

Small groups leading up to a large conversation

All over the city. Smaller groups. It would be great if you could get to the point where it's in living rooms so people are more relaxed and themselves. If you invite 5 people over and develop teams everywhere, then it could spread. Then those small groups could come to a larger meeting at a library. There's power in numbers. The legislature listens to the PTA. You don't have to be rich. Your voice can be heard if you're part of something bigger..

I always find it hard when you have the breakout and report back, you always miss a little something. But it seems basic meeting rules should apply, everyone talks once before everyone talks twice. Might be able to do it – everyone brings something different when they explain – and that can spark someone's mind. When it's reported back, you don't get the passion behind the response. You wouldn't want it to be crazy and disorganized, when people feel comfortable raising their hand, you can get to very big things.

starting small, having a group, and building out from there. I think eventually you can get to the Mission or Washington High School big event.

If we facilitated, listened to the dialogue of each group and pulled out the commonalities. They may be more comfortable with each other, more honest. I'm really excited to hear what people are saying, to find the common threads and where there are disagreements that need to be addressed...they say "never go into team meeting without doing one-to-one check-in with each person. Only then can you facilitate a productive dialogue. When you facilitate the big dialogue, you should know what everyone is going to say, so you can bridge the gaps."

I think you have to find a group to begin with that you can... you need to start with a group that's powerful enough, small enough to think together and have the right people in the room who can talk across constituencies. It could be a 2 day retreat where, at some point, there can be an unfolding of the issues. Then finding a way to unfold that to a larger group... Get the mission clear. Get people to understand what the mission is, then they can go out and build a mini version of this out and bring it back.

In specific communities... being able to speak where they're comfortable.

In specific communities with larger vision; being able to speak where they're comfortable. [Later she talked about a "big expo" and taking it to "Sunday Streets."]

A lot of the best things that happen are when people are talking to each other about the things that they are involved in, in schools, it would be parents and grandparents, and that's where I've seen a lot of the best things happen.

There's some Foundation that does conversation circles, community conversation circles. They have lots of little conversations leading to a larger conversation.

There are surveys, but that's just the what and not the why. There are techniques that people use, like fishbowl, where you can have some people having a dialogue and others listening.

I think you'd have to do it in small groups at first. You would have to start with parent liaisons because they're key to most of the schools. Teachers next, and then the parents. And there should be an outline of the important topics you derive from both. Limit it to certain topics.

The structure should be a combination of small and large groups, giving some information and grounding. You can't have a good dialogue in a large group, there's no way to pull those who are quiet and stop those who like to talk from talking. Small groups are key.

It was me and Katie Albright at the Ed Fund – we brought in PPS and the Parent Advisory council. It was the student enrollment and retention effort. We used a model to have small community conversations, with groups no bigger than 10. You go to where people are – existing convenings, living rooms, churches, rec centers. You always ask aspirational questions. What I love is that people are already in their comfort zone – it's easier in a way to be in a reflective space when there are smaller numbers. The challenge is how do you bring everyone back to pull it all together for something bigger. We sent a postcard that invited them to look at the report - we're still using the information we gleaned from that. Loved doing that. Much more human process than town hall meetings, if what you want to do is get a sense of vastness – if everyone is in a small place, going into small groups that would be important, for the value of being listened to.

I guess you really have to start with small groups with the leadership of all these 300 plus organizations; trying to reach them so there's a clear understanding of what could be accomplished through these conversations. ...By doing this you'll quickly realize which groups you need to pay attention to and which groups you can pat on the head [and ignore].

I would say first of all, I wouldn't get a room full of different, varying opinions. I would separate everybody. Apples in one room, plums in another...ask everyone the same questions. Then you can bring everyone together, and report that A said this, and B said that—and then you can mediate the varying answers. Really, really ask them the 'why?' If you eliminate the audience, there's no need for anyone to perform.

Small conversations only

In the venues we have had, you can't go deep enough in these meetings. It's a bureaucratic process that's really prohibitive with barriers to open communication.

I see when it gets so big nothing comes out of it. There's no bridge and what's the follow-up? What did we learn? What do we do about it?... What we struggle with is empowerment to really speak. A lot of people think things but don't feel empowered to say it out loud. How do we coax people to feel so compelled that they will speak up. It's powerful even to have people host in their homes, in small groups where they feel comfortable. Then people can be more honest to say things that will not be judged by 150 people.

