.



CHAVEZ OFFERS HOMEWORK HELP

DO YOU KNOW
WHAT THAT WORD
MEANS?



EVERY MORNING AT 8 AM BEFORE SCHOOL, ABOUT 9 STUDENTS GATHER IN THE AUDITORIUM TO GET HOMEWORK HELP FROM JAMESTOWN STAFF. SOMETIMES PARENTS STAY, TOO, AND THEY ATTEND WORKSHOPS ONCE A MONTH ON HOW THEY CAN SUPPORT THEIR KIDS' WORK.

8TH AND 2ND GRADERS HANG OUT

TODAY, WE'RE
READING A PLAY
ABOUT SPACE.



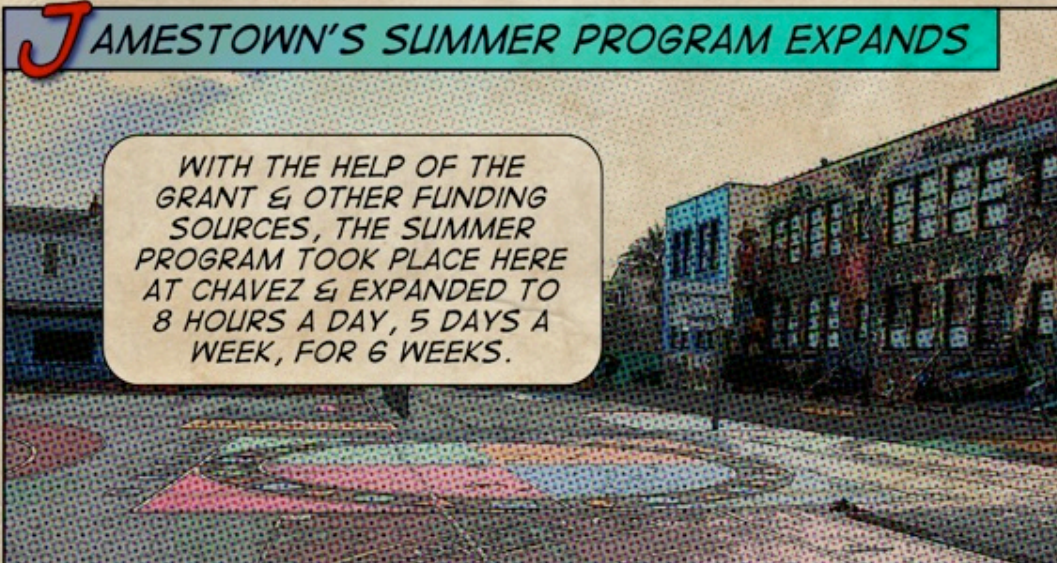
NOT EXACTLY, BUT THEY INTERACT AT A PEER READING CLASS AT BUENA VISTA HORACE MANN, HOSTED BY JAMESTOWN. THREE 8TH GRADERS AND ONE 6TH GRADER LEAD GROUPS OF 2ND GRADERS, WHO READ ALOUD TO PRACTICE LANGUAGE SKILLS.

STUDENT COUNCILS FORM



AT BUENA VISTA HORACE MANN, MR. LUIS BARAHONA TEACHES A NEW STUDENT COUNCIL SEMINAR TO 6-8 GRADERS. THE SCHOOL DIDN'T HAVE A FORMAL BODY BEFORE. THEY'VE ALREADY PLANNED SEVERAL SCHOOL DANCES.

JAMESTOWN'S SUMMER PROGRAM EXPANDS



ALL 177 STUDENTS RECEIVED FREE LUNCH. PLUS, ONE OF THE MORNING TEACHERS WAS PAID EXTRA TO WORK AS A COACH TO AFTER-SCHOOL TEACHERS & MAKE SURE EVERYONE WAS ON THE SAME PAGE.

