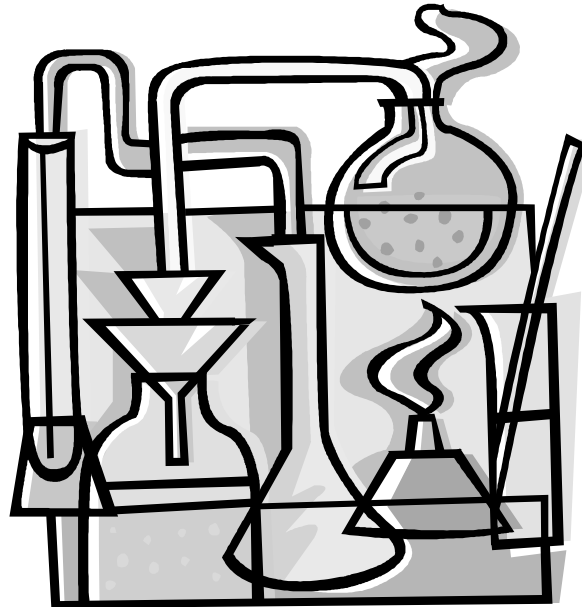


# **A+ Schools Fall Forum Series: “Pathways to Student Success”**



## **The Pittsburgh Science & Technology Secondary Learning Community**

A report on a community discussion hosted by  
A+ Schools: Pittsburgh's Community Alliance for  
Public Education



September 2007



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## **A+ Schools**

### **The Pittsburgh Science & Technology Secondary Learning Community: A Community Discussion Report**

Approximately 100 parents, teachers, administrators and community members gathered on Tuesday, September 18, 2007 to participate in an A+ Schools community discussion on the proposed Pittsburgh Science & Technology Secondary Learning Community. The goal of the meeting was to hear from the Pittsburgh Public Schools about the plans for this high school and to offer feedback on various components of the plan.

Chief of High School Reform, Derrick Lopez, and Science & Technology Secondary Learning Community Manager Sam Franklin presented an overview of the District's thinking to date about the High School and a 6-8 cohort. The small group discussions were an opportunity for community feedback. This report summarizes the presentation as well as the discoveries from 9 small group discussions.

#### **“The Pittsburgh Science & Technology Secondary Learning Community” Summary of Comments by Derrick Lopez, Chief of High School Reform and Sam Franklin, Project Manager Science & Technology Secondary Learning Community**

Mr. Lopez opened the presentation by providing a context in which the Science & Technology Secondary Learning Community is being planned. He discussed the District's “Excellence For All” reform plans and its emphasis on reducing stressful student transitions especially during the critical middle years. For this reason, PPS is now proposing that the Science & Technology Secondary Learning Community include a 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade cohort. Mr. Lopez indicated that PPS is exploring inclusion of 6-8 cohorts feeding into all future specialty high schools as part of its high school reform plans. The remaining presentation was given by Mr. Sam Franklin.

Beginning in the summer of 2006 Superintendent Mark Roosevelt convened a High School Reform Task Force consisting of teachers, parents, administrators and community leaders. Through school visits, discussions, and literatures review this Task Force identified the five pillars on which all reforms should be based. These core principles are the keys to success for all secondary schools. They are:

**Safe & Welcoming** – school is a physically and emotionally safe place that supports learning.

**Relationships** – personalized learning environment and connections to teachers, peers and the school

**Rigor** – high academic expectations for all students; engaging and demanding content and teaching

**Student Support** – special help to keep students on track

**Relevance** – prepare and connect students to the real world

The goal is not to create one high performing high school that does not benefit the larger system, or, worse makes the challenge greater for Pittsburgh's ten public high schools. Instead, the goal is to create a school that ultimately makes all PPS schools stronger. PPS seeks to create a school that tests innovations that can be scaled. We hope to create a school that is inclusive, and diverse that embodies these principles and demonstrates definitively as breakthrough high schools throughout the United States are currently demonstrating - that public high schools can be modernized.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals is currently identifying urban high schools that are doing just this. These schools are demonstrating that public schools can change the course of student's lives, can connect all students to postsecondary education or to relevant economic and professional opportunities. Innovation can happen within the system.

It is also part of the plan to provide more choices to Pittsburgh families, choices that will attract families back to the system who are currently opting out of the PPS schools and choices that will change the academic trajectories of all students, particularly low income students and students of color.

The student outcome goal is excellence for all. *"All students will access and succeed in advanced coursework appropriate to their skills and interests. They will leave Pittsburgh Public Schools connected to and prepared for a relevant postsecondary opportunity."* All decisions have been guided by this student outcome goal. Pittsburgh Science and Technology Secondary Learning Community seeks to redefine, or at least to modernize the role of the secondary school.

In an era in which the Workforce Readiness Project estimates that 85% of newly created US jobs will require education beyond high school, it is unacceptable for a school to graduate students who are not prepared to access and succeed in postsecondary education of some kind, whether it is community college, trade school or a four year institution, or to move directly into an economically sustainable job or internship opportunity. At the Pittsburgh Science and Technology school (PST) all students are required to complete four types of advance coursework before graduation. The school accepts responsibility for connecting each student to a specific postsecondary opportunity.

