

# School district poised to revamp lottery system

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Examiner Staff Writer 11/7/08

As parents in The City prepare to run this year's school-assignment gauntlet, public school leaders have unveiled plans for a revamp of the controversial lottery.

The San Francisco Unified School District officially kicks off school assignments for fall 2009 on Saturday, when it hosts the districtwide enrollment fair for parents to get the inside scoop on local schools. The fair, along with tours, is the first step in choosing seven preferred schools — and waiting to find out if their child is assigned to one of those picks when enrollments are announced in March.

The labyrinthine process took heat last summer from the civil grand jury and **Supervisor Carmen Chu**, and led 23 families at Flynn and Alvarado schools to discover they had been bumped from their enrollments.

"I think those things were a big wake-up call," said Ellie Rossiter, executive director of Parents for Public Schools, which helps parents navigate the lottery. After several district promises of an overhaul, this time "I'm hopeful it will change," she added.

Debate has raged among parents, school watchdogs and district leaders about how a new system can meet the demand of parents who want their children enrolled in a school close to home while also meeting a variety of mandates for diverse populations.

"I need to get my son into kindergarten as close to home as possible," said parent Lisa Tang, who has multiple sclerosis and can't reliably drive across The City to take him to school. "That's stressing me out."

Overhauling the lottery starts this month with the district surveying parents regarding what they want in a new system, according to spokeswoman Gentle Blythe. A variety of new models for assignment would be unveiled for further input in January, followed by a Board of Education vote by the end of April.

Although the district is taking many of its cues from past recommendations — including from a citizens advisory committee, the district's Parent Advisory Committee and the 2007 Student Enrollment, Recruitment and Retention report — it has also hired consultants with the Omega Group for up to \$33,000 to produce detailed demographic models and other data, according to Blythe.

School board member Jill Wynns agreed earlier studies were useful, but it was time for more.

"Now we need something much more sophisticated," she said.

Other board members pressed district leaders to find ways to ensure that parents not participating in the assignment process — including significant numbers of blacks and Hispanics — get involved.

The enrollment fair is 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Saturday at the San Francisco Concourse East Hall, 620 Seventh St. Visit [www.sfusd.edu](http://www.sfusd.edu) for information.  
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## **Making choices**

School-assignment timeline for 2009-10:

- Nov. 8: Enrollment fair
- Jan. 9: School applications due
- March: Assignment letters sent to parents
- Late March: Round 2 process begins for families who want to appeal

Timeline for overhaul of assignment system:

- November: Parents surveyed about design of new system
- November to January: District develops new proposed models
- January: Progress report to Board of Education
- January-March: Community discussions on proposed models, second survey
- April: Adopt new model
- May-October: Establish new assignment system
- November 2009: New assignment cycle for 2010-11 school year

*Sources: San Francisco Unified School District, Parents for Public Schools*

[http://www.sfexaminer.com/local/School\\_district\\_poised\\_to\\_revamp\\_lottery\\_system.html](http://www.sfexaminer.com/local/School_district_poised_to_revamp_lottery_system.html)