



School Works Meeting Report: *Keeping Kids in School*

from the meetings on March 8th & 10th, 2011



Upcoming Meetings:

Courses and College/Career Prep (2 locations)

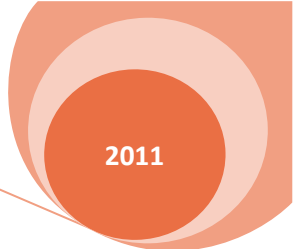
Tues., March 29th - 5:30pm-8pm: Oliver HS library

Thurs., March 31st - 5:30pm-8pm: Carrick HS library

Cosponsors:

Black Political Empowerment Project
Communities in Schools
Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers
Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network
Pittsburgh Promise
Pittsburgh Urban Magnet Project
Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh





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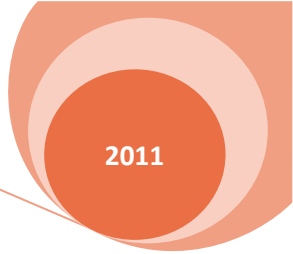
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Background on School Works

School Works is community action research aimed to assist the public in understanding what resources and opportunities exist for students in Pittsburgh Public Schools. The goal is to develop a plan for community action to ensure we have an equitable school system in Pittsburgh. The initial phase of A+ Schools' School Works program was to train volunteers to conduct interviews with each principal from Pittsburgh Public middle, high, 6-12 and charter high schools. Based on last year's responses and the community's priorities, this year we interviewed the same schools again and expanded the project to include interviews with counselors in addition to principals.

Volunteers interviewed 20 principals and 18 counselors from PPS schools and the principal and counselor in 2 charter schools. School staff responded to 64 yes/no or short answer questions asked by volunteers, and A+ Schools staff compiled and analyzed the results with assistance from a consultant. The question topics covered the following categories: teaching, behavior management, drop-out prevention, student courses and college/career preparation. Principals' and counselors' responses will be report publicly in increments during the months of February and March. The schools and volunteers are described below.

Pittsburgh Public Schools Interviewed:

School Level

- Grades 9-12: 8
 - Graduation Rate Categories
 - < 69.8%: 3
 - 70-84.9%: 2
 - > 85%: 1
- Grades 6-12: 5
- Grades 6-8: 7

Magnet School

- Full magnet schools: 7
- Non-magnet schools: 13

Public Charter Schools

- 2 Charter High Schools – however, they were not group with Pittsburgh Public Schools for any of the comparisons

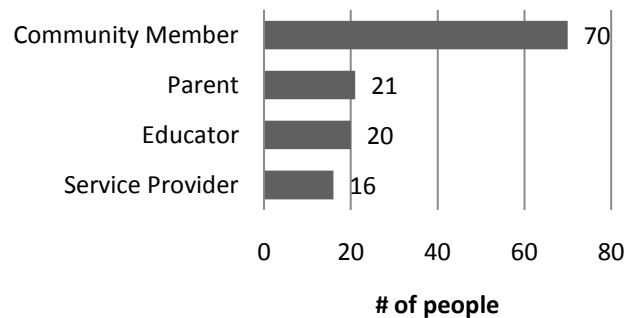
Volunteer Fast Facts:

- 138 were trained
- 42 interviews were conducted by a team of 3 or 4
- 113 volunteered

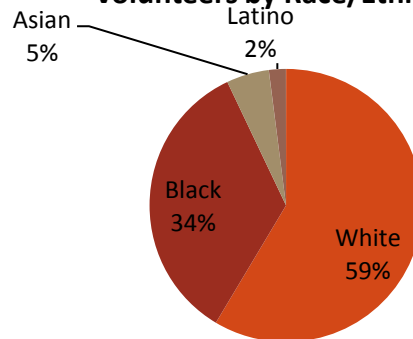
Volunteer Demographics

How do volunteers identify?

(some fall into more than one category)



Volunteers by Race/Ethnicity



School Works 2009-10

Last year, A+ Schools held its third School Works community discussion with 80+ participants in order to present key findings related to the supports students receive in schools and from central office. Parents, educators, students and concerned citizens agreed that students would benefit most from central office and schools making greater efforts toward creating positive learning environments and engaging students at risk of dropping out. Based on the interview findings and the series of discussions and polls with the community, A+ Schools articulated the following community priorities for reaching equity and excellence at scale based on our 2009-10 School Works action research process:

Equity and excellence at scale requires, at minimum, that for each student every school equitably provides:

- **Access to rigorous courses** designed to prepare students for college and careers that are rigorous in terms of their content and process for engaging students in their own learning;
- **Positive teaching and learning environments** where behavioral expectations are high, clear, and positively, objectively and consistently reinforced; and
- **A system for keeping students in school** that tracks and monitors each child's progress (behavior, attendance, credits) and deploys appropriate interventions so that every child remains engaged in learning and building their future through education.

School Works 2010-11 Findings

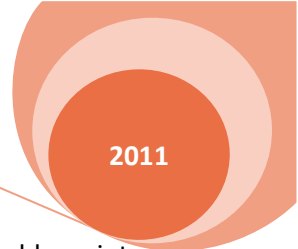
In the 2010-2011 School Works interviews, the questions asked by volunteers regarding positive learning environments and keeping vulnerable students engaged were designed to draw out how schools were doing this and what, if any, progress has been made. Below are School Works responses from principals and counselors that relate to learning environments and systems of engaging students. Responses related to access to courses and career/college readiness will be addressed at the end of March.

Areas of Concern This Year:

Establishing Positive Teaching and Learning Environments: Having a school-wide behavior management plan is a best practice identified by the US Department of Education in establishing a positive teaching and learning environment. We found this year that it is linked to lower suspensions in a school and, according to principals, teachers who are more effective at managing student behavior. Schools that reported having effective behavior management plans also reported that staff members regularly model the same behaviors expected of students. Those same schools also reported that they explicitly teach students the school's expectations and how to replace inappropriate behaviors with appropriate ones. However, almost half of the schools interviewed reported again that they did not have a school-wide system to address student behavior. It also was not clear that the objective of the schools' strategies was to proactively teach students appropriate behaviors, rather than following through with a process.

