Re-Imagining Castro
Research Brief and Rationales

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Zooming Out–District-wide Systems Perspective:

The continuing reproduction of educational inequality in relation to race and social class is not a unique problem for Mountain View Whisman School District. In fact, over the past few decades, millions of kids in the U.S. have experienced the negative impact growing inequality has on communities (Steil & Menedian, 2014). Median incomes have risen exponentially in Mountain View over the years. A demographic study revealed that the median household income jumped from $41,911 in 1990 to $91,302 in 2014 and $158,104. Rising income and increased affluence has been a double-edged sword. Though increased property values provide better funding to the school district overall (because of California's LCFF), rising affluence has also resulted in decreased participation from affluent families in our public school programs [via homeschool and private school] (in 2015, nearly a quarter of the district's families opted for private or homeschool options)[1].

This shift has created increased segregation in the district, and in turn, more pockets of concentrated poverty and affluence within the district boundaries. These concentrated pockets are replicated through reinforcing feedback loops. For example, schools with concentrated poverty (and concentrated need) typically score lower on standardized state assessments. Those scores, which are used by real estate search tools such as GreatSchools[2] to rate the quality of schools, affect parent perception and decision-making. Similarly, schools like Stevenson, which has a high concentration of affluence generally scores high on state assessments and is thus more outwardly desirable for families, who view test scores as a proxy for school quality. As historical enrollment data shows, when given a choice, families with the means will choose houses in areas with schools with better scores or exercise their right to apply to Stevenson. Again, this is not singular to Mountain View. Schools and communities across the country are becoming increasingly segregated along class and racial lines, exacerbating educational inequity in those communities (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010; Mickelson, 2001; Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012).

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[1] "City is Growing, Public School Attendance is Dropping" by Kevin Forestieri, May 26, 2015, MV Voice
[2] "What Experts Say Parents Should Know Before Using School Rating Websites" by Kristen Taketa, November 5, 2023, San Diego Union-Tribune

Educational leaders in Mountain View, including members of the Board of Trustees, have consistently been well-intentioned in their efforts to provide equity between schools and a high-quality education for all. However well-intentioned, decisions made in the past decade amidst boundary revisions, facilities-building through bonds, and even the opening of new schools has affected the overall system of schools and sometimes in unexpected ways. For example, in 2014 when the district decided to split Castro Elementary into two schools (what is now Castro and Mistral), the Board was operating under the direction of the Castro Restructuring Task Force who reasoned that a separate school for the traditional program that housed low-income and EL students would help to overcome the achievement gap by eliminating the other dual-immersion focus and concentrating supplemental funds to help this population[3]. Additionally, moving the PACT program off of Castro's campus (in 2009) and onto its own campus (Stevenson Elementary) may also have affected the trends we recognize today. A retrospective analysis, nearly a decade later, has revealed that unintended consequences of these decisions, regardless of good intent, have likely exacerbated the inequities at Castro and sustained its status as the lowest performing school in the district. Some of these unintended consequences may include an increase in the concentrated poverty and disadvantage at Castro, increased teacher and admin turnover, a decrease in enrichment programs and classroom volunteers due to diminished enrollment and PTA presence, and/or the reinforcing feedback loop of 'low-performing schools' receiving less community support. These system fluctuations and unintended consequences must be studied aggressively when planning for significant and sustainable change for Castro's future.

Focusing our Lens–Framing the Problem as an Equity Challenge:

Given the longstanding history of school improvement at Castro and persistent achievement and opportunity gaps for students there, along with the district's history, it's important to acknowledge that Re-Imagining Castro is a challenging project for many reasons. (1) The unequal outcomes for students at Castro persist despite our best efforts to address them, which denotes a more systemic problem (2) School closures due to Covid-19 have resulted in long-term negative consequences on student's performance, and (3) Learning acceleration has not yet outpaced the degree of learning loss school closures inflicted.

