



April 2019 Admission Report

April 2, 2019

What Happened?

As of April 1, enrollment for the 2019-2020 school year is at 491, significantly over our budgeted enrollment of 472. I wanted to share the factors that contributed to this larger than expected enrollment number.

The admission office always has an April “targeted” enrollment that is higher than the budgeted enrollment. This is to give us some breathing room as we experience the “spring melt,” i.e., a net loss of enrollment between April 1 and June 1 (when enrollment agreements become binding). The spring melt happens for a variety of reasons, including families moving, families getting strong public school options from the SFUSD second enrollment round, or families getting into higher choice independent schools off of those schools’ wait lists. For the last 5 years, the spring melt has averaged 5 students, but it has been as high as 9 students.

For the 2019-2020 school year, the admission office set an April targeted enrollment of 480. We believed achieving this enrollment goal in April most likely would ensure we would open the 2019-2020 school year at or above our budgeted enrollment of 472.

There were three main factors that contributed to an enrollment number higher than our April targeted enrollment:

1. We had decided we would over-enroll TK by one student (to 13) to achieve a better boy/girl balance. That plan was working great (with 7 boys/6 girls) until a current preschool family decided they strongly preferred a TK placement to a second-year preschool placement, which made us 2 over in TK (with 8 boys and 6 girls).
2. Responses to kindergarten offers were due Thursday, March 28 at 10 a.m. Although we still had a number of offers out just one hour before the deadline, I was concerned we would not reach 48 students in kindergarten given our historical yields. In our past experience, families who are waiting until the absolute deadline typically are hoping to come off the wait list at another school, and our yield with these families can be quite low. I also knew that our peer schools were already offering spots to wait list candidates,

and I was concerned that if I waited until after the 10 a.m. deadline our top wait list candidates would have been snatched up by other schools. As a consequence, I made 4 offers to wait list candidates before 10 a.m. As events played out, our yield was significantly stronger than in recent years. We did reach 48 with our first round candidates, and all 4 wait list candidates accepted our offer, putting K enrollment at 52. I do expect this number will shrink somewhat in the coming weeks.

3. We generally have a small applicant pool for grades that are not typical entry points, i.e., grades 1-4 and grades 7-8, and often these students are struggling in their current schools. Strong applicants to these grades almost always receive enrollment offers from multiple schools, so our yield in these grades can be low. This year was unusual, however, because of the situation with Marin Preparatory School. Marin Prep lost its lease on its current facility, originally needing a new site by the end of the current school year (they have since gotten a one-year extension, but must have a new site by the end of the 2019-2020 school year). The uncertainty around the Marin Prep situation led to a spike in applications to CDS from Marin Prep families in these typically hard-to-fill grades, resulting in our adding 5 students from Marin Prep alone who, in other circumstances, most likely would not have even been applying to CDS.

The combination of the above three factors gave us 11 students who, had circumstances been different, we most likely would not have enrolled. Without these 11 students, we would be at our targeted April enrollment.

I do expect our enrollment to decrease between now and June 1, but I think it is unlikely it will drop as low as 472. My estimate is that we will open at 486, but who knows in this year that feels like “the perfect storm.”

Other Preliminary Takeaways from this Admission Season

Attrition among currently enrolled students is low at 6%, higher than last year’s record low of 5.4% but lower than our historical average of roughly 8%.

The entering 3-year-old preschool class is 59% students of color. The entering kindergarten class is 52% students of color.

Our strong enrollment performance gives us the opportunity to add additional students on sliding scale, so that we spend the 19.4% of the budget allocated to sliding scale and maintain our position as a leader in socioeconomic diversity. We will be extending offers to additional sliding scale families over the next couple of weeks.

Our yields were quite strong, with an overall yield in preschool of 73%. Our first round yield in kindergarten was 32% and our overall yield in kindergarten was 38%. While low in comparison to our preschool yield, this year’s first round kindergarten yield was twice as high as last year. And, while our peer schools generally are very secretive about yield

numbers, I know that at least one direct competitor typically has a kindergarten yield of 35-40%.

Shelly was an engaged, thoughtful, present force during the admission season, and prospective families responded very positively to her and very enthusiastically to her vision for CDS. We also think we benefited from what we are calling the “lobby bump,” meaning that the school visually showed much better than in prior years because of the new lobby, the hardwood floors, and the incredible art displays.

In late-April/early-May, we will survey families who applied to CDS for the fall, including those who accepted our enrollment offer, those who declined our enrollment offer, and those who were wait-listed. The information from that survey should give us more insight into the factors affecting this year’s admission season.