Intervening with Specific Students: Principals and counselors who were interviewed reported that drop out indicators were monitored at their school. They also agreed that the most effective strategies their schools use to change the trajectory of students are individual meetings with students and communicating frequently with parents and families. Yet, a little over half of the schools reported they had an intervention system to re-engage students.

Having the Capacity for Consistent Interventions: The majority of principals and counselors reported that administrators held the most responsibility for connecting students with behavioral supports. Half of high school principals reported that more than 10% of the school's students had been referred to the office during the month of September. Principals and counselors were also in agreement that the person responsible for monitoring student data, contacting parents and coordinating interventions with students at risk of dropping out are social workers or counselors who often have caseloads of close to 325 students.



What the Research Says about Positive Teaching and Learning Environments:

The US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs published an implementation blueprint for best practices in Positive Behavior Intervention Support systems. In general, the blueprint describes the following strategies in schools that best support students: 1. Proactively addressing student behavior by involving the whole staff in carrying out practices that contribute to positive student behavior, 2. Establishing a school-wide focus on teaching all students socially acceptable behaviors and providing positive reinforcement, 3. Regularly monitoring specific data and using it to determine when to intervene with high risk students to provide effective supports, and 4. Providing supports that staff would be able to provide consistently. The progress we see in this year’s School Works data will be compared to these best-practices in order to understand more clearly how we can improve systems to better support students.

What Progress Have We Seen in the Results of School Works 2011?

1. Proactively addressing student behavior

- When asked about the objectives of their school’s behavior management plan, most principals (19/20) reported objectives related to processes such as being consistent, using documentation/data, using in-school suspensions or Saturday detention. 16/20 principals reported objectives related to students such as increasing attendance, engagement, teaching alternative behaviors, developing ability to handle themselves outside of school, increasing accountability and academic performance and 6/20 reported objectives related to the environment of the school

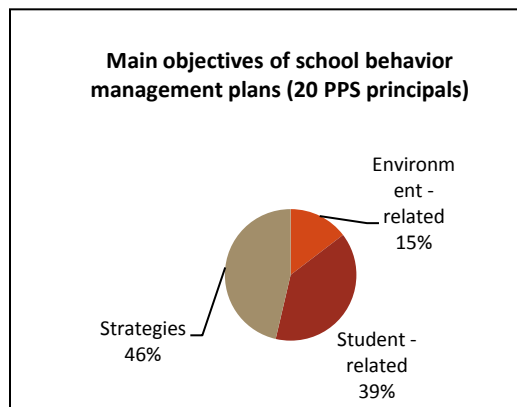


Figure 1

such as building relationships, establishing an environment conducive to learning or increasing family involvement. (Figure 1) One charter school principal cited objectives related to processes (high expectations, consistency, making discipline a learning experience). Another cited a student-based objective of making sure they get back to class settled.

- In terms of discipline, principals from 10/20 schools reported that 10% or more of their students had been referred to the office in the month of September and 2/20 reported that 10% or more of their school had been suspended by the date of the interview. One charter school reported that 9% of students had been referred (one school did not respond to the question).

- The 3 main behaviors subject to a zero tolerance policy in schools, meaning that students are suspended on the first offense, were fighting, profanity towards staff and assault. (Figure 2) Similar behaviors were reported being subject to zero tolerance policies in charter schools.

- Schools with the highest suspension rates were more likely to have a zero-tolerance policy related to classroom disruptions.

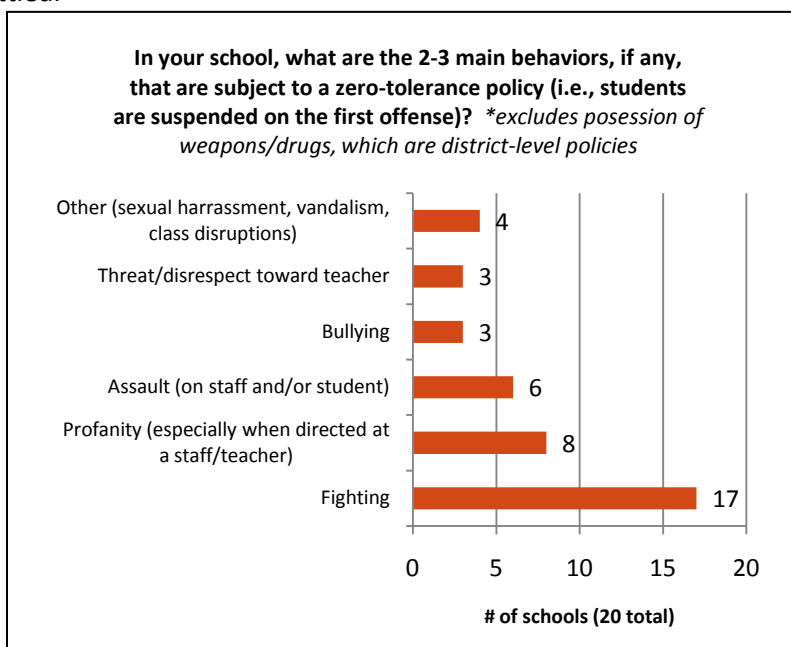
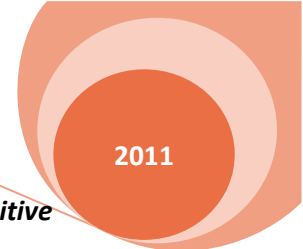