At the same time, PST seeks to be inclusive, serving a diverse group of students with no minimum academic standard for admission. We are seeking to connect all students to advanced coursework and a specific postsecondary opportunity. At the same time PST seeks to be an inclusive institution, accessible from all neighborhoods, serving a diverse group of motivated students who are interested in science and technology. In order to achieve the academic outcomes that we aspire to, without simply being an institution that only serves elite students who are already high performing, serious innovation is required. Innovative components of the Science & Technology School include:

- Unique, inquiry driven courses operating within a continuum that culminates in advanced coursework and is motivated by stages of cognitive development.

- Professional approach to teaching characterized by significant amounts of planning time, an eight hour workday, and a Professional Education Program.
- Four academic concentrations which are sequences of courses designed to move students to advanced coursework in relevant science and technology fields.
- Yearlong, semester length and mini courses increase scheduling adaptability.
- A middle grades cohort which supports the establishment of sustained positive relationships and facilitates 6-12 curricular alignment.
- A five level structure which replaces the traditional 6-12 system, allowing students to advance at an appropriate pace emphasizing academic readiness.

The integration of a 6-8 cohort into the Pittsburgh Science and Technology design is supported by a growing body of research and aligned with the moves that the district has already been making. Moves that reduce the number of disruptive transitions that students experience facilitate the establishment of sustained positive relationships with teachers and facilitate curricular alignment K-12. Three types of sources supporting this design include:

- Focus on the Wonder Years: challenges facing the American Middle School, RAND Education, 2004
- Rochester NY Annual Accountability Report – Rochester eliminated all 6-8 configurations moving to a district with K-6, 7-12 grade configurations and one 10-12 grade school.
- The University Park School in Worcester, Massachusetts

For Pittsburgh Public Schools a new consideration is integrating a 6-8 cohort by creating two primary entry points. The first point of entry would be at sixth grade and would include 45 to 50 students or half of the eventual graduating class. The second point of entry would be the ninth grade and include an additional 45-50 students or the other half of the eventual graduating class of 90-100 students.

A flexible system for promotion and retention allows students to finish secondary school in five to nine years and is based on three anchor years. These anchor years coincide with important academic and developmental transitions. Between the anchor years (Novice, Associate, and Executive) are two flexible levels that allow students to move through the curriculum in one, two or three years according to their academic needs. The levels are:

Novice (1 year) – Developing love for inquiry and exploration through interdisciplinary experiences; transitioning from concrete to abstract thinking.

Apprentice (1-3 years) – Shifting gradually to an emphasis on precision, knowledge and skills; looping with teachers to build strong relationships.

Associate (1 year) – Transitioning academically and developmentally into the upper grades; preparing for entry into an academic concentration.

Manager (1-3 years) – Preparing for advanced coursework according to individualized program; completing a focused sequence of courses in a specific field.

Executive (1year) – Applying knowledge and skills in the completion of advance coursework; preparing for and linking to a postsecondary opportunity.

At the Manager and Executive Levels students focus their studies with the selection of an academic concentration. Each of these concentrations allows students to develop expertise in a relevant field of science and/or technology through deep project based experiences. Each concentration is a focused sequence of courses that begins with an introductory course designed to generate excitement for the subject matter. The sequence then moves students through five quarter length rotations, additional quarter and semester length electives, and, finally, to one advanced concentration course that integrates the skills and theory of introductory and rotation coursework.

At the Executive Level students complete four types of advanced coursework. The interdisciplinary Capstone Course integrates the body of knowledge acquired through the entire curriculum. The Advanced Concentration Course is a concentration specific opportunity for the application of knowledge acquired within each concentration. The Executive Experience is a yearlong sequence consisting of two components – an independent student and a group-based Executive Project in partnership with a university, industry or community organization. Postsecondary Preparation II is a semester length opportunity for students to research, apply for, and connect to their postsecondary opportunity.

The school uses a five period block schedule and offers courses in three lengths: mini, semester, and yearlong. The third period is 99 minutes and is a flexible support, enrichment, and activity period depending on students' level in the school.

The current plans project that the school will grow to a capacity of approximately 530 students within six years.

Secondary schools must be realigned with the expectations of 21<sup>st</sup> century universities and employers. There is a clear disconnect between secondary education and economic expectations. The Workforce Readiness Project indicates that about 85% of new U.S. jobs created between 2000 and 2015 will require education beyond high school. Yet only 34% of high school graduates in 2002 were adequately prepared for college. Public high schools are not preparing most graduates for secondary education and students, parents, and families are being forced to make up the difference. Over \$17 billion each year is spent on remedial classes, or thousands of dollars in private school tuition.

We have to be willing to innovate, to think creatively, and to try something that is research driven but exciting and new. We believe that Pittsburgh Science and Technology Secondary Learning Community is an important step for Pittsburgh Public Schools and for the students and families of Pittsburgh.

After these remarks Mr. Lopez took questions from the audience about the proposed curriculum, the pacing schedule, and the 6-8 cohort.

### **Small Group Discussions**

Participants were organized into nine small discussion groups which were led by experienced volunteer facilitators. Each group was asked to consider at least three of the following questions:

1. What did you find most compelling about the presentation? We are specifically interested in reactions to the systems and innovations proposed.
2. What concerns or questions do you still hold?
3. Do the systems and innovations that you have heard about align with the District's dual goals of:
  - 1) Bringing more families back into the district;
  - 2) Increasing achievement for traditionally underperforming students (specifically low income students and students of color),And if so, how?
4. What local organizations and groups do you think may be logical partners for PPS as this work of reform begins (specifically in the area of science & technology)?
5. What might the outreach look like if PPS wants to seek out students across the city in public, private and parochial schools?
6. What are the advantages to integrating the sixth through eighth grade cohort into the school?
7. What are the challenges associated with doing so?
8. What are the keys to successfully integrating the sixth through eighth grade cohort into the high school?