C HAVEZ ADDS 2 EXTRA AFTER-SCHOOL CLASSES



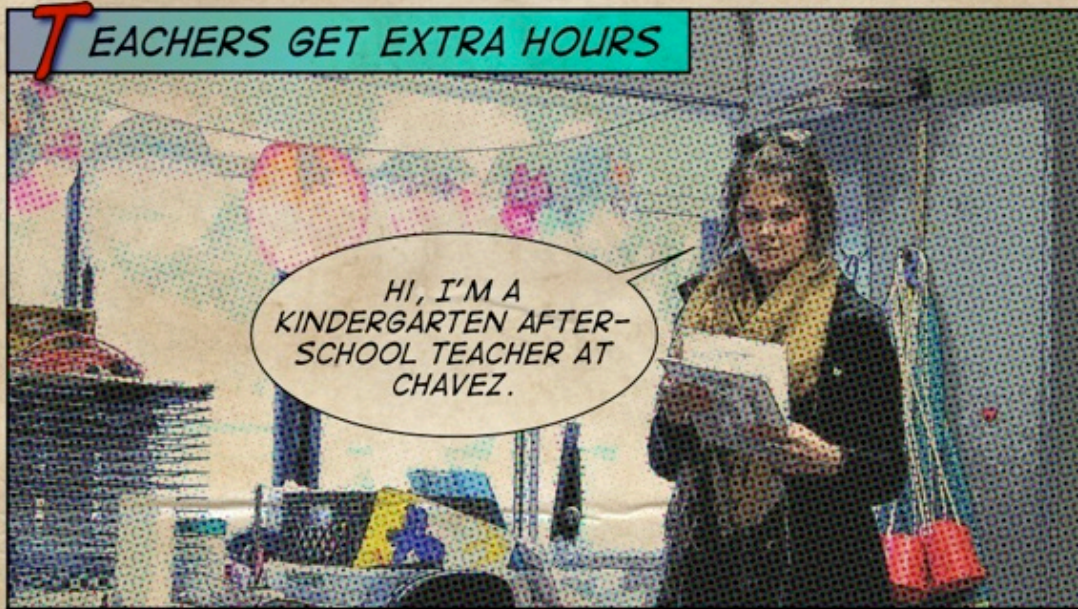
MANY STUDENTS IN THESE CLASSES HAVE HIGH BEHAVIOR AND ACADEMIC NEEDS. THIS IS MS. GAMEZ'S 1ST GRADE CLASS. SOME STUDENTS HAVE SOCK PUPPETS ON, SOME ARE BARKING AND SOME CAN'T QUIET DOWN.

MS. GAMEZ'S 1ST GRADE CLASS & ANOTHER 2ND GRADE CLASS ARE NEW.



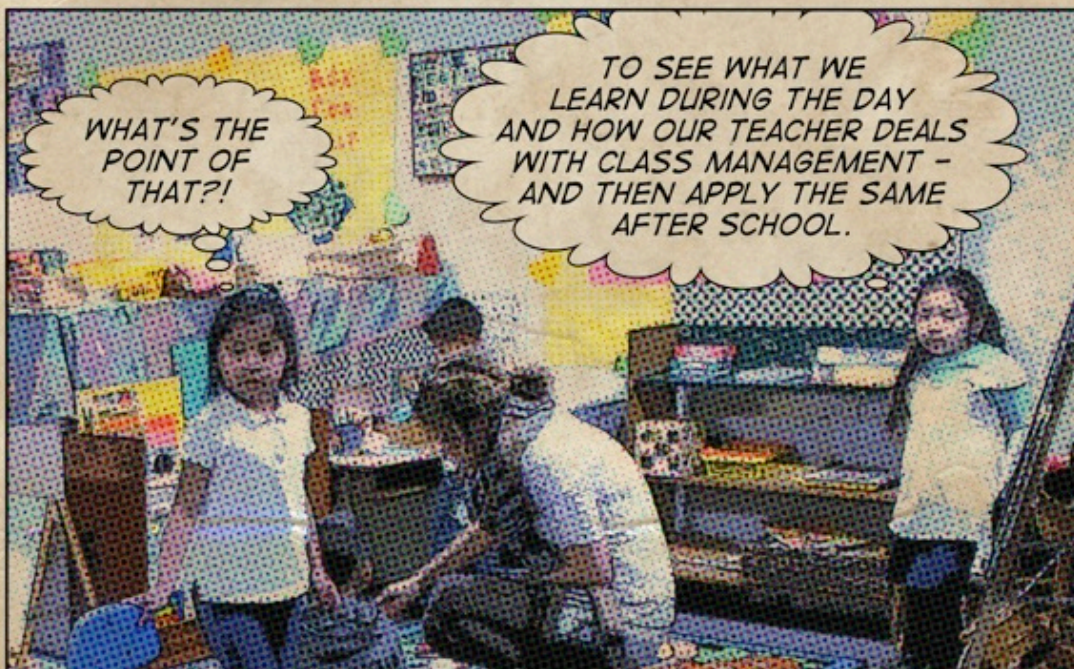
EVERY DAY, STUDENTS LEARN ACADEMICS AND SOCIAL COOPERATION THROUGH ACTIVITIES LIKE PLAYING THE RECORDER AND MAKING CERAMICS, SAYING PHRASES LIKE, "I FEEL THIS WAY."

TEACHERS GET EXTRA HOURS



HI, I'M A
KINDERGARTEN AFTER-
SCHOOL TEACHER AT
CHAVEZ.

MEET ELIZABETH COOPER. SHE WORKS AN EXTRA 15 HOURS PER WEEK TO GO INTO HER STUDENTS' CLASSES DURING THE DAY - TO OBSERVE & LEAD SMALL GROUPS.

