

Should the Sacramento City School Board create a streamlined K-12 pathway for local families by adding grades 7 and 8 to Arthur A. Benjamin Health Professions High School?

A feasibility study for Sacramento City Unified School District.

Executive summary and recommendations for policymakers

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Executive summary

Arthur A. Benjamin Health Professions High School (Health Professions High) is a high performing, under-enrolled school.

Leataata Floyd Elementary School (Floyd Elementary) is an under-performing, fully enrolled school.

Both are public schools in the Sacramento City Unified School District (Sacramento City district), in Sacramento, California.

Health Professions High and Floyd Elementary are immediately next door to each other in Sacramento's Upper Land Park neighborhood, an area widely known for Marina Vista and Alder Grove, two large, low income and historically segregated public housing communities occupied primarily by people of color. These communities are widely considered to be underserved by city services, including in education options.

The Sacramento City School Board asked us to investigate whether transforming Health Professions High into a grades 7-12 integrated middle school-high school – creating a “community learning center” K-12 pathway on one block, from a K-6 Floyd Elementary to a grades 7-12 Health Professions Middle/High School - would benefit Sacramento students and families, especially those in the area around those schools.

This report concludes the benefits of the community learning center and grade 7-12 models in the Upper Land Park neighborhood are ultimately outweighed by the substantial risks they present for Upper Land Park and Sacramento City families, for three major reasons:

- Grades 7-12 at Health Professions High carries a significant risk of increasing segregation of Upper Land Park families within Sacramento City district, isolating them from other Sacramento City families in a school pathway that is uncertain to outperform existing popular school choices - yet likely keeps them just blocks from home for the majority of the first 18 years of their lives.
- Adding grades 7 and 8 to Health Professions High forces the school to deal with several big changes to school culture all at the same time, and is ultimately more likely to create more problems than solutions for Health Professions High student outcomes.
- Health Professions High's under-enrollment is rooted in perceptions about the safety of the school and area for students, and concerns about the narrowness of the health professions pathway. This study found the 7-12 model unlikely to address these underlying issues.

Though adding grades 7 and 8 to Health Professions High is not the answer, the current realistic education options available to Upper Land Park families are unacceptably poor. This study urges the Sacramento City School Board to take action to improve outcomes

for Floyd Elementary students.

Specifically, this study recommends the district and these schools take more cost efficient, less risk-fraught actions to capture many of the benefits of – and lay the groundwork for – a community learning center and create a better pathway for Floyd Elementary students. They also allow Health Professions High and Floyd Elementary to deal with major changes to school culture and operations one at a time, rather than all at once. These recommendations increase the likelihood of creating a quality, desirable, integrated middle school option and community learning center in Upper Land Park.

This study's recommendations for Sacramento City district policymakers are:

1. **Increase school site-led collaboration between Floyd Elementary and Health Professions High.** Such collaboration, in community health services, student-to-student mentorship, and recruitment, would capture many of the benefits of the grade 7-12 school and community learning center model with less risk and cost. It would also test the viability of, and lay the groundwork for, adding grades 7-8 at Health Professions High.
2. **Create a focused Health Professions High branding & marketing strategy, and consider broadening Health Professions High linked learning pathway beyond the health profession.** Health Professions High can specifically target Upper Land Park families as a potential source of students. Health Professions High School is not just for students who want to be nurses and technicians, a common perception in Sacramento City district. Health Professions High is also for students who want a small school, professional exposure, and a college and career readiness track. However, if appeal of the health professions pathway remains low among Sacramento City district families, a broader pathway, or adding even a second, dual pathway, is likely to broaden Health Professions High's appeal to families from across the district and region.
3. **Deeper study of Floyd Elementary-Health Professions High family & community needs.** Exploring the depth and impact of Upper Land Park school segregation and trauma is essential to collecting the community views and hard data required to continue exploring options and developing an informed, detailed vision for this area's future, beyond this study's recommendations. Serious long term solutions to under-performance and under-enrollment at Upper Land Park schools start with understanding how these schools learning environments are deeply affected by their surrounding communities.

Recommendations for policymakers

Recommendation #1: Increase school site-led collaboration between Floyd Elementary and Health Professions High.