Small group discussions lasted for an hour and then were concluded with a summary report back to the entire group. Flip chart notes were transcribed to capture all of participant discoveries. For detailed notes from each discussion group see the appendices.

### **Findings**

From the small group discussion summary reports as well as the detailed table discussion notes, we highlight some common themes from participant feedback on the Pittsburgh Science & Technology Secondary Learning Community presentation.

**Participants found the five level structure and individualized pacing the most compelling innovations** in the school's plan. The concentration on science and technology and the inquiry-driven curriculum were also compelling to many participants.

**Participants had the most questions and concerns about the admissions criteria and process** for the school. Participants were also expressed concern over the curricular continuity between this school and others (within and outside of PPS) for the youth that may transition in and out of the school. The third greatest area of concern was around the impact of the Science & Technology School on other PPS programs and schools. Equally of interest was the location of the school and how transportation would be handled.

**Participants indicated that the admissions criteria and process; the quality of teachers; and the focus on science & technology were all factors that would impact the schools' ability to meet the Districts goals** of attracting families into the District and increasing the achievement of traditionally underperforming students. There was skepticism about the current magnet admissions process and how equitably it serves students of color.

**When asked about the advantages of integrating the 6 to 8 cohort into the school participants had more questions than answers.** However the flexible pacing, focus on science & technology, and connections to post secondary opportunities were seen as advantages.

**The challenge associated with mixing students of differing ages was what participants reported most frequently.**

**Participants saw physical separation of the age cohorts as the key to successfully integrating the 6 to 8 cohort into the high school.** Good planning and reliance on community partners were also seen as important components.

Participants listed 54 different corporations, organizations, agencies and universities as logical partners for PPS in the design and delivery of the Science & Technology school.

In addition to traditional advertising methods, participants suggested a range of outreach activities including outreach through employers, corporations, churches, as well as relying on partnerships to recruit students to the school.

### **What's Next?**

Findings from this community meeting will be shared with PPS as they continue designing and developing the Science & Technology Secondary Learning Community. A+ Schools will work with PPS to organize future opportunities for community input as the plan is developed.

A+ Schools is an independent community advocate for improvement in public education. Our vision is a community mobilized to improve public education to produce successive generations of young people who thrive and who build their families and futures in Pittsburgh.

Our purpose is to be a community force advancing the highest educational achievement and character development for every public school student.

To find out more about A+ Schools and or tell us what you think, please visit us on the web at [www.aplusschools.org](http://www.aplusschools.org).

**A+ Schools and Pittsburgh Public Schools  
The Pittsburgh Science & Technology High School: A Community Discussion  
Discussion Questions**

**1. What did you find most compelling about the presentation?**

**We are specifically interested in reactions to the systems and innovations proposed**

**2. What concerns or questions do you still hold?**

**3. Do the systems and innovations that you have heard about align with the District's dual goals of:**

**1) Bringing more families back into the district;**

**2) Increasing achievement for traditionally underperforming students (specifically low income students and students of color),**

**And if so, how?**

**4. What local organizations and groups do you think may be logical partners for PPS as this work of reform begins (specifically in the area of science & technology)?**

**5. What might the outreach look like if PPS wants to seek out students across the city in public, private and parochial schools?**

**6. What are the advantages to integrating the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade cohort into the school?**

**7. What are the challenges associated with doing so?**

**8. What are the keys to successfully integrating the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade cohort into the high school?**

**Table 1 (Will Thompkins, Facilitator)**

Summary Report:

- Time frame to open, resources
- District goal alignment: racial balance and location
- Listed 20 local organizations that PPS should connect with

Question #1

- Length of time depending on your level of learning; provides opportunities for acceleration
- Flexible
- Project-based learning
- Who are the teachers?
- Opened education; process of moving students along
- Move along based on what you know
- Teachers looping; stay with students over time
- Built-in applied steps

Question #2

- How will they identify and pay staff to teach?
- Time frame to open; seems too soon to open next fall
- Is there a transition plan?
- Concern about the start-up next year; will your child give up their spot in another school?
- Such a different mind set for the teachers; will they be able to follow the new schedule?
- Will resources be there to assist the school in the long run?

Question #3

- Criteria for admission

- racially balanced
- location is important to draw families back

Question #4

Girls Math & Science Collaborative	Pgh Tissue Engineering Initiative	RiverQuest
National Society of Black Engineers	Natl Association of Manufacturing	Alcoa
Regional colleges	UPMC, All Health Systems	SeaGate
Catalyst Connections	Carnegie Science Center	Google
Pittsburgh Technology Council	The Technology Center	Microsoft
Natl Robotics Engineering Center	Society of Mechanical Engineering	Confluence
Natl. Energy Technology Laboratory	Society of Women Engineers	CMU

Question #5

- Not just a technical school; geared to higher learning
- International flavor; work with students in other countries
- YouTube & MySpace
- Real estate community should push this school
- Innovative advertising
- Education of parents coming to this school
- Get out to the university faculty/Health/Sciences
- Get out to the manufacturing community
- Employee based outreach

Question #6

- Need quality program in 6<sup>th</sup> grade to connect to the high school
- Not locking them into an age issue
- Middle and high school students may not mix well; influences
- Looping; depends on teacher (could be good or bad)
- Working with parents in elementary level; develop structure so their comfort level is O.K.