Figure 2



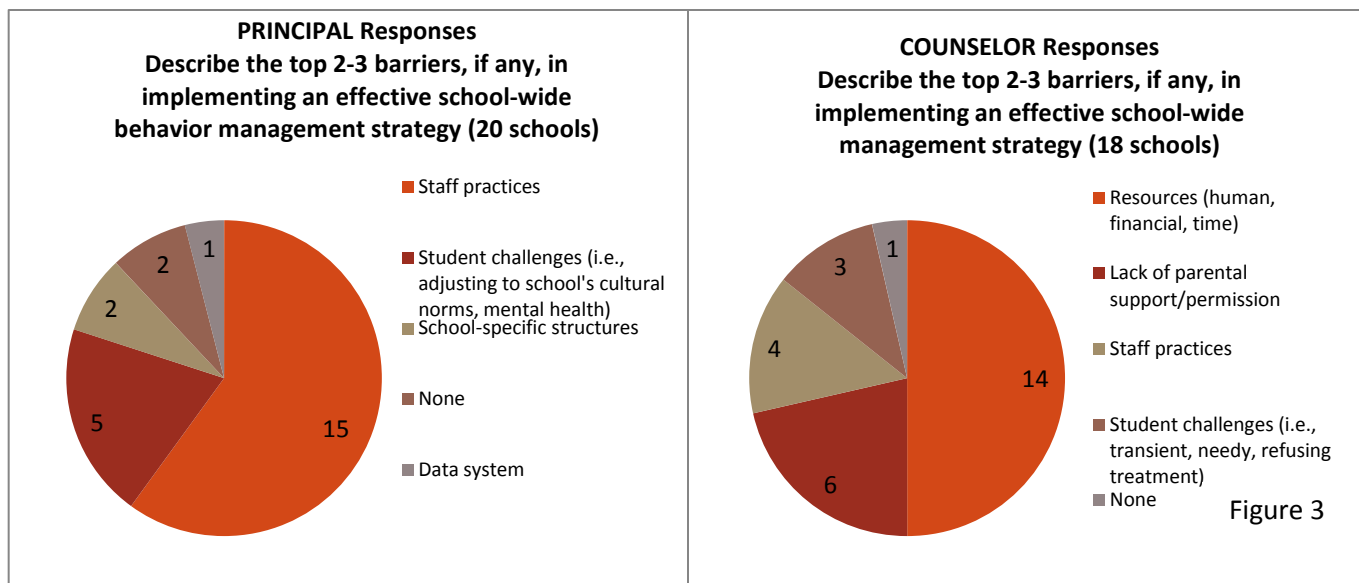
2. *Establishing a school-wide focus on teaching students acceptable behavior and providing positive reinforcement*

- Based on principal responses, 12 schools (60%) out of 20 currently use a school-wide behavior management plan. This percentage is close to last year’s responses to the same question, in which 14 principals (67%) out of 21 said their school used a school-wide plan. The responses from counselors did not completely align with the responses from principals- the biggest difference was in 9-12 schools where a little over half of the principals and counselors gave the same answer.
- PPS schools that reported having a school wide behavior management plan were more likely to also report lower suspension rates and teachers being more effective at managing student behavior.
- In schools where principals and counselors were likely to report reported having effective or highly effective behavior management strategies, and they were also more likely to report that the plan 1) was implemented school wide 2) was effectively teaching students the schools expectations regarding behavior 3) was effectively teaching students how to replace inappropriate behaviors with appropriate behaviors and 4) included staff frequently modeling behavioral expectations. The same pattern held true for charter schools: the school reporting a highly effective behavior management strategy also reported high levels of effectiveness in the 3 actions described above.

What Did Principals and Counselors Cite as The Barriers to Implementing an Effective School Wide Behavior Management Strategy?

- 75% of principals (15 of 20 schools) cited staff practices as barriers in implementing an effective school-wide behavior management strategy. These include consistency, teacher practices, giving discipline vs. punishment, being mindful of students’ backgrounds, & building positive relationships with students. (Figure 3)
- 72% of counselors (13 of 18 schools) cited resources as barriers, including human resources (staff turnover, large influx of students, lack of staff) and a lack of money and/or time. 33% (6 schools) cited lack of parent support as a barrier, which was not mentioned by any principals. (Figure 3)
- Principals and counselors at charter schools cited similar barriers in implementing an effective school-wide behavior management system.

3. *Monitoring specific data to know when to intervene with students at risk of dropping out to provide effective supports.*



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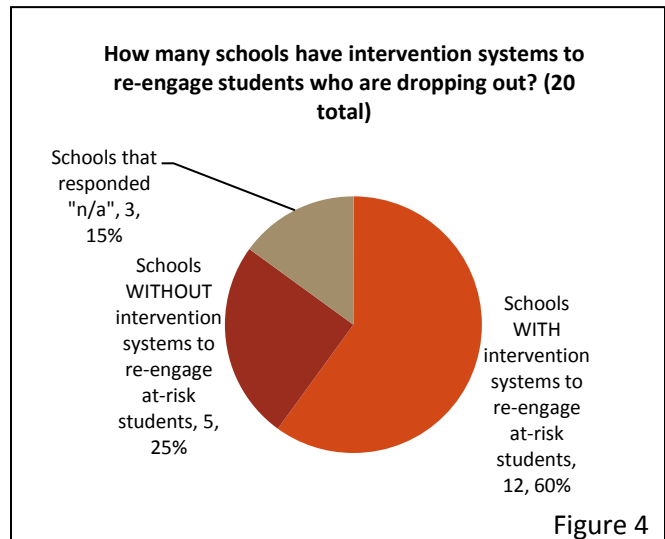
- Research on Pittsburgh Public School students done by the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board tells us that the 4 main indicators of a student being at risk of dropping out are 1. Attendance, 2. Behavior, 3. Course Failures and 4. Age. All principals and counselors reported that their schools monitored drop out indicators such as: 1) being at risk of course failure due to excessive absences before he/she actually fails, 2) being at risk of dropping out for lack of daily school attendance before he/she actually drops out and/or 3) being at risk of not being on track to graduate because of the number/type of credits they have earned before their senior year.