A successful, stable K-12 pathway between Floyd Elementary and Health Professions High would require an enormous amount of collaboration between these schools anyway. Why not start with the collaboration first, and add grades 7 and 8 later, rather than the other way around or, worse, having to implement both at the same time?

Collaboration between these schools does already exist. It is successful. And more can be done with the support and encouragement of the Sacramento City School Board. Sacramento City district can capture many of the benefits of the K-12 pathway by simply funding and supporting increased collaboration between Floyd Elementary and Health Professions High.

Increased neighborhood collaboration is likely to spread more information about Health Professions High among Upper Land Park families, and be more cost effective way to build a Floyd-Health Professions pathway – the same pathway that has so much potential to improve Floyd student performance and boost Health Professions High enrollment.

“ *[Health Professions High] - is that a public school?*”
- *Parent at Leataata Floyd Elementary School*

School site collaboration will also test the proposition, and lay the groundwork, for a future community learning center. If collaboration is fruitful, it can increase. Over time, Floyd families will come to know whether Health Profession High better – Health Professions High will come to know what the Upper Land Park community wants and needs. If the collaboration is popular and successful - the groundwork is laid for the K-12 community learning center pathway on the Floyd-Health Professions block.

The school sites themselves are most in touch with their families’ and communities’ needs. They should lead this collaboration. Collaboration can take many forms –this report does not deem to know which collaborations would be most high impact. This research revealed many ideas for collaboration, including:

- Increased Health Professions High outreach and recruitment into Floyd Elementary and Upper Land Park – a recruitment day at Health Professions High for 6th grade families.
- Providing community health services for Upper Land Park families on site at Health Professions High, supported by Health Professions High students. This could be a community health day, a community partnership, or an ongoing clinic.

- Student mentorship, especially in reading and other academics, college tracks, and healthy habits, between Health Professions High students and Floyd Elementary students.

Some collaborations are easier than others. Some are simple and can be undertaken right away by the school sites with support from Sacramento City district. Others are complex – they might require partnership with the City of Sacramento, Mercy Housing, Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency (SHRA), Sacramento Police Department, private sector health care partners, and so on.

Regardless of what level of engagement the school sites choose and Sacramento City district supports, one of this report’s clearest findings is the unrealized benefit of supporting increased Floyd-Health Professions collaboration.

Recommendations #2: To broaden Health Professions High’s appeal in the Sacramento region, create a focused Health Professions High branding & outreach strategy and consider broadening the school’s linked learning pathway beyond the health profession.

Qualitative research suggests Health Profession High’s enrollment is low at least partly because knowledge of this school was low among parents interviewed, and because the health professions pathway may have limited community appeal.

Qualitative research revealed even in the Upper Land Park community that surrounds the school, some parents did not know:

- Health Professions High School exists; is a public school; is not a continuation high school – is an option for their children.
- Health Professions High School graduated 98% of its 2016 senior class.
- Health Professions High sent 84% of its 2016 graduates on to higher educationⁱ.
- Health Professions High School is not just for students who want to be nurses and technicians. It is also for students who want a small school experience, professional exposure, a college and career readiness track, etc.

This report recommends Health Professions High and other small schools of choice in Sacramento City district should share best practices and benefit from each other’s lessons learned in successful outreach and recruitment.

Some straightforward marketing strategy changes may also benefit Health Professions High, such as:

- Changing the name of the school to Arthur A. Benjamin High School, or another name that reflects that the school is appropriate for and Sacramento City district students – not just those interested in a narrow health profession.
- Profiles of successful recent graduates, including their job title, estimated salary, and testimonials from the student. Consider hiring recent graduates for outreach

activities.

- Profiles of partner employers who have hired Health Professions High graduates and interns, with current job openings (with salary) and testimonials.
- Increasing school site visits to the Health Professions campus for 7th and 8th graders and their families.
- Targeting Upper Land Park families in Health Professions recruitment through community-focused tactics – keeping in mind the languages and cultures of the families in Upper Land Park.
- Targeting Leataata Floyd families specifically through outreach to families with 6th graders.

Outreach into the neighboring Upper Land Park area and specifically at Floyd Elementary families is particularly high value as it has potential benefits of capturing some of the benefits of the community learning center model as well as bolstering Health Professions High enrollment with a community whose current educational options are not serving them well. Floyd Elementary families are a rich and relatively untapped potential source of Health Professions High students.