Question #7

- Treat middle grades as the age that they are
- Teachers need to differentiate the ages of the students they teach; the students are developmentally different
- Transition out plan; important as a back-up plan for parents who want to try it out but don't want their child stuck (there)
- What evaluation process will be in place?
- Educate older students on how to relate to younger ones
- Orienting children coming in to the school at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level (vs. 6<sup>th</sup> grade)

**Table 2 (Michele Cheyne, Facilitator)**

Summary Report:

- Concentration areas, diverse student population, gifted students
- Rigorous academics
- Admissions lottery

Question #1

- Very ambitious
- Concern over accepting non-gifted or highly performing students

- Concern over deadline for magnet lotteries
- Opportunity for students to re-apply after not getting in to school in 6<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade?
- If you enter school in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, do you lose out on opportunities?
- Middle school still taking yellow buses?; okay with yellow bus 6-12, not OK with PAT 6-12
- Stay for grades 6-12; permits moving quickly (or at a different rate) but in the same school
- Science is key to success; theme of Sci/Tech seems very important
- Teachers have contact w/students over multiple years: Teachers and students get to know one another; recognize strengths and weaknesses
- Innovative; trying new things based on research 6-12 model, aligned curriculum
- Strength of working with colleges and universities
- Starting with 6<sup>th</sup> graders catches them young; help to integrate thinking, skills and problem solving
- Develop interest early in Sci/tech

### Question #2

- Would there be integration of sports & extracurricular activities?
- What is the selection process?
- Where will this school be?
- Movement of students in and out?
- How does curriculum align with HS district and state standards?
- Concern that students may not receive enough credit for sports scholarships
- Top-down approach to concentrations; why no community input? Need more info!
- Why can't the Sci/Tech focus be integrated into all schools?
- What about band/music?
- Admissions; (what about) transfers?
- What is implementation phase-in?
- Concern is that families can only choose 1 magnet school. Will this school be part of the magnet process/lottery?
- Can students get in if at any other point other than 6<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup>? What if my child doesn't get in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade?
- Will my child be at a disadvantage if they enter in 9<sup>th</sup> grade?
- Will all students receive transportation on yellow buses? OK with 6<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> graders on same bus but now OK with 6<sup>th</sup> grader on public bus
- Discipline issues with broad spectrum populations can distract from learning

### Question #3

- 6-12 model
- Opportunities for promotion
- SciTech focus is key for economic vitality-this is overdue
- Teachers get to know and build rapport with students
- Very innovative-using best practices from other schools
- Opportunity to partner with universities and hospitals
- Develop interest in science early

### Idea of 6-12 Model

- Why are we focusing on middle school if we are doing HS reform?
- Possibility for integration-lots of connections 6-8 & 9-12
- Model less important than a rigorous curriculum

### Concerns/Questions

- Existing magnet lottery should be changed. Bar keeps getting lower-academically and behaviorally

-Options to opt out of school if school isn't a good fit

#### Question #6

HS reform vs. including the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>

### **Table 3 (Elizabeth Steiner, Facilitator)**

#### Summary Report:

- Location! Where is it going to be?
- Timeline-opening school at a rapid rate, not enough detail
- Admissions
- Applying-who? Which students? Criteria?

#### Question #2

- Where"
- How to pay for it...
- How do you get in?; criteria
- What about the other public schools?
- Logistics; where students are willing to go
- Timing
- Prevention strategies for low-achieving students
- Expectations-academic environment
- Teacher "care"; investment in students
- Building teacher/student relationships
- In current state plan too vague
- Benchmark dates-timeline
- Science/tech interest group

#### Question #5

- Outreach; what would appeal to students/families
- Bringing in outsiders; too much to ask of one school
- Narrow focus to closing the achievement gap
- Use insiders, already decided on personnel; problematic
- Need to look outside the system
- Closing the gap, strong academics and safe schools will bring people in

#### Question #6

- Sustains interest
- project based
- post-secondary opportunity

#### Question #7

- Does 6-12 matter? How is it different?
- gender interaction
- Uniforms?
- Racial comp?
- Dual enrollment
- Male/female comp?

**Table 4 (Karen Rafalko, Facilitator)**

Summary Report:

- Develop love of learning 1<sup>st</sup>!
- Timeline to implement is too soon
- Can anyone attend?
- Cost per student
- Attracting others into schools

Question #1

- fluid promotion based on readiness
- breaking the paradigm; 9-12 levels; feeder patterns
- develop the love of learning 1<sup>st</sup>!
- personalized education and timeline that's connected to a post-secondary plan
- math and science becomes a "circle of learning" for the teacher; more enriching experience, continuous learning for teacher

Question #2

- Excellence for all? Or just STHS? 530 (students)?
- What is the timeline to implement in the rest of the system?
- Sounds like an exclusive prep school
- Is this a magnet school?
- What are the criteria for acceptance? Can anyone attend?
- How much will the school cost? Per student?
- What do you do with non-motivated students?
- What is the tie-in to local post-sec. schools?
- What type of student are you trying to attract?