If you break it up by neighborhood, you'll get more.

The Ed Fund, I used to go to the luncheons and when it was smaller there was a lot of interchange. When it got bigger, things became more formal and congratulatory but it didn't stimulate a lot

As a teen, I feel more comfortable listening to people my age talk. For me, listening to someone who is like 40, its boring. It's just like school, it's not interesting. Small groups, not auditoriums, because it just like large class sizes, people won't get enough attention.

Don't do auditorium stuff; one person talks, people either fall asleep or tune out.

I will tell you, having just gone through trying to organize a public conversation about public schools as part of the Mayoral debates, we had 20 people there. We put it out to God and everyone and we got 20. We had more candidates there than people attending. If you have a public dialogue you're going to get more of the same people. I think you need to get existing organizations that you go out to in much more strategic meetings. Rather than have a "y'all come..." It's more useful to hear from folks who aren't showing up at these things.... I sit on a Board—the Child Abuse Prevention Center—many of those folks have kids in private school. They're not going to show up at a public school and framing it like a public dialogue will sound too much like a community meeting. I wouldn't depend on that exclusively. They are already there; they're already talking about it privately.

We've had many conversations using the small conversation process. People are in a room where they're comfortable with small numbers so they can interact. All of that information gets captured. You get the what or why with these small conversations. You get a sense of why. You can use them to compare and contrast. You can distill what's the same and what's different in different communities. Our own experience has shown us that with small conversations you get a lot out of people.

The only thing I landed on, I liked the 900 families contacted and through focus groups had conversations around enrollment. I like that format: focus groups. They tried really hard to get to people who wouldn't normally be reached.

I want a fishbowl. I want class of 2001, 2000, 1999, 1998 and on backwards. I want specific, distinct stories that highlight the need for civic engagement dialogue. I want some very important, key questions. Why did you succeed? Why didn't you? If you could go back, what would you have needed? On the outside circle, all the decision-makers, the who's who, rich billionaires that need to hear it. That, by far, has the most impact. I want Bobo - class of '78 - we know who these stories are. They haven't highlighted why dialogues have to happen. At least a decade - of different schools, different students - it's important because so many decision-makers have that length of history important to realize you've inherited that you're not feeding into it. I want to see data. Enough data for why we can't change education outcomes for 5305? Black and 2700? Latino students. And yes, to breakouts and they need to speak to specific roles, former students, former teachers, current teachers, advocates, etc. One day is breakouts. There needs to be cross-pollination.

Being in the same room seems old-fashioned, yet being in the same room we can have a conversation.

One of the most effective strategies that the school district has used (actually that it's community partners have made happen) is engaging parents in small gatherings where people feel comfortable to talk in their language and in their neighborhood as equals. When we did student enrollment, retention and recruitment, and student assignment, we saw there was so much more agreement.

How far can you go with 50 people; people who are more influential than me: Kelly, Carranza, Bergeson. Maybe it's smaller. Maybe it's a pre-public dialogue. If it's like this [big], then maybe it's too big. If it's too narrow then people say, "God, why did you bring me?" How far can you go with 50 people; people who are more influential than me: Kelly, Carranza, Bergeson. Maybe it's smaller. Maybe it's a pre-public dialogue. If it's like this [big], then maybe it's too big. If it's too narrow then people say, "God, why did you bring me?"

Maybe it's a staged thing with people who can narrow the landscape. Then I wonder about neighborhood dialogues. I don't see something necessarily city-wide but small natural groupings.

Size it according to the goal.

Not too big. Too big and it devolves into chaos. I like the idea of house parties.

When we've tried to do bigger events it's not as effective. If people have to go up to a microphone and talk, you're going to lose people. [Marian asked Ellie about the Educate Our State event in the Marina.] People wanted to do things and care and it was amazing to say that 3000 people showed up and care. Not that nothing came out of it, there were comments made and charted, but what was the thing? So, big venues are effective for some things, but not necessarily for the dialogue piece. 3000 parents showed up and all the legislators came and more wanted to come; same with community-based organizations. It created a sense of urgency and momentum. If you look at things like mayoral forums, it's a very limited format.

About having adults and kids in a group: With grown-ups and students, the grown-ups might see us as hyenas: not mature, yelling or not paying attention. They might see the negativity in us. If you have different age groups, it would be a challenge; if there was the same age group, it might be better.

