Investing in Our Families & Public School Teachers

Nearly 300 congregants and members of the wider community attended the May 31st event, Investing in Our Families and Public School Teachers. They were joined by Superintendent Richard Carranza, Dennis Kelly, President of United Educators of San Francisco, Dr. Terry Bergeson, Executive Director of the San Francisco School Alliance, Norman Yee, President SF Board of Education and Rachel Norton, Vice-President SF Board of Education. These guests were asked to commit to implementing the new Common Core State Standards effectively, equitably and transparently across SFUSD. The event created a wave of enthusiasm across the congregation and among leaders in the public school community. Attached are a few materials from the event, including the powerful slide presentation made by two members of CEE’s local organizing committee.

Here’s how committee members described their strategy in an article for the synagogue newsletter:

"The scope of the issues facing public education in our country, and San Francisco in particular, was daunting, and after many discussions with teachers, parents, academics and administrators we decided that California’s decision in 2010 to join with 45 other states in adopting the newly promulgated Common Core Curriculum Standards represented a timely opportunity for our group. This new Curriculum is widely felt to be an historic, positive step for education in the US and is designed to be relevant to the real world and inculcate the knowledge and skills required for our children to succeed in college and careers. Effective implementation of these new standards in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) faces major challenges, especially in the face of increasingly large cuts to public education. We learned that although a group of teachers had begun to work on the new program, the SFUSD had not yet formulated a specific plan or timetable for its implementation, despite the intention to begin using it in the next academic year. We also learned that the anticipated cost of the program was estimated at $5.5 million per year for the first three years." (Diane and Howard Winer)

At the event, CEE won the following commitments from SFUSD leadership:

- Superintendent Carranza agreed to publish the plan for implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) on the SFUSD website by August 20th, including key milestones, funding strategies and plans for evaluation; he also agreed to participate in quarterly, community report-backs (beginning in October) hosted by CEE, SFOP and our partners.

- Commissioners Norton and Yee agreed to make the implementation of CCSS a school board priority in the coming year and to press the district for a plan for professional development that would equip teachers for success with CCSS.

- UESF President Dennis Kelly agreed to bring a resolution in support of CCSS to the UESF leadership for passage and to participate in the quarterly report backs (with teachers from across the district)

- Terry Bergeson, Director of the SF School Alliance, agreed to raise the gap funding needed for professional development focused on equipping teachers for the implementation of the CCSS.

On the journey to this event, those who are part of the organizing committee at the congregation have developed a core of effective lay leaders and greatly expanded connections with fellow congregants as well as those outside of the congregation. The leadership development was evident -- roughly 20 lay
leaders ran an incredibly engaging, organized and professional action, impressing even the biggest skeptics.

Since the May 31st event, the group has worked to capitalize on the excitement created:

- They have collected exceedingly positive feedback from those in attendance, including from the president and several members of CEE’s board, Rabbi Pearce and public officials who attended;

- They have recruited roughly 5 additional members for their organizing committee, including 1 senior staff person at CEE who was inspired by the event;

- They have begun to build partnerships with groups across the city who will help them co-host the quarterly report backs on progress implementing CCSS; the first report back will be hosted by an SFOP congregation or school in the Mission in order to engage our leaders in that neighborhood, and leaders at CEE have set a goal of hosting following report backs in other neighborhoods across the city.

This week, Congregation Emanu-El will have its first, open follow up meeting following their event on May 31st. Several new lay leaders are expected, and we will be discussing internal and external follow up steps, including expanding the work to more of the congregation, partnership with other SFOP organizing committees and voter work focused on winning revenue for the state.