Question #3

- Sounds attractive to parents
- Not enough to attract parents who have moved to the suburbs
- May attract students away from private schools; no extra cost
- First step in making a drastic change in the current paradigm

Question #4

Urban League	Local Universities/Colleges	CCAC
Pittsburgh Technology Council	Major corporate R&D centers	Google
Wireless Neighborhoods	Local Unions (trades/crafts)	UPMC
PFT	Social Services	Foundations
Businesses	TRWIB	

Question #5

- Empowerment organizations
- B-PEP; Tim Stevens
- Recruitment team
- Ad campaign to all counselors; public/private
- Parent groups
- churches

### Question #6

- Authenticity and honesty from the school board, administrators and superintendent
- Give everyone an opportunity to attend, not just the smartest and brightest
- More public input that is utilized; not just behind-the-scenes brainstorming
- Switching to too many current fads in learning models
- Start telling the truth about science
- Be more inclusive, not just a few

### **Table 5 (Judith Hallinen, Facilitator)**

#### Summary Report:

- Concerns in 6-12 portion; if students leave what does that mean?
- Partnerships are important
- Many things that need to be done are already being done by many local organizations; use them!

### Question #1

- The curriculum piece – how to be creative and innovative to meet the needs of students who are struggling and those who are advanced at the same time. (This is compelling and a concern at the same time.)
- The 5 year level has been needed and is being implemented in a number of other cities. All students do not learn at the same pace.
- The mini course is seen as a great innovation, and can be used as a remedial course to let students catch up.
- It seems that this would be an exciting way to be involved in teaching because it is more than what is currently possible.
- Integrating critical thinking throughout the process is fabulous.
- The career development piece is crucial to the success of the program; however it cannot be so limiting that the students feel they can be successful in only one field. This must be a broad program, with an Internship Coordinator and experiences throughout the program to prepare the students for the world. Paid summer internships would be a big plus for students who must contribute financially to their family.

### Question #2

- (this note left by someone who could not stay for the presentation): This must be done in such a way that teachers and resources are not robbed from existing programs in other schools. Existing programs must remain strong. In the past, new programs have killed existing schools and programs.
- Will the students in grades 6-8 be in the same physical space as the students in 9-12. This could cause problems.
- Transportation is an issue – the underrepresented groups will remain underrepresented if they are not able to get to the school. Parents will have to ride them (depending on the location) and this will ensure that there is no diversity in the program.
- What happens if a child must leave the program partway through (because of a move or other reason.)
- What grade will they be in when they register at another school? This makes the 5 level model confusing because it has to fit into the larger world.
- This presentation was really about the 6-12 learning community model and there is still much concern about the research base for this plan. For every research report that says middle school doesn't work, there are examples and reports about middle school programs that do work.
- Specific to the PPS – do we have data that demonstrates failure of the current middle school system?

- Is it clear that this can only be implemented as a 6-12 program, or is there still debate on whether we are still talking about a Science and Technology HIGH SCHOOL?
- How will students at this school participate in sports and other “traditional” school activities? Make sure you don’t lose the arts also.

Question #3

- With the information given in the packet (none) about the specific program it is difficult to know if the program will draw people back to the district.
- It may take time; once people see that this works. The competition for spaces would be problem; if people are happy with another program and only 100 spaces are available each year for Science and Technology will they take a chance?
- For increasing achievement – it looks like it could work but it will be difficult. Some questions were raised about the number of students who repeat grades currently. Is there data about the number of students who take more than 7 years to move through 6-12 grades? How many people take 8 or 9 years currently? Including this data in a report about this meeting would be important (also data about the students who don’t complete the process at all).

Question #4

Carnegie Mellon Univ.	Local Universities/Colleges	Urban Youth Action
YouthWorks	YMCA	Pittsburgh Tissue Engineering
Life Sciences Greenhouse	Technology Council	PPG
UPMC	Bayer	Allegheny Conference
Google		

Question #5

- Focus on the concentration areas and make sure that students see things that they want to learn – so the PR reflects this. For example, if HEALTH is an organizer, make sure that Sports Medicine is a rotation. Forensics was offered as another ‘hot’ area for students.
- Key partnerships would help; if strong partners are involved it would get people to notice this program
- The technology focus would have to be explained – what does this mean? People may choose if you integrate computer science and robotics.

Question #6

- Get the students at a younger grade and focus them with an exciting program that makes them want to learn
- This is a very new way of learning that the students will have to adjust to. This could take some time. - Getting them sooner would ensure that they aren’t closed to the idea of a new school paradigm and they would adjust more quickly, and could take advantage of the opportunities.
- Concern about this is that many students in 5th grade won’t know that they would like to learn more about science and technology and they’ll be “forced” into the program by an adult who makes the choice for them; how will they do?
- The 6-12 model and the Science & Tech Learning Community are 2 different things to consider
- Will 6-8 students be ok in the same space with 9-12-will they be separate?
- How will 5<sup>th</sup> grade students know that they want to do science and tech?
- Paid summer internships; connect students to careers
- Multiple opportunities to learn about careers/focus learning during the experience
- Many partnership possibilities exist and need to be integrated
- How does this impact other traditions in the HS? Sports, clubs, music and the arts

- How will you keep the students safe?
- Critical thinking skills integrated all of the way through

### **Table 6 (Heather Harr, Facilitator)**

#### Summary Report:

- Role of teachers; potential and challenges, excitement, working with students; “success is addictive”
- Science is great, transfer to all schools; personalized learning