- 19 principals and counselors reported that their schools have a system of pre-identifying students at risk of dropping out to proactively monitor their progress, compared with 2009, when only 57% of principals said they had a system of pre-identifying students at risk of dropping out in order to coordinate an intervention. This year and last year, both charter schools reported their school having a system of pre-identifying students at risk of dropping out.

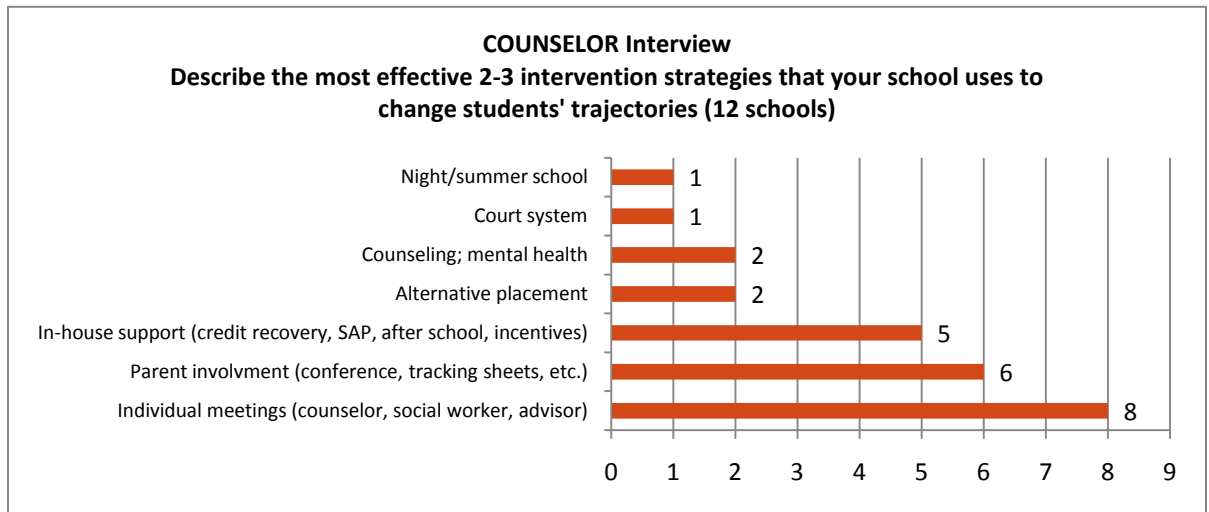
- While 19 schools have a system of pre-identifying students, only 12 schools have an intervention system to actually re-engage students who are dropping out. (Figure 4) Both charter school principals said they have an intervention system to re-engage at-risk students.

- 6-12 schools are most likely to have a drop-out intervention system, and 9-12 schools are least likely, where only 50% have a strategy for re-engaging students at risk of dropping out.

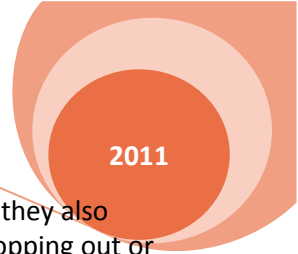
- According to principals and counselors, the top 2 most effective strategies that schools use to change the trajectory of students are 1) Individualized student attention, 2) Contacting and involving parents and



families. The 3rd most effective strategy according to principals is referring students to alternative education programs, and according to counselors it's providing supplemental



programs in school such as Student Assistance Program (SAP), credit recovery, or after school programming. (Figure 5). In charter schools, counselors cited referrals to other agencies and family engagement as the most effective strategies. Principals cited individualized attention regarding options, support from multiple staff (admin, social worker, and advisor), and Saturday school as effective strategies.



- In schools where the principals reported having an effective drop out intervention strategy, they also reported that families are contacted more frequently when students are at risk of course failure, dropping out or not being on track to graduate. Both charter schools reported high levels of effectiveness for contacting families, but counselors gave lower ratings than principals for the overall effectiveness of their school’s intervention strategies.

4. A system to support implementing intervention practices consistently

- The majority of principals and counselors reported that the counselor and/or social worker were responsible for monitoring students who display drop out indicators. In charter schools, principals reported more frequently than counselors that they were at least in part responsible for monitoring the above actions. Overall, the responses varied and included social workers, student services, teachers, education managers, curriculum directors, and administration.

- Out of 18 schools where we interviewed a counselor, 13 of them reported having only 1 person that fills the role of a counselor or social worker. His/her title was intervention specialist, social worker, developmental advisor, academic counselor, guidance counselor, school counselor, or director of student services. The average caseload for this staff person was 340 students, ranging from 125 to 560. The charter schools had 4-5 counselors each with average caseloads of 80 and 15 students.

- When asked what top 2-3 tasks took up the majority of their time in the day, 10/17 counselors/social workers said working directly with students, 7/17 reported monitoring student attendance or truancy, 6/17 reported test coordination and 5/17 said crisis management. (Figure 6) Charter school counselors cited post-high school planning, application processing, field trips, one-on-one counseling, crisis intervention, and leadership intervention.

- On average, counselors/social workers reported spending 53% of their time with students and 39% of their day on administrative tasks. Both charter school counselors reported spending 70% of their time with students and 30% of their time doing administrative tasks.

