



**PASADENA UNIFIED
SCHOOL DISTRICT**



PUSD Equity-Centered Facility Plan Update

SAN RAFAEL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL INTERIM COMMUNITY PRIORITIES REPORT

School Site Committee Listening Sessions / Workshop

May 27, 2026 | 11:00 pm – 1:00 pm

Prepared for Pasadena Unified School District by RSS Consulting Services | June 15, 2026

Introduction

Ten San Rafael community members shared insights into the learning conditions, student experience, facility constraints, and planning priorities at San Rafael during one listening session on May 27, 2026. Participants included parents, educators, a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) coach, and the principal.

Participants described a school with a strong sense of community, trusted teachers, engaged parents, and a campus history that matters deeply to families and neighbors. At the same time, they identified current conditions that make it harder for students and staff to thrive: cramped bungalows, age-inappropriate restrooms, no school library, limited quiet refuge, overheated assembly spaces, unsafe or poorly organized outdoor areas, constrained intervention and conference space, and a planning process that must protect the “**soul**” of the school while minimizing disruption. The central message is that future facility improvements should not simply create a new building; they should strengthen the community, instructional practices, and neighborhood identity that already make San Rafael meaningful.



What We Heard

Participants describe San Rafael as a school where language and culture are not enrichment opportunities but foundational parts of the educational experience. Multiple families shared stories of language and cultural loss caused by assimilation across generations and explained that San Rafael offers an opportunity to reclaim what previous generations were encouraged or forced to abandon. Parents repeatedly connected the school's wall-to-wall Spanish immersion model with a strong sense of community, describing the campus as **"one Panda family"** where culture, language, and belonging reinforce one another. Several participants noted that they initially chose San Rafael for immersion but stayed because of the community. For these families, preserving Spanish is not only an academic goal. It is a way of preserving family history, cultural identity, and connection across generations.

"We came for the immersion and stayed for the community."

Participants describe a school where the people are the core asset. Parents repeatedly said they trust the teachers and want future decisions to reflect the judgment of those closest to students. One parent said that if there is tension between district standards and teacher needs, he would feel confident if **"our teachers are happy with it,"** because teachers **"deal with our kids every day"** and know what is best for them. Another parent said **"remodeling doesn't matter if you don't have the community,"** and named teachers, the principal, math programs, and parent-led run club as the reasons her children want to come to school. This is one of the strongest planning implications in the discussion: San Rafael's future campus must be designed around the instructional and relational practices that already work, not around a generic idea of modernization. Participants want the school improved, but they also want its **"soul"** preserved, with disruption minimized so families do not leave and neighborhood relationships are not damaged.

Participants also described a need for **LEARNING SPACES** that match how children actually learn: through movement, small groups, reading, hands-on work, natural light, and access to the outdoors. A parent with a third grader in the bungalows described the classroom as **"incredibly cramped"** and said that for active children, a confined room can feel **"stifling."** A teacher contrasted that with what works in her own classroom: natural light, a patio, outdoor tables, reading areas, science investigations, planting, differentiated math groups, and enough room for 33 students to collaborate, move, and feel ownership of the classroom. She said her students showed growth in math and attributed the success partly to grouping, differentiated teaching, and having **"that space for kids to move around."** For San Rafael, outdoor access is not an amenity. Grade-appropriate patios, classroom libraries, natural light, sinks, and flexible learning zones should be understood as instructional infrastructure.

A **SCHOOL LIBRARY** emerged as both an academic priority and a social-emotional one. Participants said San Rafael does not have a library, and families connected that absence to the loss of reading culture, Spanish-language access, and quiet refuge. A kindergarten teacher imagined a school library with **“plenty of Spanish books,”** where students could read silently, hear read-alouds, invite parents, check out books, and learn responsibility. A parent said her son lost something important when San Rafael no longer had a school library, and she described students who sometimes need a supervised quiet place instead of being outside the whole time during recess. Another parent described a child running outside, getting overheated, and then wanting to draw or read; for him, a refuge would be **“awesome.”** The implication is broader than a room of books: San Rafael needs quiet, literacy-rich spaces where students can regulate, read in both languages, and experience calm without leaving supervision to chance.