Re-Imagining Castro is an **Equity challenge.**
Essential Question: How do we **increase access** to **high-quality** and **culturally-responsive** educational experiences **and support structures** for students at Castro that result in **increased outcomes** over time, considering the logistical, social, and fiscal hurdles this challenge presents for the district system as a whole?

Framing the Solution and Managing Expectations:

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[3] "District may split Castro into Two Schools" by Keven Forestieri, October 16, 2014, MV Voice

In an effort to help manage expectations on the Re-Imagining Castro implementation process, it is worth noting that any changes made at Castro as a part of these efforts will take several years to produce meaningful, sustainable results in student outcomes[4]. Our expectations for how quickly change should happen will likely outpace reality. That being said, we must stay firm in knowing that the plan is solid and based on intense study, collaboration, and insight. Plans that we craft to help benefit the students at Castro must be formed using past learnings and must acknowledge actions that produced unintended consequences. A plan of action must be developed that, above all, demonstrates investment in long-term outcomes and is not easily threatened by short-term results or pitfalls[5]. A complex, long-term response will include an intentional avoidance of 'quick fixes,' set realistic expectations with the people we serve, and target short-term successes that support long-term results. Additionally, successful planning and implementation of system changes will rely heavily on healthy, collaborative relationships between the Board and the district, between the administrators and the teachers, and between the teachers, parents, and children. We will need to intentionally prioritize creating and maintaining these healthy relationships to produce favorable results[6].

Zooming In–Castro Data Analysis in a 5-Year Data Comparison

Data sources:

Qualitative Data Sources:
School Quality Review (SQR) Mariano Castro, 2015-2016
Mountain View Voice Articles, 2014-2023
DAC Listening Session with parents
Site Leader and Former Site Leader Interviews
Castro Teacher Interviews

Quantitative Data Sources:
CAASPP Smarter Balance Assessment Results
iReady Assessment Results
Equity Scorecard Data
Attendance Data
Demography Data for Enrollment
CalPADS Enrollment data/Suspension Data

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[4] "Lessons from the Lily Pond" by Innovation Associates Organizational Learning and Bridgeway Partners in *Systems Thinking for Social Change* (p.49).

[5] *Systems Thinking for Social Change: A Practical Guide to Solving Complex Problems, Avoiding Unintended Consequences, and Achieving Lasting Results* by David Peter Stroh (2015)

[6] "Amplifying Success In Collaborating for Iowa's Kids" by Iowa Department of Education in *Systems Thinking for Social Change* (p.174).

LCAP survey data

To perform a comprehensive data analysis, various quantitative and qualitative data sources were collected and considered. Five year's worth of data was collected and processed in order to see how changes in the systems affected different variables over time, such as student performance or suspension rates. The data has been separated into the following categories for further inspection: (1) Enrollment and Demographic Data, (2) Student assessment data, (3) Attendance, Suspension, and Long-Term EL Data. Additionally, qualitative data will buttress each section in a 'qualitative addendum' to provide further insights[7] on changes in the conditions of Castro over time.

Key Findings:

Quantitative

Looking at all of the data as a complete set, there are two data trends that are easily identifiable (they stick out): (1) exponential trends in data and (2) stagnation trends in data. To help synthesize the analysis to inform next steps, and to keep our analysis systems-focused and student-centered, guiding questions were used to probe the data further an inform key findings:

When we see **stagnation**, or data that doesn't change much over time:
What policy, practice, or system is replicating the results we see over time?

When we see **significant growth/decline**:
What about the environment changed over time? What supports were or were not in place to accommodate this change in the best interest of students?