On having adults listening to youth discussion groups: That would be nice, maybe just start off with a small group of students, because if you have a large group of kids yelling at you, you're not going to want to help us. You can start with student government and then you can move to classrooms...Better if the grown-ups in the room are not your parents or teachers.

Big conversation only

I would be bold – just bring us all together all at once. If we weren't doing this, it would be a bit nefarious – to bring everybody together at once. But given the fact that we're all going through this process, we're already to some extent buying in. Bringing us together is really the next step of the process. Let's bring everybody together.

These things usually work best if you get a panel of people that maybe would talk about what's right and what's wrong and then open it up at the end of the discussion.

About the Permanent Campaign for SFUSD district: What it attempted to do was be a monthly meeting where people from variety of backgrounds came together to talk about schools and create a support system. ...The idea was wonderful and the conversations were decent most of the time. This would be an extension of the best type of that grouping. This would branch out. That was a schools insiders group. This could carry the message farther afield.

If it were a survey you could go out to parks. That's some of the stuff that we did with the campaign: parks, senior centers, community centers.

The low hanging fruit is a one-day forum somewhere that won't ever reach the depth needed to move this dialogue forward.

What do you want to have happen? That's the challenge of the opportunity. Having a large room with 1000 people is hard to do....At the end of that meeting at Mission High School, what do you hope to hear people saying as they walk out? As you know, when you get people's attention, you've got 10 minutes after they leave to move onto the next thing. I guess that's part of the piece for all you: is it a high level listening/talking? Is this a public forum?—which is very different. You're going to get posturing and.... Some of it is process of elimination.

I see it huge and happening on many different levels: house party, Bill Graham, the press is involved, the Chronicle does something on it.

I think because it is difficult to find neutral... and so given that challenge, perhaps a way to go is go really big. Create a big tent and everybody's in. Do you recall a moment in the last 2-3 years, maybe 3-4 years? So maybe it is a permanent campaign coalition of folk who have agenda, but at least have a common commitment to... [missed this]. I don't know that there was private sector engagement. I don't recall. [Marian: there was a chamber representative speaking on behalf of business.] So maybe start with that and create a matrix to find out who is missing. Bring them all together and say, "We need a public discourse to value and support great public schools in San Francisco." It's too challenging to find agenda-less, neutral players.

Big conversation that branches into small groups

You might do an initial pass that's a large group, but the reality is, given people's schedules and where you hold it, you're going to get the most committed people. If you break it up by neighborhood, you'll get more.

Having breakout groups into smaller groups. It breaks up the showboating that happens in front of large crowds but not smaller groups. Also the people who try to make the meeting about something else.

About meetings with like populations: Absolutely not . Why? To make it easy? Isn't SF already structured that way? May as well not do it if you're going to do it that way. If it's going to be about social comfort then to do it that way, but if you want to make it so that everyone can participate, you have to give them space to disagree. Why wouldn't you? Fear of failure? Well failure is inevitable, it has to not go well. I don't see failure as a bad thing.

How to get masses of people and still have a dialogue? We've done things where we do a main convention and everyone goes to separate rooms. People get funny about that like, "How come I'm in this room?" Or they want to talk to the main person who gave the presentation, so there's tension to that, but it is a way to have a dialogue with more people.

It could be in a more official setting to do a kick-off to show that this is something that the City embraces. And we could switch back and forth between that and more informal settings.

Use technology

You've got to make people feel they're involved with this without coming to one meeting. We have the technology to make people feel involved. If meetings are crisp and short, you can put it on the website.

Using technology here in San Francisco and the passion and knowledge-base that you all have can be extremely powerful. ...Use the technology. They've figured out a way to get them in. Education funders think about it in a long-term, systemic way.

You're going to have to use social media. People connecting with each other with a large goal and other goals emerge out of it. For me, everyone is in such a hurry in their lives with all that's on their plates and fear of what they might lose tomorrow because of uncertainty. Having the ability to buy time for a group to figure out ...[?]. At some point, you're going to have to go off and reflect. "What's wrong? What's not working?" Get the critic to come and be a constructive critic, instead of a destructive critic.

Ongoing dialogue groups: institutionalized

There has to be a sustainability element because people have been burned. Leaders have to take the time to think it through. Leaders have to take time to understand each others' missions.

Not one event, has to be a campaign. Establish goals... marketing... branding so that everyone knows... street fairs... prey on idea of community building first, then next phases have more meat.