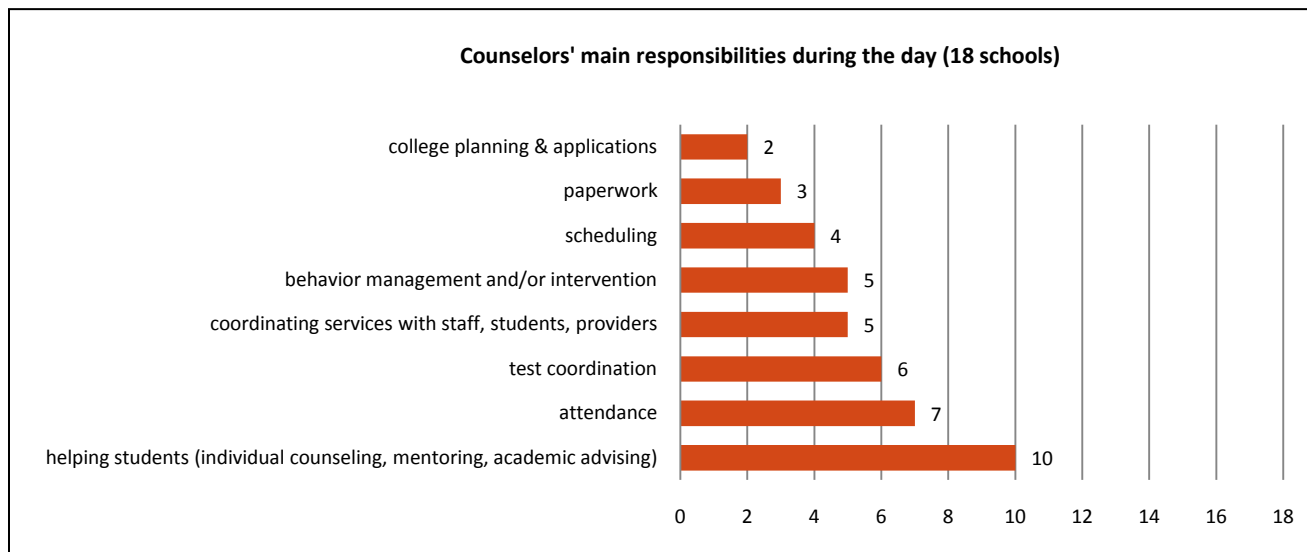


Figure 6

- When asked what top 2-3 tasks they are required to fulfill that they feel are not relevant to their role in supporting students to succeed: 9 of 17 counselors stated test coordination, 7 of 17 said clerical work & paperwork, and 5 of 17 said lunch duty. Both charter school counselors said nothing.

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- Counselors with bigger caseloads were more likely to report spending more time doing administrative tasks than their peers with smaller caseloads. Despite caseload, the counselors at charter schools reported spending the same amount of time doing administrative tasks (30%).

What Did Principals & Counselors Cite as Barriers to Implementing an Effective Drop Out Prevention Strategy?

- Both principals and counselors reported that the main barrier to implementing an effective drop out strategy was the lack of student engagement, and the 2nd and 3rd highest were staff capacity and parental support. (Figure 7) Some middle school principals said that students do not drop out in middle school. Charter school principals and counselors also cited student engagement & personal/psychological problems as barriers; one charter school counselor did not know what barriers exist at his/her school.

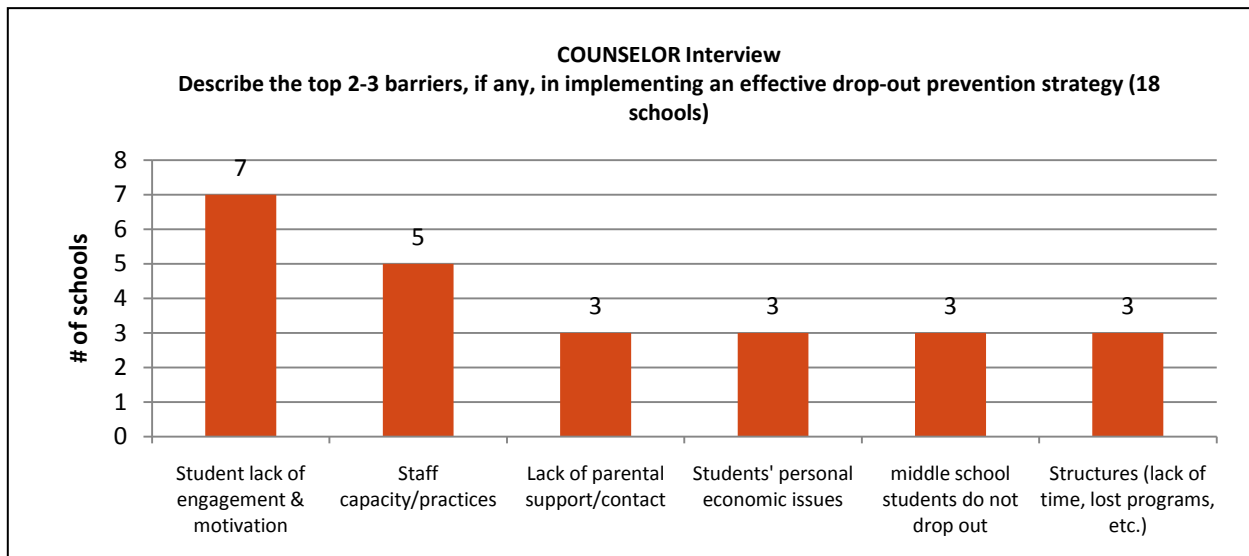
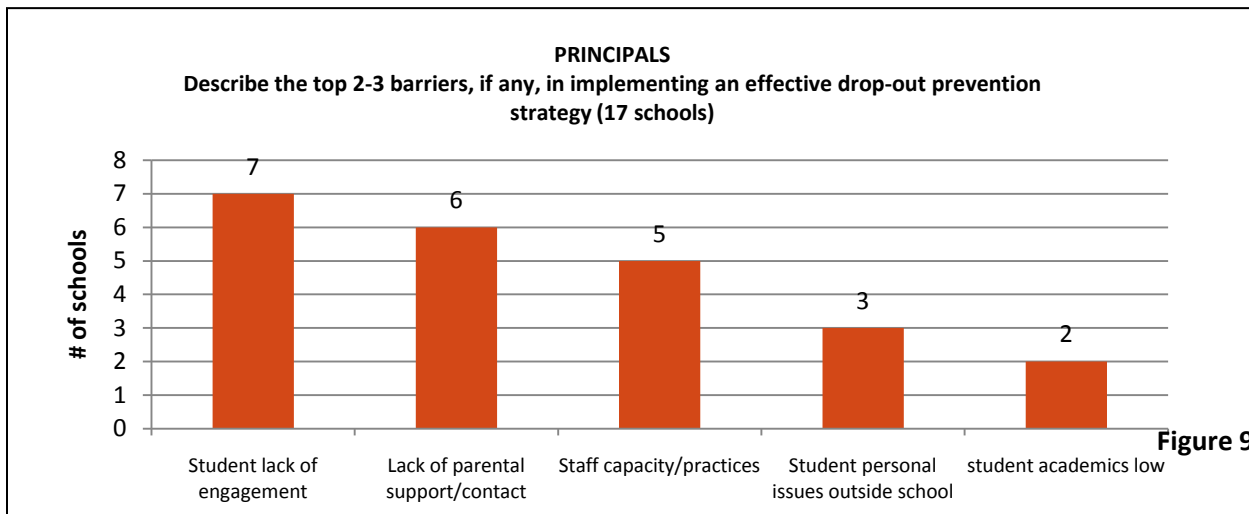