“I would love a library in the school... a space for silent reading, read-alouds, parents coming in, students checking out books, and plenty of Spanish books. A special library at school would increase their reading and their love for reading.”

Participants described the **AUDITORIUM** functioning simultaneously as assembly space, music classroom, event venue, book fair location, and community gathering space. Because there is no library, the book fair uses the auditorium; because music does not have a dedicated home, the auditorium is also shared with the music teacher. One parent said the constant movement of chairs, materials, and people creates stress and interferes with music learning. Participants also described the auditorium as hot, loud, and uncomfortable, with no air conditioning, students sitting on the floor, and group events sometimes split by grade because there is not enough room for families. The principal said a larger, more comfortable space would reduce the number of separate assemblies and ease class coverage challenges. Participants also raised the need for restrooms connected to auditorium events so families and students can access bathrooms without opening the whole building. Future improvements should give library, music, performance, assembly, and family-event functions appropriate homes rather than forcing them into the same overburdened space.

OUTDOOR SPACE is another central theme, but participants were clear that more outdoor space alone is not enough. Students need outdoor areas that are safe, shaded, age-appropriate, and designed for real movement. Families described younger children needing space to run, use imagination, play with blocks, dress up, and role-play. Older students need places for wall ball, soccer, and age-separated play so younger children are not excluded by older students. At the same time, staff described planters, cracked asphalt, hidden cracks under wood chips, reduced blacktop, and altered circulation as safety problems. One participant said beautification has taken away PE space and asked for **“designated space so students can safely move about.”** Participants also



emphasized shade and tree preservation, including concern for old-growth trees during construction. The facility implication is to design outdoor areas as a system: safe run zones, softer play areas, wall-ball or ball-play zones away from classrooms, age-specific spaces, shaded gathering, and controlled outdoor learning areas within the campus rather than near the street.

SAFETY, DIGNITY, AND COMFORT came through in everyday details. Kindergarten restrooms are shared with older students, and one teacher described a child still using the nurse restroom because he did not feel comfortable using the regular restroom. Staff restrooms in the auditorium were also named as not providing the experience staff deserve. Families raised front-entry safety, asking for a front gate that closes, visitor control through the front office, and no direct street access to classrooms. Participants also raised visibility concerns at the back of campus, where people can see children through the fence, and one parent connected poor phone reception to safety because she cannot reliably call in or out. These comments should not be treated as isolated fixes. They point to a need for age-appropriate restrooms, dignified staff facilities, secure entry sequencing, protected sightlines, reliable communications, and boundaries that keep students safe without making the school feel disconnected from its community.

Finally, participants described the importance of **SUPPORT SPACES** for conference, staff, parking, and engagement needs to daily functioning. The MTSS coach said “**we don’t have space**” for interventions, counseling, English Language Development (ELD), private meetings, and other supports happening at the same time; patios can work in good weather, but wind, rain, and cold make them unreliable. A teacher described parent conferences happening on a loud patio because after-school programs use her classroom, creating a dilemma for everyone. Staff also need places to decompress; the principal said the teacher lounge matters because staff need to leave the classroom, have lunch elsewhere, gather, and access sinks and nearby restrooms. Parents connected staff support directly to student outcomes, saying that when teachers have the resources and

environments they need, the **“ripple effect”** reaches children. Planning should also address parking for staff and families with physical limitations, the neighborhood fit of the design, and a clear communication structure. Participants suggested a message board or online hub because email gets lost, but families still want an easy way to see **“the latest and greatest.”**

Selected Insights

“Restoring the loss of culture and language that resulted from my father’s assimilation is important to me. It’s the wall-to-wall immersion. It’s all kids in the same program. We are **one Panda family.**”

“We came for the immersion and stayed for the **community**. Our family was displaced by the fires, and the parents welcomed us immediately. Their help created continuity for our child. It was a **lifesaver** for our whole family.”

“When we started, we looked at a lot of private schools. But no other place has this community vibe. We love how tight everyone is. We love the school’s approach to thinking and learning.”

“Inside the **bungalows**, it feels **incredibly cramped**. Students love their class and teacher, but when active children spend a good portion of the day in a confined space, it can feel **stifling** and create more pressure.”