I would hope it wouldn't end with one. That maybe it's an ongoing community engagement tool to take the pulse of how people feel about public schools. That people get engaged and once it gets in their heads, they tell one person who tells another.

This is where I get very cautious about yet another meeting and another table where you see the same people again. I can see you having a core group of folks that would lead the policy direction—the public school agenda—that you would have buy-in from City and School District folks, and then create working groups/task forces to take on issues so there's momentum; whether it's chronic absenteeism or teacher professional development.

Wouldn't have town halls at first, it's chaos and unruly. Have leaders from each area to begin the meeting and start meeting each other. See if you can adopt a common direction and common goals. If we could agree on a series of ground rules, what's important and what's not— and set up regular meetings and a workplan for a year – and see where it goes. Then you can take stuff on the road, it's got to get going that way. If you start on the road, the prop A people, Chinese parents are going to scream. That's what I would recommend.

I think it could work if we met quarterly, with committees and subcommittees, and ask, "What is it going to take to close the achievement gap?" We are so underfunded. NY and NJ are at 15K/student. We're funded at 5K/student. We're delivering a 9 month school year on a 7 month budget. Convening is more than the sum of its parts. You could have a subcommittee on the achievement gap, retention, etc. SFUSD gets up to 10K just through local supports, but state money is still at 5K/student. Convening has the opportunity to bring powerful players together to address violence, bullying, stalking, etc. Not a lot of education organizations talk about violence. It's a big issue for our kids and something your neutral convening can set up a committee to work on.

The model we use is the Family Violence Council. The State mandated every county to have one, and it includes the courts. We have legislation that says which departments have formal representatives and designees because we have trouble getting people to the meetings. We meet quarterly. I invite you to come to the meetings. People are really involved in problem solving—leave your issue at the door and problem solve. We start our meeting with check-ins, announcements, and trends. Then we hear a presentation—i.e. from animal care and control, homeland security, etc.—with time for discussion. It is part professional development and part problem-solving. It would benefit from a subcommittee structure, but we don't have staffing for that. People feel it is valuable. It is a 2 hour meeting.

Humanized, focused on building relationships

I really don't know, but I do think it has to be humanized. People need to be able to develop relationships. Part of what keeps the dialogue the same is people aren't connecting on a human level... The human connection is critical.

Campaign around people; prey on idea of community building first, then next phases have more meat.

Do people get to know each other while they're there? Will there be community building? Whenever you get people together there's always that opportunity, model everything that you do, have groups do their own scribing and report out.

The process should provide some way of helping people, some way of healing people. But there are times when you're going to feel crappy at those dialogues when you do this kind of work.

The difficulty I'm having is - how would a day work? I don't see it happening in one day. Getting commitment of individuals over a period of time would be key.

How do you engage people that it can be fun in the sense because of the people involved, because of the opportunities? What do you want it to look like? Is it going to be like all the SOCAP things at Fort Mason? How do you pull the best from all that and have it be and look a little different?

What it takes, what it always takes, is one person meeting another. When I got involved in the library I met Marian and she kept me coming back. I wanted to be with her!

I'm always struck by people who put themselves in campus ssc meetings – why are they here? What's their agenda? I want to know who people are when I sit down at the table with them.

Being realistic about resources

My vision is more about tools at our disposal, than the numbers and kinds of faces. Come into the room with what's available to us. The conversation is not about pie in the sky – it's about what do we actually have and how do we leverage those items in the most powerful way.

How do we make systemic change? How do you make your resources—limited amounts—do more, work better for you? How are you going to change the trajectory of what's going on in the school district? Wouldn't you do more by changing the system than by changing one kid's path? It makes you feel good to help one kid, but how do you make systemic change? How do you make systemic change and help kids, at the same time?

Focus on Positives

My whole modus operandi with SFUSD is that I feel like the conversation shouldn't be about what do we have to do. It happens with attrition – we shouldn't plan for it, we should plan for greatness, the best case scenario, not the worse case scenario, then it would become much clearer how to get to the best case scenario.

I did imagine... people sharing their ideas, writing those ideas down, and figuring out how we get to that in a way that's not accusatory versus, "This doesn't work!" There is an opportunity to get folks in the room and get, "what we want," versus "what's not working."

Honor teachers and professionals, don't minimize.

Everybody [should be engaged in the dialogue], but they have to have scaffolding with different messages. Unless you really bring home the benefits of public education, they might think they aren't connected, but they have to be shown they are.