Figure 7

What Connections Do Behavior Management and Drop-Out Prevention Have to Graduation Rates?

In high schools with higher graduation rates, the following things were reported:

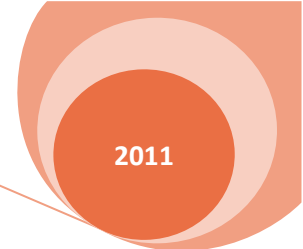
- Principals were more likely to report lower numbers of student referrals, lower percentages of their student population receiving referrals and a larger percentage of referrals resulting in suspension
- Principals were most likely to say their schools deliberately teach students how to replace inappropriate behaviors with appropriate ones
- Principals were more likely to rate their drop-out prevention strategy as very effective
- Counselors were likely to have smaller caseloads and were more likely to spend less time during their day doing administrative tasks and more time working with students

Both charter schools have graduation rates of 96% or higher – in both these schools, principals reported a high degree of 1) effectively teaching students the schools expectations regarding behavior, 2) effectively teaching students how to replace inappropriate behaviors with appropriate behaviors and 3) frequency with which staff models behavioral expectations. Counselors had caseloads of 80 or fewer students and spent over twice as much time working with students than doing administrative tasks.

In Summary

The US Department of Education has identified best practices for supporting positive student behavior as proactively teaching students acceptable behavior, involving all staff in establishing a positive teaching and learning environment, monitoring data and implementing specific effective interventions for specific students and maintaining the capacity to deliver consistent supports to students. From principals and counselors we heard what works in terms of managing student behavior: having a school wide plan and staff modeling and deliberately teaching students about behavior expectations and how to replace negative behaviors. We also learned what works in terms of changing the trajectory of students: individualized attention and involving families.

We learned that those practices were at work in high schools with higher graduation rates. Unfortunately, we have also learned that those practices are implemented unevenly across schools and within schools. In both cases of managing student behavior and monitoring kids at risk of dropping out, the responsibilities of doing so are in some schools are carried out by only a few adults in the school. If we want students to receive the kinds of support they need to stay in school, we also need to ensure that staff is deployed to provide support to every student. A+ Schools is committed to monitoring our schools and supporting their staff to ensure that all schools have what they need to meet students' needs.



School Works 2010-11 Community Response

During the community meetings at Oliver and Carrick High School in March 2011, A+ Schools reiterated the community priorities related to keeping kids in school based on the 2009-10 School Works action research process. These priorities include positive teaching and learning environments where behavioral expectations are high, clear, and positively, objectively and consistently reinforced; and a system for keeping kids in school that tracks and monitors each student’s progress and uses appropriate interventions to keep each student engaged in learning. A+ Schools shared the results of principals’ and counselors responses to questions in these areas, which, combined with national research, indicated that some but not all schools have best practices in place to address student behavior and drop-out risk. The following practices were significantly related to higher graduation rates in high schools: lower numbers of student referrals, lower percentages of referrals resulting in suspension, deliberately teaching students appropriate behaviors, and having counselors with smaller caseloads who spend more time with students.