If increased knowledge among district parents (and especially Upper Land Park parents) about Health Professions High does not solve the school's low enrollment, then appeal of the health professions pathway must be brought into question. Broadening the health professions pathway, or adding a second, dual pathway at the school would give Upper Land Park families more pathway options in their neighborhood.

“ All these things I didn't know about the success... of Health Professions [High] students. I had no idea. ”

- Parent at California Middle School

Sacramento City district should consider whether the health professions pathway is overly “narrow and isolating,” as one educator put it, to appeal to a broad swath of Sacramento region families. Hesitation about the narrowness of this linked learning high school pathway was raised repeatedly by parents and educators that participated in this study. Adding a second (non-health) linked learning pathway at Health Professions High school – one with clear demand among Upper Land Park families – could also permanently solve Health Professions High's under-enrollment by consolidating existing Sacramento City district pathways in one place. For example, one suggestion that came up in the course of this research was to move New Technology High School's pathway to share a campus with Health Professions High.

“ Was Health Professions [High] designed for the community in which it resides? If it was built for this community, then it would be full.”

- Educator at Floyd Elementary School

Recommendation #3: Conduct a deeper study of Floyd Elementary-Health Professions High family & surrounding community needs.

Adding grades 7 and 8 to Health Professions High does not address the root causes of that school’s under-enrollment, or Floyd Elementary’s underperformance. In fact, the likelihood of successfully implementing grades 7 and 8 at Health Professions High is more likely to be affected by those root causes than to change them.

“ [As a district,] we’ve got to do something different.”

- Educator at Leataata Floyd Elementary

Educators, parents, and district leaders were nearly unanimous in reporting the neighborhood circumstances – the “deep trauma and segregation” in Upper Land Park – limits the ability of teachers to effectively teach, and of Health Professions High to recruit students. There was a widespread feeling that inaction, as one educator put it, creates a “moral imperative from our [school] board to recognize they are perpetuating something.”

This study focused on the question of the likely costs and benefits of adding grades 7 and 8 to Health Professions High, and it was beyond the scope and resources of this study to address the broader – and greater – questions:

- What Upper Land Park families to find out what these families want and need from their public education provider.
- What Floyd Elementary, Health Professions High, California Middle, and McClatchy High need in order to create a viable, successful learning environment for Upper Land Park students.

A comprehensive community engagement survey of Upper Land Park families and how Sacramento City district was the #1 request from educators at the Floyd Elementary and Health Professions High school sites.

“If the community needs [around our school] are not addressed, then our enrollment will never be what it needs to be,” says one Health Professions High educator.

“ Talk about becoming a doctor when the kids don't like science or math. ”

-Upper Land Park community member

In particular, Sacramento City district should explore the depth and impact of school segregation in these neighborhoods and answer questions such as:

1. How does the surrounding neighborhood affect the learning environment at Health Professions High, and the readiness of Upper Land Park students to learn in the Health Professions High classroom?
2. What services are available to low income (Title 1) students and how can Sacramento City district support school sites to take advantage of those services?
3. Are Floyd Elementary students prepared to learn when they arrive at school, and if not, why? What can Sacramento City district do to help these children be ready to learn when the bell rings?
4. Why do Floyd Elementary students choose C.K. McClatchy High School over Health Professions High School? What does this community want from Health Professions High? How can Health Professions High serve this community more?

The fact is, Floyd Elementary School students are effectively segregated from the rest of Sacramento City district at grades K to 6. Floyd students are 98.5% of colorⁱ. 100% of students meet the federal poverty thresholdⁱⁱⁱ. Nearly all students live nearby in Upper Land Park's 751 units of public housing.

One of this study's clearest findings is the learning environments and reputations of both Floyd Elementary and Health Professions High are deeply affected by their surrounding communities and their needs.

Understanding those dynamics and examining the data and perceptions behind them, beyond the anecdotal, is an essential first step to giving Upper Land Park families better education options.

ⁱ Health Professions High School Class of 2016 Post-Secondary Plans (Arthur A. Benjamin Health Professions High School)

ⁱⁱ Leataata Floyd Elementary School 2014-15 School Accountability Report Card Published During the 2015-16 School Year (Sacramento City Unified School District).

ⁱⁱⁱ Sacramento City Unified School District: <http://www.scusd.edu/priorityschools>