You need to bring some kids to the meetings, who are very diverse and they need to talk about their hopes and dreams: "I want to be a doctor or..."; It was a group with a different way to get people to give to underperforming schools. There were videos of kids with talent and brains, and promise. Look at the talent that is in this building. It was a super positive message. The negative message is overwhelming in its size and difficulty. Most people are going to walk away from that. "These are great kids, let's give them a break."

The voters have said time and again that they 'give a shit' about kids. There's a tremendous amount of that in this city. I want to take full advantage of that. When we talk about the public discourse about public education in this city, we're building off a generosity model, not a deficit model. ...we need to talk about building off this positive model. People like to back winners. We're building off a pretty solid base. We are a city with great schools. We are not a city that's got a great school district.

We [at NEN] promised everyone doing community work that we were a value add; that we'd create a platform that would elevate their work and help them be more successful. Once you turn that corner with them, they want to [participate]...

People want a lot of the same things for their kids. It works to approach these questions from where we agree and where we're alike. It's time consuming and labor intensive, but worth the effort.

The message needs to be positive. It can't be, "Oh the Union! Oh the lottery!" What can we do? What's the opportunity? What's being done? It's got to be toward saying, [I didn't get this verbatim, but something like, "Here's what's good and here's what you can do to help make it better."]

Be clear on goals

It needs to drive toward something actionable.

Being clear about the path, the end goal and continuing to reflect on the end goal. Remembering where we began – what we're trying to get to – and checking, continuing to double check that's where we're trying to go.;

But we need to have the conversation about, "What is a school?" I do believe you have to have common goals and it's got to be pretty clear. If you've ever sat in an AA meeting they have one goal, helping the alcoholic. They don't get distracted by other issues. We're talking about education. We don't get our pots mixed up.

What we're doing is taking it to action steps. What are we going to come out with next steps? It can't be for the sake of conversation, there has to be shared understanding of our next steps. If we all agree on x, y and z then our next steps are a, b and c and we're all committed to that. And our next conversation will happen on...— that's what I'm envisioning.

It can't go too fast, and yet, the thing that wasn't clear was our goal. The goal of the civic dialogue has to be clear. In the beginning people will want an answer that you can't give them. They have to have some meta-framework. They have to have a broader-scale notion of where it's going, but you can't give them the answers.

I would hope that some existing vehicle was out there with a broader mission statement to create this dialogue, with outcomes to work with the district to realize those outcomes.

Be very clear about the intention of the dialogue and finding common ground through individual... [missed this]. Having an initial conversation and presenting that back, or having a conversation in the beginning to identify commonalities.

With a clear reason why we're coming together.

Being able to identify as a group what the end goal is... they come, they're pumped, they're on board... finding balance of focus... need early wins so people will stay pumped and on board, but knowing it will take [a long time or concerted effort].

When we talk about education, it's so huge, not narrowed. A facilitator needs to know the goals, we need to focus. What is it really we're trying to extract.

I think starting with smaller, more focused, narrowly focused topics, might be better. And ways for participants to see how they fit. So, the first - don't know if you're envisioning a series of discussions - maybe the first one is how this is going to work - here's the process and these are the topics we'll talk about - or the only topic. The first one is investigation and we're gathering data, the next one is about solutions and how to investigate solutions, then talk about reporting back and each organization's commitment to solutions. There needs to be significant effort around managing all of that. There can't be assumptions around people saying this is important to them and equal action behind that.

It's time to get people energized and excited. If you frame things in a solutions oriented way, you can get people excited.

The key thing that I have found in this work is that when you bring people together—there's a certain aspect to needing to have a specific goal in mind, there's a 'to do' there. [There's a] need for some kind of crowd control, for alignment...It needs to be real, but has a solution orientation that aligns with the district's strategic plan. The District has done a decent job of narrowing the number of priorities it's working on. High performing [school] districts have two or three. Make sure whatever the work is, it's informed by the District's strategic plan. Taking them off on another walk...they'll go backwards. When you're thinking about how you fundraise with people, addressing their needs and matching it with what the district needs, it gets complicated really quickly.

The big challenge, in order to look at city-wide conversation that generates meaningful outcomes and change: get critical mass around collective value of those policy decisions that make substantive change.

about the Permanent Campaign for SFUSD district: It faltered a bit because there wasn't a clear idea about where they should go.