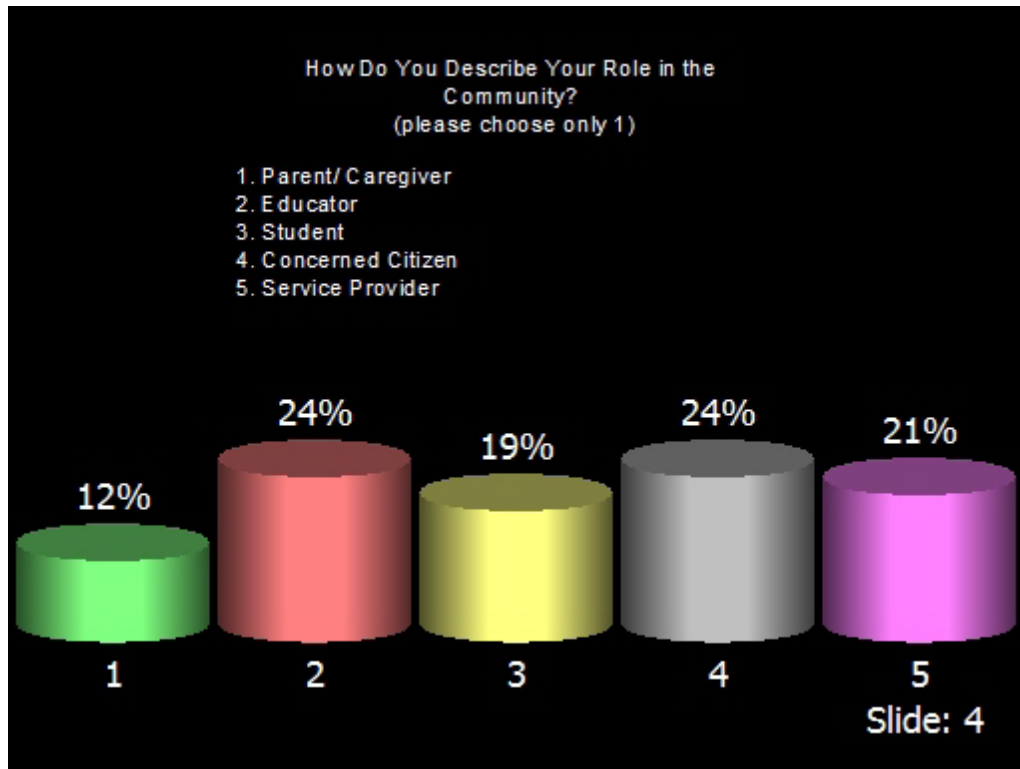
The Discussion

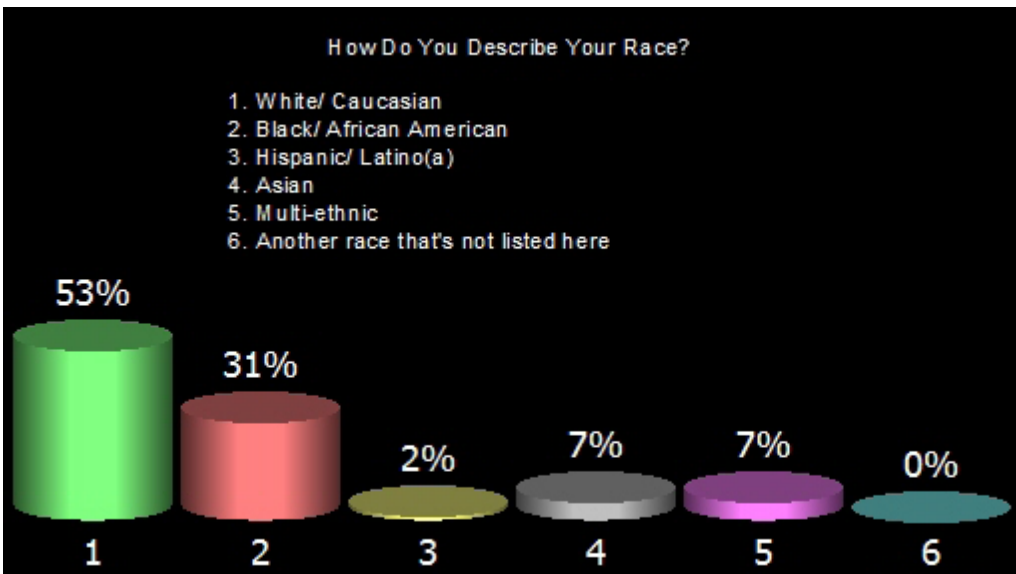
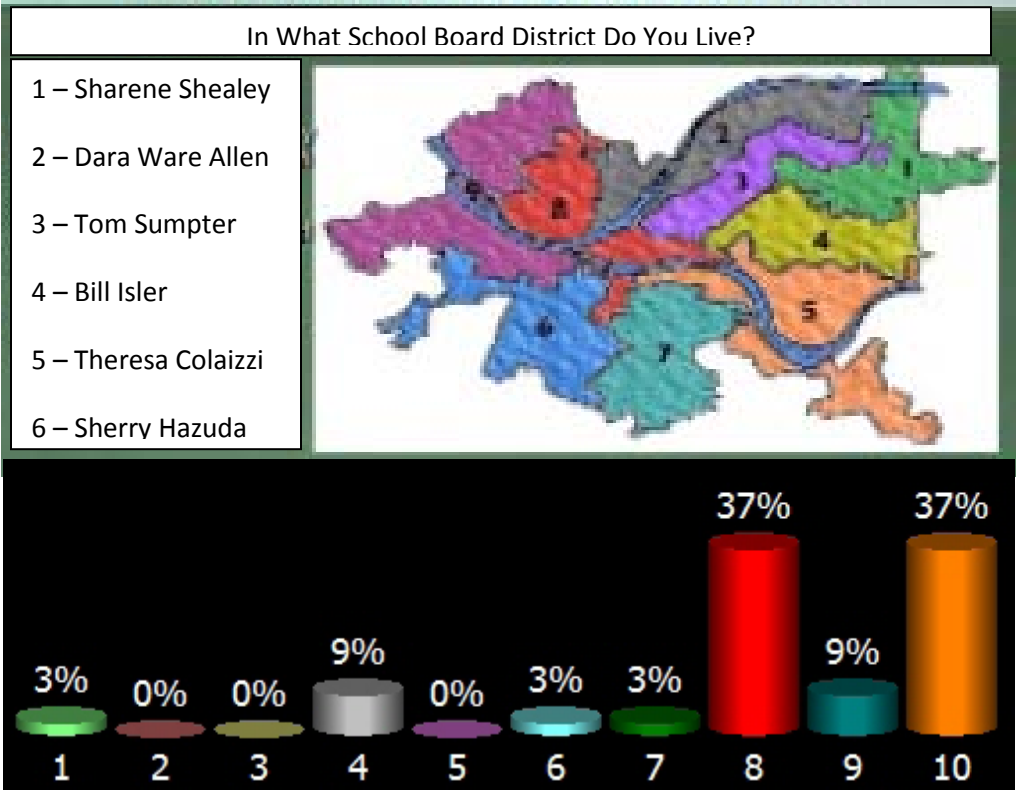
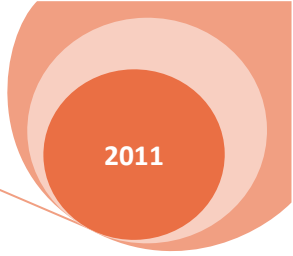
We asked participants to discuss the components of a positive teaching and learning environment that best support student success and compared their answers to current national research. We also asked to what extent participants believed that addressing positive teaching and learning environments should be prioritized by the School Board. In anticipation of continuing to monitor how PPS and schools implement systems to keep kids in school, we asked participants to share what they thought was most important about what they heard, what they wanted to learn, and what actions they would take to follow up.