#### Question #1

- Students can move at their own pace
- Bringing partners in from industry; PPS hasn't done yet
- Compete in the world with sci/tech
- Everything based on sci/tech
- Everyone can succeed vs. failure
- Grade 6-12
- Use sci/tech as vehicle for preparation; critical higher-level skills

#### Question #2

- What impact to current HS?; Allderdice-engineering, Schenley, Peabody
- What happens to PSP, CAS?
- Where is the money coming from?
- Sports & extra-curricular activities; good idea during lunch
- Will it bother kids to stay 2 years after their friends left? Vs. they weren't prepared anyway
- How to select/recruit teachers? “Different than a predominant teaching culture”; giving the best effort every day, success the only option
- “Success is the most addictive thing in life”
- Teachers will need mentoring, relationship skills w/ families, community, not just content success

#### Question #3

- Will classes be smaller? Do kids learn better?
- Technology-teachers won't have the technology skills
- Lag; how do we make that up?
- Asked teachers how many of them use a PDA, half did
- No existing technology in schools
- Strictly academic, room for the not 4 year institution, 2 year tech; Kid wanted to be a plumber at Allderdice but did not get support
- Will there be learning outside the classroom?
- Field trips to jobs
- Not included in presentation: 1) How will parents be involved?; 2) what about the other schools like building trades?; 3) Small #s-will it hold all the students?
- Do research to find out how many students are interested in this!
- Potential if they can move at their own pace
- Teachers may have more faith in students; more personal involvement and commitment w/students
- Teachers have more background in subject
- Is the promise correct?
- Will these students be more apt to stay in school due to interest focus?
- It really depends on the teachers and personal relationships

- Student-“Not that many kids interested in science...our teacher is not excited about his subject. We need teachers who are excited”
- Ultimately all schools need to do this.
- Research shows we need skills in this setting

Question #4

Google	Bayer	Any tech business
CMU	Bill Gates	Duquesne Light
Comcast	Verizon	Community-based partners

- Need community-based partners to juggle balls; need partners who can develop partnerships; can't just depend on busy teachers

Question #5

- Outreach to attract students from various types of schools
- “Show the benefit to children, community, businesses...”
- “It's not just our kids, it's our city...it's our nation”
- “How do we retain these students in Pittsburgh?”
- Jobs w/local companies; job offers before they graduate (e.g. kids go through Peabody)
- Local colleges should recruit from this program
- Get UPMC involved
- Pgh Promise, local companies
- PNC “Grow Up Great”

Question #6

- Need isolation physically
- 6<sup>th</sup> graders “will get run over”
- How will it be broken up in 7<sup>th</sup> grade levels?
- Need to cultivate kids who want to go into current K-8
- Need the skills
- “I thought we wanted K-8: what about continuity? What does it do to the other kids?”

**Table 7 (Bonita Allen, Facilitator)**

Summary Report:

- Reaching out to parents and children; having teachers talk to parents
- Hire a paid outreach coordinator

Question #1

- Advancing based on academic readiness
- relevant and viable post-secondary opportunities for all students
- Focus on technology

Question #2

- 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders as ‘guinea pigs’ for new curriculum programs
- Sci/Tech=math; no math standard, pre-reqs? No admissions process?
- Will pull teachers/talent from other schools; will drain some aspects of other schools
- Will pull students as well (if shifting existing students vs. pulling in or attracting new students)

- Union rules may need to be modified to consider external candidates
- Re: acceleration-is there a cap?

Question #3

- Yes, flexibility in rate of progress through school (with support and encouragement as necessary)
- Attracts families/students back to the district
- More information and second year/watching more may return to the district
- Location will be interesting to impact (more market to capture in certain parts of the city; transportation also factors in; this is a big deal!!)
- If no entry requirements-some kids will get too deep/over their heads and leave
- Thematic learning is good

Question #4

Universities	Technology Council	Bidwell
Manchester Craftsmen's Guild	Urban League	NAACP
U.S. Steel	Westinghouse	Assett
RAND		

- Important to have a commitment to follow through
- Foundations-particularly education interest; economic development and capacity building

Question #5

- Billboards
- Newspaper ads
- Internet ads
- Idea like Schenley Teacher Center to hold teachers
- Community Forums-well publicized
- City Council
- Ask for help to advertise (i.e. City)
- Consider innovative ways to inform/engage low SES families
- Work with guidance counselors
- Mailings
- Faith-based organizations
- Open House-teacher and/or students speak or refer to others
- \*This is a fundamental choice; may need a hired/paid outreach person
- Give people options at a very early age

Question #6

- Concerns over age-range issues
- What would be the indication that a 6<sup>th</sup> grader has an "interest"?
- Social stratification-with mixed levels-growth and developmental difference, concerns

Question #7

- Separate in age by building as an option
- Thoughtful planning
- The Boy Scouts mix levels and it works!