Enrollment and Demographic Data:

- Decreasing number of SED students but increasing number of students who qualify as homeless suggest that families living in poverty are being pushed into homelessness (struggles of poverty are being amplified by current economic conditions)

Student Assessment Data:

- 'Standard Not Met' in both ELA and Math was steadily increasing over time pre-Covid. Post-Covid there has been **significant growth** of students in the 'Standard Not Met'

[7] Dumas, M., & Anderson, G. L. (2014). Qualitative research as policy knowledge: Framing policy problems and transforming education from the ground up. Education Policy Analysis Archives, 22(0), 11. http://doi. org/10.14507/epaa.v22n11.2014

category, <u>which indicates that this group is the most influential in overall scores for the entire school</u>

- 'Standard Met' in both ELA and Math was steadily increasing over time pre-Covid and then stagnated in 2019 or slightly declined. Post-Covid there has been a **significant decline** of students in the 'Standard Met' category overall.
- For ELA, Grade 3 scores show the largest current gaps between the number of students who are scoring in the 'Standard Not Met' and 'Standard Met' categories
- For Math, Grade 5 scores show the largest current gaps between the number of students who score in the 'Standard Not Met' and 'Standard Met' categories.
- Looking a bit more closely at CAASPP Literacy and Receptive Language (Listening) scores reveals fairly **stagnant** trends of students in the 'Near Standard' or 'Below Standard' categories. Students scoring in the 'Above Standard' category saw **significant declines** Post-Covid.
  - Additionally, students scoring 'Below Standard' in receptive language saw **significant increase** Post-Covid

Attendance, Suspension, and Long-Term EL Data:

- Chronic Absenteeism has been steadily increasing since 2017 and **increased significantly** Post-Covid, even outpacing the State.
- Suspension rates remained in line with district averages and increased slightly before Covid. Post-Covid there has been an **exponential increase** in suspensions due to dysregulated behavior and challenges on mental wellness of students.
- Long-term EL data reveals a typical fluctuation from year to year as cohorts reclassify. The overall trend is a slight increase in students at-risk for long-term EL status in Grades 3 and 4, with decreases over time for 5th grade.

Qualitative

Strengths, Challenges, and Priorities

- **Strengths**
  - Dedicated teachers wanting to serve at Castro, specifically
  - Small class sizes
  - Teamwork and collective responsibility
- **Challenges**
  - Peer conflict and behavior challenges lead to instructional losses, especially during unstructured times
  - Staff/leadership turnover reduces staff cohesion and increases need for PD supports for new teachers
  - Finding the time and maximizing longer instructional blocks

- **Priorities**
  - student achievement *through* relationships and serving their social emotional needs
  - Literacy

Factors impacting past improvement efforts:

- School closures due to Covid-19
- Principal and staff turnover
- Applying changes for only short period of time before shifting to something else due to *perceived* lack of results (i.e. "quick fixes")
- Tight daily schedules and findings longer instructional blocks to accelerate learning
  - outside provider schedule constraints
  - sharing facilities/personnel with Mistral
  - social-emotional and behavioral needs of students increased post-Covid and takes classroom time

Perspectives on what Castro needs:

- **Social Supports**
  - At-Risk and SCEF staff is highly valued
  - More wraparound services and supports for families
- **Academic Rigor**
  - Emphasis on high-quality instruction with support that is consistently provided from year to year (not "quick fixes" that disappear after one year)
- **School Day Structure**
  - Increased instructional blocks
  - More supports during unstructured times of school day
- **Staffing**
  - Retention of teachers who choose schools like Castro
- **School-wide Enrichment**
  - More enrichment activities that are typically funded through a school's PTA budget

Planning to Plan

    How we enact change is just as important as the actual changes in practice we choose to make, especially considering the impact a process has on relationships. Trust amongst and between stakeholder groups is the foundation of that relationship. The planning and implementation of changes at Castro will include times when multiple stakeholder groups come together to give input, such as during an **Educational Roundtable**. This Roundtable will be

made up of district leaders, teachers, site administrators, parents, and even students, when appropriate. There will also be times where an **internal district team** will be working autonomously behind the scenes to make things happen. This team will include cross-departmental collaborations such as with leaders from Ed Services, Business Services, and Human Resources. For this reason, stages of the plan will highlight *process* components (how we are going to make decisions or implement changes) and *product* components (what we are going to produce–changes to current practice and how it will be reported) separately to increase transparency, promote trust, and manage expectations.