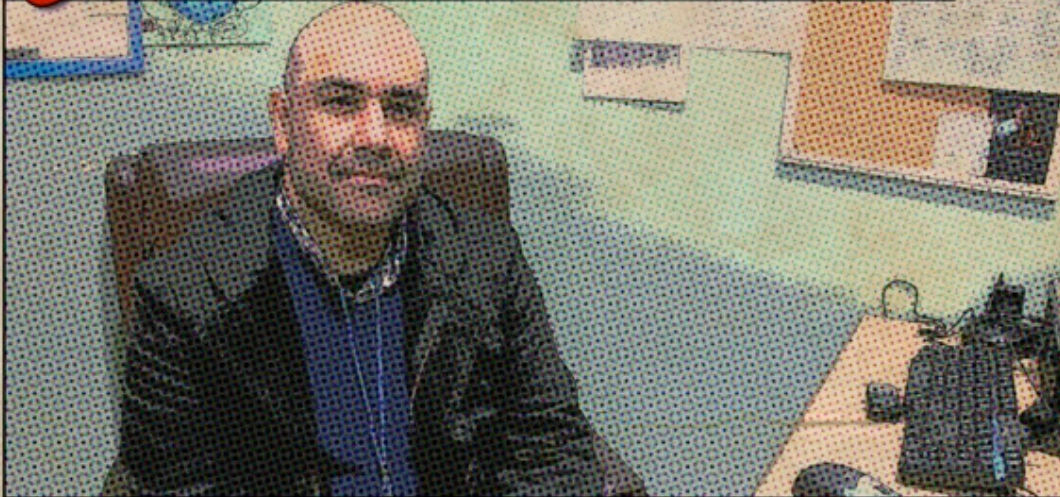


WHAT'S THE
POINT OF
THAT?!

TO SEE WHAT WE
LEARN DURING THE DAY
AND HOW OUR TEACHER DEALS
WITH CLASS MANAGEMENT -
AND THEN APPLY THE SAME
AFTER SCHOOL.

INCLUDING COOPER, 4 AFTER-SCHOOL TEACHERS AT CHAVEZ AND 2 AT BUENA VISTA HORACE MANN WORK EXTRA HOURS DOING THIS.

CHAVEZ ADDS A MENTAL HEALTH DIRECTOR



FOR 8 HOURS A WEEK, HE WORKS WITH CHAVEZ STAFF TO IDENTIFY MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES. HE MAKES SURE TECHNIQUES, LIKE GIVING A TROUBLED STUDENT A BREAK EVERY 15 MINS, ARE CARRIED OUT BOTH DURING THE SCHOOL DAY AND AFTER SCHOOL.

ONE-ON-ONE TUTORING EXPANDS



THIS IS TIM CURBO LIBRARY, THE SITE OF CHAVEZ TUTORING.

AT BOTH SCHOOLS, MORE STUDENTS NOW RECEIVE TUTORING TWICE A WEEK FOR AN HOUR. TUTORS USE STUDENT INTERESTS, LIKE COMICS, TO CREATE LESSON PLANS BASED ON STRENGTHENING BASIC ACADEMIC SKILLS.

STUDENTS HAVE A PLACE TO GO AFTER SCHOOL



IF THEY WEREN'T
IN JAMESTOWN'S
PROGRAMS, MANY WOULD
HANG OUT ON THE YARD
OR GO HOME EARLY.

BUT DESPITE EXTRA SERVICES MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH THIS
MONEY, WAIT LISTS FOR SOME OF JAMESTOWN'S PROGRAMS ARE
STILL 40+ LONG.

THE FIGURES

NUMBER OF JAMESTOWN STAFF FUNDED EITHER FULLY OR PARTIALLY THROUGH THE SIG
GRANT: 10

NUMBER OF 1ST AND 2ND GRADERS IN THE EXTRA AFTER-SCHOOL CLASSES AT CHAVEZ: 40

NUMBER OF STUDENTS AND FAMILIES ATTENDING MORNING HOMEWORK HELP AT
CHAVEZ: 10

NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE STUDENT COUNCIL CLASS AT
BUENA VISTA HORACE MANN: 15

NUMBER OF 8TH GRADERS PARTICIPATING IN THE PEER-READING CLASS: 5
NUMBER OF 2ND GRADERS: 25

NUMBER OF ADDITIONAL STUDENTS RECEIVING ACADEMIC TUTORING:
10 AT CHAVEZ, 20 AT BVHM

NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED THE SUMMER SCHOOL PROGRAM (FUNDED BY THE
SIG GRANT AND OTHER SOURCES): 177

PERCENT OF JAMESTOWN'S GRANT GOING TO THE MENTAL HEALTH DIRECTOR
AT CHAVEZ: 40

PERCENT OF JAMESTOWN'S GRANT GOING TO OVERHEAD: 15

PERCENT OF JAMESTOWN'S GRANT GOING TO MATERIALS & SUPPLIES: 10