Question #8

- Optional configurations: K-5, 6-12, K-8/9-12

- Eliminating transition
- Mixed sentiment on 6-12
- Needs to be well planned out
- Access and exit possibility at 9<sup>th</sup> grade; helps with this
- Stigma if remaining with younger peers

#### Other questions

- How will CAS/IEP-Gifted look?
- CAS/Gifted may not choose this as “will get better education in CAS”
- Possibly consider admissions criteria (at least 50% non-open admissions)

### **Table 8 (Jordan Pallitto, Facilitator)**

#### Summary Report:

- What happens to accelerated students who are done? Can they stay?
- Thanks for thinking “outside the box”

#### Question #1

- “Out of box”
- Objective, fresh
- Education levels, no grades
- Plan is comprehensive
- Replicability, elasticity
- Idea of choice
- Inquiry-driven

#### Question #2

- Fall '08 is too soon!
- What about PA mandates—PSSA, NCLB, etc.
- Teacher/staff recruitment
- Physical location???
- Admissions criteria???
- Transfer in/out?
- Will there be continuity in core curriculum
- What happens to students who lose interest in sci/tech?
- What about advanced students who don't want to leave after 3 years? How will extended stays affect graduation rates?
- Location must be fair; central, access for all, close to universities
- Where is the “magic” curriculum?

#### Question #5

- All students and parents will want to attend
- Teacher referrals?
- More info: curriculum, schedule, staff
- Need to recruit girls; tough to get into sci/tech

#### Question #6

- Flexibility allows students to advance at individual paces
- Small school population means one grade won't be too big

### Question #7

- Young students scared of older students
- A 20 y.o. with a 12 y.o.???
- 5<sup>th</sup> grade is too young to commit to a concentration

### **Table 9 (April Clisura, Facilitator)**

#### Summary Report:

- Defined curriculum
- Involve business community
- History of magnet program; program itself “won’t do”
- 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades; parents will be more protective, travel
- Keeping children separate; Reizenstein School is a great location
- Older students embrace younger; mentors
- Safe & welcome strategy-diversity; parents want to send their children, less territorial

### Question #1

It seems to be a break from tradition – youth will be moved from grade to grade based on individual progress. There is no pressure to move. Sounds a bit like the “alternative school” model. Maybe the time for a science and technology high school has come – it’s a big chunk of new jobs. The concept of the Executive Level will make school more authentic for youth and act as a good gateway into the workforce.

### Question #2

- How will this magnet school succeed in being diverse and inclusive where other magnet schools in the district have failed, such as Schenley.
- With students able to stay in a grade for up to 3 or 4 years, will there be any upper age limit for staying in school? Will it be different from the other schools in the district?
- Are grades 6-8 and 9-12 going to be in the same building or even in the same class as they progress? The younger students may be able to compete academically, but not socially.
- It seems there is still much curriculum work to do in the next year. The 4 areas of mastery are not clearly defined.
- How will children in the lower grades, such as 4th and 5th be prepped to take advantage of this opportunity?
- With many students in the district being transient, how will students leaving for a “traditional” school in the district or another district be able to fit in with the typical 9-12 grades?
- With the focus on rigorous academics, how will students who do not have proper behavior be dealt with? What is the threshold for being removed from this school – more or less strict than others in the district?
- How will transportation be made amenable to the younger students, such as 6-8th grade, where parents may be cautious about letting their children travel across the city?
- How will this unusual school be integrated with No Child Left Behind policies, especially where requirements for moving from grade to grade are concerned?
- The Executive stage of education will depend on the good will of businesses to accept working with students. What preparation is being done to pave the way for the businesses?
- Will school start times be unified for younger and older students? They’re not currently throughout the district.
- Will the school result in more “creaming the crop”?

-Will students with mental and physical challenges be incorporated successfully?

Question #3

-Increasing achievement for traditionally underperforming students (specifically low income and students of color)...

[This question elicited the most frustration from my group of African-American parents and educators. What I took away from my group is that there is a perception in the community of unfairness and some racism on the part of how the schools currently operate, particularly with regard to how students are assigned to schools and special programs. Wow, there is a big bridge of trust here that needs to be built/repaired!]

-This question is mainly an issue of whether or not black students will even get into the school in the first place in significant enough numbers to make a difference.

-If we base our answer on the history of the magnet program in Pittsburgh, the prognosis for the school attracting black students is not good: preferential treatment “because of who they know” for white students in the lottery system that traditionally accompanies the magnet school waiting lists, the fact that white students are overrepresented in current “honors” classes and programs. White students are funneled into these programs to separate them from black students, and only the black students with the very highest grades get into the best opportunities. The current magnet system is used to shift white and black students to different schools with the effect of increasing segregation, instead of mitigating it.

-Not only recruiting but retaining and supporting black students or low income students are crucial to meeting this goal.

-The fact that there will be no specific grade point average necessary to get in this new school might be helpful in getting traditionally underperforming students into the school, but relaxing traditional screening methods is also a double-edged sword. Criteria that are very objective and cut-and-dry are less subjective and open to preferential treatment. How will the school’s admissions policy strike a balance between objective standards and inclusion?

Bringing more families back into the district...

-Don’t worry about this goal so much until the goal of student achievement is met

-This one school will not have a very great impact at all on this goal

Question #4

YouthWorks	YouthPlaces	Urban Youth Action
Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board	Local universities, colleges and technical schools	Pittsburgh Technology Center campus
Unicentric	Alcosan, PWSA and other utilities	Heinz
Engineering firms	Google	Other regional and national companies

Question #5

-Eliminate preferential treatment in admissions process. Build trust and confidence with parents that the process is fair and unbiased.

-Eliminate race gap in who gets first information about the school and its admissions process and the waiting list/lottery system.

-A demographic quota system in admissions might not be a bad thing. And if there are at first not enough black students to fill their share of the quota, keep those seats open until there are – don’t give them away to white students.