“Kindergarten students share the restroom with older students, and sometimes they do not want to go because they think another kid is there. They need to feel **free and comfortable**, with more restrooms, especially for kindergarten.”

“I would love a **library** in the school... a space for silent reading, read-alouds, parents coming in, students checking out books, and **plenty of Spanish books**. A special library at school would increase their reading and their **love for reading.**”

“Students sometimes do not want to be outside the whole time. They need a **quiet place to sit and read**, with an adult able to supervise. Being surrounded by books in a space where you are supposed to be quiet is comforting.”

“My son will be running around outside, get **overheated**, and then want to go in his room and draw or read a book. Having that **refuge** when it is hot out would be awesome.”

“One of my concerns is school safety and the entrance of the school, making sure visitors are stopped at the **front office**. We have a closed campus, but a neighbor came on campus once without permission, and that has to be fixed.”

“A **front gate that closes**. Not being able to access the classrooms from the street.”

“I want to make sure we **preserve the soul** of this place, and that means minimizing disruption so we do not lose families.”

"The whole school was sitting out on the playground, and one tent covered maybe a third or a quarter of students. I almost passed out from heat exhaustion. We need the ability to have group things without fear of **overheating**."

"We do not have a library, so the book fair has to use the auditorium. The auditorium is also shared with the music teacher. There are voices, noise, chairs moving in and out, and it can be very stressful. Mr. Medina needs his own space."

"The kids all sit on the floor, it is **hot**, and then they start getting noisy. Because of the room, when they talk it gets loud really quick. It is a **distraction**."

"Having more space, and definitely a **comfortable space**, would help us host fewer separate assemblies and reduce the class coverage challenges."

"Bathrooms in the auditorium would truly help when we host assemblies, so parents and guests can use that restroom, and students could access bathrooms during recess and lunch without opening the building."

"What works in my classroom is **natural light** and open space for kids to go outside. With larger classes, students need indoor and outdoor space for differentiated teaching."

"Third grade is cramped in the bungalows, and they have no open space for themselves. Each grade should have some kind of **patio space**. My children benefit so much from that space; we plant, do science investigations, and use natural light."

"All this beautification has taken away our **PE space**... children walk fast, and they fall and fall and fall. With cracked asphalt and wood chips over the cracks, it is very dangerous. We need **designated space** so students can safely move about."

"We do not have space. There are private meetings, counseling, intervention, ELD, and many things happening at the same time. We only have so many hours, so **space is a premium** right now."

"I need to have a parent conference, but after-school programs use my classroom. Often it has to be on the patio, but it is loud and noisy. I have to think, **where can I go? Nowhere**."

"It is better to provide a patio or outdoor space that is **within the campus** and not facing the street. It feels more controlled."

"Shade is important... I am very concerned about damaging old-growth trees depending on how invasive construction and demolition is."

"Some classrooms have sinks and some do not, but for hands-on activities, I think it would be important for **all classrooms to have sinks**."

"The teacher lounge is important, a place for teachers to leave the classroom and **decompress**, not have lunch in the classroom, and have sinks and restrooms nearby."

"Phone reception is a security thing. I cannot call out or in because of the poor connection."

"My classroom library is a very big part of our program. Students choose books, sprawl out, read independently, collaborate, and feel like the classroom is **their space** and a **safe space**."

"A successful classroom needs students to be **outside**. It works better when there is outdoor space, even for reading groups, writing, quiet reading, or two students finishing work."

"If there is tension between what the district wants and what our teachers want, I will feel happy if our **teachers are happy with it**. They deal with our kids every day and know what is best."

"Remodeling does not matter if you do not have the **community**. You can remodel everything, but if you do not have the same staffing, the same community, that is what matters most."

"We want to see our teachers happy. They are at the front lines, giving our kids this amazing learning experience, and if we enhance what they need, we will see the **ripple effect** in education."

"I want it to still fit the **charm of the neighborhood**. The 100-year-old homes in the neighborhood match the 100-year-old school. I do not want it to look like a concrete modern building."

"If **our teachers are getting their needs met**, the resources and environments supporting them, that is most important because they directly impact our kids and help the school thrive."

"A message board would be great because you can check it on your own time and see when updates happen. Email is fine, but email gets lost; a board could show the **latest and greatest**."