What's there is a dialogue, but what's the purpose of the dialogue? What's the message? If it's not articulated, then what's the ask? What are people going to do differently as a result of this?

The players have to agree to an outcome. It should be multi-pronged, but coordinated. You are going to hear from some people that think we're on the same page, but we're not.

This conversation is really about, what does it mean to have high quality 21st century public education? What do we have now? What do we need?; The point is the embracing of the agenda and signing on. If you can get that commitment you're going to be able to make that conversation happen.

What you need to start is a coordinating council, where agreeing on the objectives, what it is and what it isn't, not the place to negotiate your next deal, to push your agenda, this is to talk about the school system and the school community as a whole....For the health of the school system, what are 5 things we need to do? And what can we do to support that? In addition to, changing work rules, etc. Some ideas, some resources that we can agree to make things better. No more than 5. If you don't get beyond 5, it's manageable and it's realistic.

How do you have that dialogue so it doesn't get shut down by the bomb throwers. Use that information you're garnering to move an agenda to move that.

Keep it to 5 topics or you'll never complete the whole thing; five hot topics or main topics of interest.

get everyone on the same page about what we're doing and how we're doing it.

If it's a dialogue that's going to have some specific projects and work, then it has a great chance of success. ...People will want to know the purpose: Why am I here? You'll get some people to the first meeting, but it's got to be the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th. The risk is being ambitious, but giving enough chunks, bite-sized nuggets for people to do something with.

I think if people don't understand the point or if they're unclear on the role of the organizing group or the organizer and how it fits in and how it's taking place. People's time is valuable. I'm sure everyone would want to have a clear idea of where this conversation is going.

I like the process you're using. reflecting back what we've said individually and see if there are common themes and what ideas have emerged. Throw everyone in a room together in an organized way and.... Hopefully what will emerge is one, two or five things that will be a priority. Focus really matters. Having everyone focus on 1-5 things will bring a much better result than so many from so many different organizations.

It's really tricky to have a sense of... To what end? What is the reason? What would success look like? You can't pin it all down but you have to have enough to go on

The goal is to agree that we have a problem.

It depends on what the dialogue is about. Define what you want to achieve, then bring the right people together to achieve it.

Here's where it gets tricky: too predetermined agenda up front—too open—has people question purpose. So have at least clarity of process: we're going to have a number of community conversations, play it back, have people respond to that based on action. So it's thought through from a process point of view, so people can see the beginning, middle and end, so they know what they've gone through.

how to infuse some fun... could it be like City Streets? With a clear reason why we're coming together.

A bigger fear is would we have focus? You can't fix everything. When you try to fix everything, you fix nothing. You have to be pinpoint laser. You have to stick to it.

Create our own model for dialogue

Could be a strength, to do it your way – and come at it from a new place. And to say, this is what we're hearing from the community, this is our end goal.

It's probably going to be some kind of hybrid method...

[His answer about clear outcomes, in alignment with the District, and using one of our existing organizations to lead the process, also seems to speak to creating our own model for how to conduct a dialogue with clear goals.] MCT

Starting point: with a listening campaign, like you're doing now but a listening campaign for everybody, where people who have not been traditionally engaged in the process are able to do so.

There needs to be a leader in that and I don't know who that is in the current cast of characters. It also depends on outcomes. It need to be similar to Boston's pre-paid college plan. That effort came out of the Boston Foundation. They defined outcomes in many different way. There is a parent engagement platform, a chamber of commerce business platform, etc. It would depend on the partners and stakeholders meeting specifically to address equity, placement, low achievement. There could be 4-5 working groups: achievement and parity among all schools, investment, community stakeholders (addressing people living the city), etc. There should be an education focus, economic focus, family focus, professional focus.

a circle with an inner and outer circle, polling stakeholders. That's true organizing the way you're going about it.

That should ground the conversation - what schools did and didn't do for students. And let that shape the dialogue around data. 70% of students graduated without A to G requirements, now it's 49% and 16% are African-American. Something for people to understand the urgency piece.

This is all, you all know, a really politically charged environment in San Francisco. Having the opportunity to disagree... When it comes to our kids, it isn't okay to disagree. People say the Union is the problem, teachers are the problem. You want everyone to bring some of their emotional baggage to the room and they need to leave some of it.