-Provide safe transportation to younger students (if 6-8 are involved) and convince parents it will be safe.

-Do more on the “safe and welcoming” initiative. Parents need to be assured their child will not only be safe, but also not feel like an outsider. Children have to want to go to the school.

#### Question #6

-No advantages for the older students

-Advantage to the younger students would be getting exposed to a rigorous curriculum early

#### Question #7

-Risk of bad influence from older students on younger ones

-Difficulty of working with students who come into the school early versus in the later grades. Some will already be acclimated to the new system and some will not.

-Students who start in this school young may naturally change their interests over time and want to transfer out. This becomes harder to do with each passing year, because the school is so different than other schools.

#### Question #8

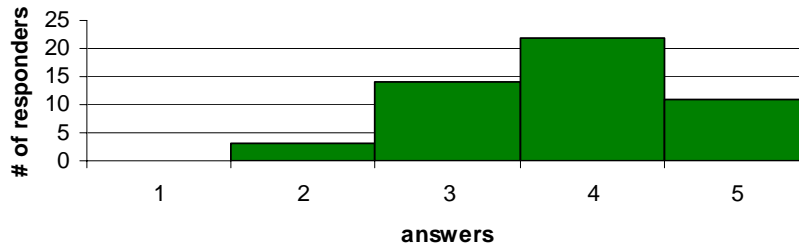
-Physical separation of the students is absolutely necessary. Existing building with “houses” at Reizenstein may be helpful.

-Some physical separation combined with a strategy and culture that encourages the older students to take responsibility for making the younger students feel safe and welcome – a mentor system. This might also help with recruitment and retention.

**A+ Schools**  
**The Pittsburgh Science & Technology Secondary Learning Community:**  
**A Community Discussion**  
**September 18, 2007**

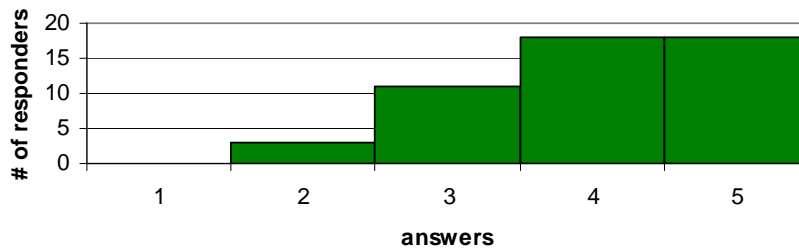
**Event Evaluations**

**Question 1: How satisfied are you with the information presented tonight?**



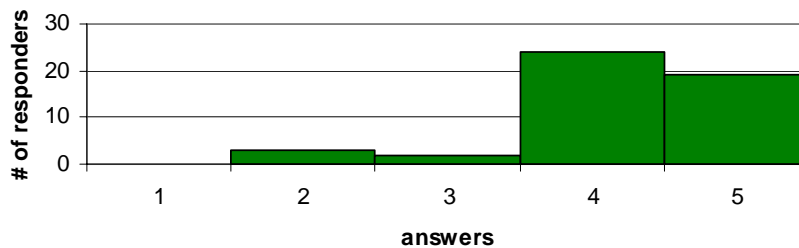
\*1 out of 51 responders did not answer this question\*

**Question 2: How valuable did you find the "Science & Technology High School" presentation?**



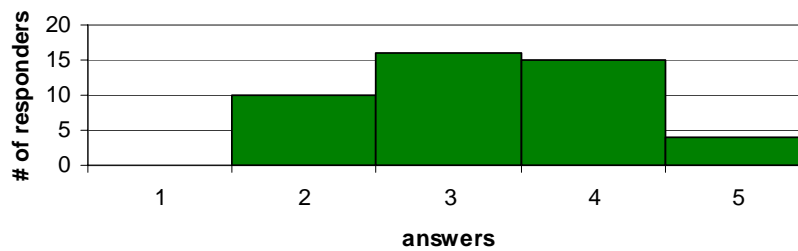
\*1 out of 51 responders did not answer this question

**Question 3: How valuable did you facilitated break out groups?**



\*3 out of 51 responders did not answer this question

**Question 4: How valuable did you find the information in your packet?**



\*6 out of 84 responders did not answer this question

**5. What did you find to be most valuable about tonight's program?**

- “How much momentum it has”
- “The desire to break from tradition of age matriculation”
- “Nice to hear many frank opinions voiced in relatively efficient manner”
- “Compelling, exciting, inspiring; opportunity for community feedback”
- “Sam Franklin's speech”

**6. What would you change?**

- “Include the PowerPoint presentation in the takeout information packet”
- “More detailed information disseminated in advance of the event would prompt more pertinent and pointed questions”
- “Better publicity so parents of children who will be in middle school next year know that this school is aimed at 6-12 not just 9-12”
- “More information and details would have been useful. However, if the purpose was to elicit input from parents, teachers and community before putting more flesh on the concept of the Science & Technology Magnet School then the lack of detail was understandable.”
- “More detail of plan for parents to use to determine if students should enroll in this school”

**7. How did you find out about this meeting?**

- “A+ (Schools) Mailing and email”
- “Pittsburgh Public Schools STEM Steering Committee”
- “Pittsburgh Board of Education-internet and school email”
- “Today's Post-Gazette 9-18-07”
- “Email (from a colleague, friend, family member)”