It might be uncomfortable, it might not even be effective. Anything that releases frustrations would be good. It will have stirred things up. That might be uncomfortable but it's not bad. Like ugly school board meetings that everyone leaves mad. That's unfortunate, but there's release in that that can be helpful in some way.

it is in New York City, started by Mayor Bloomberg. There was a campaign for public education with Carolyn Kennedy as the spokesperson. It was a clear destination for people who wanted to support public schools, including financially. ... I don't think we have that same kind of thing. We have the Ed Fund, Alliance... That campaign [in NYC] was in the general public consciousness in a way that it isn't here. I'm not sure that everyone in SF thinks that's the right approach.

There's a consultant in Washington, DC, Lisa Silverstein. She is a brilliant designer of process. She's done extensive work with non –profits and she's worked with SEIU. I've been through one process and she was amazing. We identified problems and wrote them up on butcher paper which was left on tables around a room. Then groups would rotate through and work on solutions to the problems. She had somebody like David Sibbet, who used to work for Coro Foundation. He's an unbelievable graphic artist. So you end up with a picture and with The combination of those two things was really powerful and brilliant.

It's kind of like the Clinton dialogue on race. That was a healthy dialogue. That was kept really high and mighty. The answer is money, when you compare it to education. The answer is money. A big chunk of the problem is money....I'm with you, I'm goal oriented in general. As I'm sitting here talking, the more concrete and tangible, the more they rip apart that thing. As opposed to getting a tidal wave. I support same sex marriage. I don't care about the wording, but I'm there.

Brown's tactic is, "I'm gutting public education, but here's a ballot measure that can stop this from happening." You need to do those divisive things to cause the dialogue.

At the Department on the Status of Women (where I work), we have a staff of 5. We can't do it by ourselves so we convene. After 7 years of work, we've reduced domestic violence by 80%. I see you're doing that—reaching out to stakeholder. When you do that—a systems approach—it has the possibility to stick and have legs.

I would try to position and frame it as a series of community conversations focused on understanding, appreciating and improving public schools in San Francisco. I probably would frame it as a listening tour; wanting, welcoming and encouraging all voices.

Neutral Facilitator/Good Facilitation

you can't have anybody close to it doing it. I've seen it needing to be a really respectful objective process where people feel like they can be honest and say what they need to say without fear of how someone else will take it. Or if they're friends with someone in another organization, they won't be afraid of hurting that person's feelings.

Facilitation is key. Facilitation has to be very robust, it's facilitating a conversation, not facilitating grandstanding.

I don't understand this City and the things that happen here. I just feel like there are a lot of niches people are in. They're comfortable. It may not be working for them. They may not know who they're fighting, who their perceived enemies are. Without a strong purpose and without skillful running, that's the danger.

It needs to be very closely facilitated, which is going to rub a lot of people the wrong way. So, for some people, it will feel like controlling the conversation, but it needs to be positioned as - there's a ton of value in the room and we need to make sure all that value comes out. In order to do that, we need this process, this facilitation of discussion.

Conversation within a group is different from conversation in a mixed group and it needs to be facilitated differently.

If there are forums where the general public is participating, having clear structure on how people are to participate. I've seen one person get up and take the mic for 10 minutes. Have clear guidelines so that it's more equitable.

It goes back to a strong mediator, it will help. If they can say, can you rephrase that? They might not be able to, but you could give them examples.

I was very encouraged when Marian said that starting a new organization was not the way to go. That's the first thing people think of as a solution.

I think about our efforts (United Way and others) to have some community dialogue about public schools in the Waiting for Superman moment. If I had to do it all again, I'd do it the same; bring labor, bring charter, bring higher education, bring public. The danger for me is just how quickly they become polarizing conversations. It took me 10 phone calls and 10 hours (so many hours) just to get Dennis Kelly in the room and, likewise, to get Nick Driver in the room. It is almost on its face a very polarizing conversation. How it is framed and facilitated becomes the key. It's fraught with strong points of view, some very dogmatic, quite frankly. When cooler heads don't prevail it can be a very ugly conversation and non-productive; so it's a tricky space. But I still say you do it.

Facilitation is critically important. This kind of process, where we are extracting common understanding right up-front – and making that the basis to build the conversation is a brilliant way to bring people together.

It's always good to have one person at a time speak and go around many times. We do this in our work and we have strict guidelines about sharing from personal experience; not using your 2 minutes to respond to someone else, but using it to share your personal experience.

Informed by good data/good information

Can we have the conversation/dialogue informed by good data—good information that shows the results of what's happening.

Obama campaign... straight polling... knocking on doors and canvassing to gauge how people feel...

You would do tours of a bunch of schools first. And based on that—the life of a child from elementary school to high school—then have the conversation about what initiatives we might put on the ballot. Getting beyond pet projects and even, “When I went to college it was like this.” But they might not be coming from the place where 70% of kids are on free and reduced lunch. Doing it from the student's perspective first, rather than... Because I think a lot of people who go to meetings... School people will take what we can get, but I'll often be at these meetings and I'll be like, “Have you been to a school? Do you know what it's like?” Lets' ground this; get everybody there and then let's hash out the issues at hand.

How can we make the system work for all our teachers with the right professional development? Focusing on the learning outcomes for the kids

It would be really interesting to do some policy analysis. We work with all the universities. You find out how many families and what are the points of argument for going to public school or not. Is it economic? Socialization? Why is there the dichotomy in a family? What's driving that conversation? Once a child is enrolled in private school, what is the likelihood of them returning to public school?

If you want to base things on the facts: we know certain populations of kids are doing poorly and certain populations are doing great and have done great and will continue to do great.

Data to share - the last A-G class. Breaking down who's graduating, by ethnicity, people have to get out of the comfort zone that everybody's succeeding - it's not the case. Having a cross-sector of folks. Struggling with - what is needed to get here. What really will take folks there - there needs to be fishbowls, data, some background on the district, where folks currently are, also the realities per school, all schools are not filling in the city of SF, pulling out what's happening that's different. What makes Carver different than Claire Lilienthal. What are the ingredients? On paper, it looks like brown children can't be educated, it should be a large group to make sure you get all the different sectors.

Research showing how many black and brown children - if they're able to go to college, the main option is City. If they go there because it's cheaper. But if that's your only option, that's a problem.

We should make sure the conversation is based in reality. We need to acknowledge what isn't going well

Not everyone's going to be a policy wonk and get into the data. They just need to know: Can I drop my kids off at a school and know that they'll get to college? I know for some people, the data is important. If you ask a person who chose independent schools, they are willing to mortgage their house, not go on vacations because they can count on it.

Tours of Schools

Since this should be a bridging experience, it could bridge the gap between the reality of the situation and its portrayal in the media.

You'd probably get mixed reactions. Some teachers already feel over-watched-it would be overwhelming. There are probably other teachers who would welcome the opportunity to see what's being done. Something where I can sit down and talk after school. Lunch doesn't work, the school day is too hectic.

going to the schools, especially tours, explaining "This is what we do, this is our classroom... this is how many people are in the classroom."

I guess, bring them to the school, so you're showing them what needs to change, show them what they're supporting. If they're satisfied, they'll want to help us or if they're not satisfied, they'll see how bad things are and want to help.

I live a very sheltered life. I live with, work with people who look like me. I was really excited about the demographics and the things going on in the classroom. I was just really excited about the talent and energy of the kids. It only took a fraction of a second for that misconception to go out the window. ...I may not have gone on the tour if it was just for a school tour. For this tour, I got there for a different reason and then we did the tour.

It depends on who you involve. If you involve truly non-school people, they should go to schools to see what it's like inside. If you have 2 sets of people walking down the street, adults on one side and kids on the other, the adults are perfectly happy to be on the other side of the street from the kids. They will cross the street to be on the other side of the street as the kids.

It seems like there should be something the schools are doing so people can come in and take a class.

I have a wacky suggestion and, again, I don't have... I was watching Top Chef and they did a progressive dinner. What if you did a progressive school outing where you all started...? You either start at one school or break up into groups... and they see stuff; they don't have an agenda. They might go to a reading class or go to an ELL for new children. Then you end up... Or maybe it was more of a break out room. They've had that experience together; they'll be seeing the same things. The other thing is that if they're together all day, they'll be having their own conversations. When it's business folks or they come by once in a while, they don't have a sense. A progressive dinner party of schools!

It would also be great to get people into public schools. It would be an interesting survey to ask how many residents of San Francisco have set foot in a public school. That would be really good info to have. You could sweeten it by pairing it with that group that gives neighborhood architectural tours. They could give a tour of Mission High. Get Lorraine Jobs, get a name, anything. Make it fun, bring some public spirit to it. It doesn't have to be all serious, "There's a PROBLEM!"