Polling Results

Who was there -

Approximately 50 people attended to discuss the systems through which Pittsburgh Public Schools manage student behavior and engage students at risk of dropping out. As seen in the following images, audience members reflected a diverse group of parents/caregivers, educators, students, concerned citizens, and service providers from all parts of the city who represented 7 of the 10 School Board Districts in Pittsburgh.





How did people express their opinions - Similarly to the previous year's community meetings, small table conversations were held and afterwards, hand-held polling devices were used as a way for each person at the meeting to express him/herself as an individual in response to the discussion questions. The community was asked to vote for either a single response or to rank their top 2 priorities for the question. For the priority questions, a person's first choice was worth 10 points, the second was worth 9, and the third was worth 8. The numbers in some of the following graphs therefore represent the average weight the item received from the group. The higher the number, the more important that item was to the community members who voted.

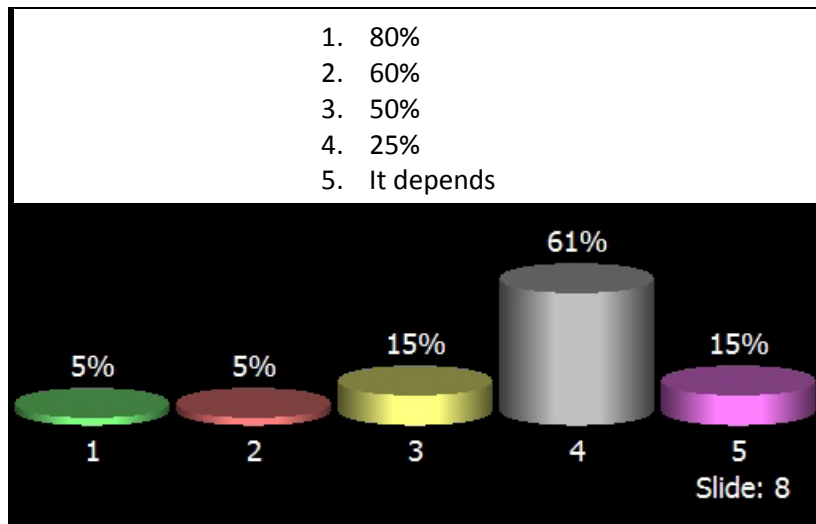
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What did community members understand about off-track indicators – below are participants’ responses when asked about the likelihood that a student would graduate from high school if they showed certain off-track indicators in 6th grade.

Question: According to the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, if a student showed 4/4 off-track indicators (low attendance, suspended often, failing classes and being older than their classmates) in 6th grade, what is the likelihood that he/she will graduate from high school?

→ *The majority believed the student would have a 25% of graduating from high school*



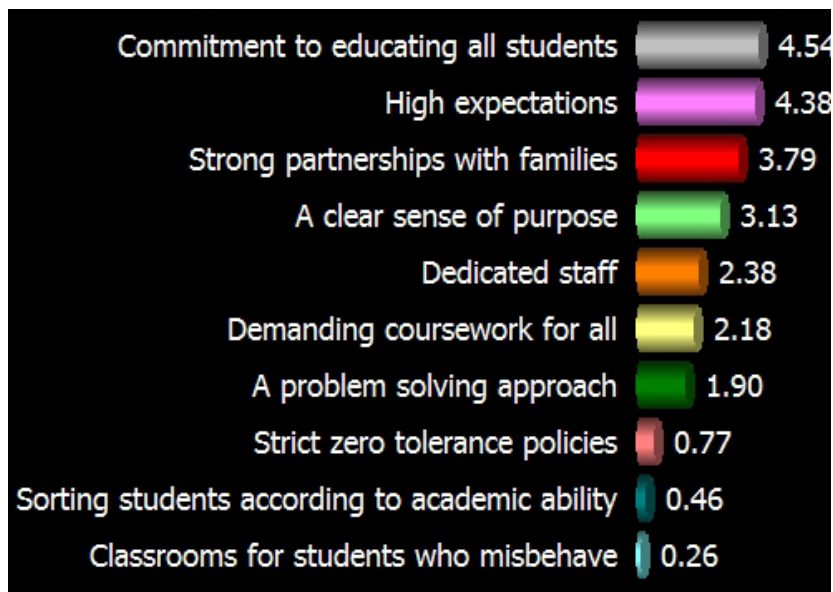
Takeaway: After polling participants on the question, we explained that the answer was “It depends” – if a 6th grader who displays all 4 off-track indicators no longer displays them by the time he/she reaches 9th grade, then this student has the same chance of graduating from high school as any other 9th grader. This information underscores the importance of monitoring and addressing students’ attendance, behavior, and academics in middle school in order to decrease their risk of dropping out of high school.

What did community members think about positive teaching and learning environments – each table held a facilitated discussion about (1) what they learned that was most important to them, and (2) which components of positive teaching and learning environments they think best support student success.

We then polled participants on the top three practices they believed would be found in a school with effective teaching and learning environments. We created separate identical polls with all of the responses as options and asked participants to vote on their top three choices.

Question: Of the following practices, which 3 are most likely to be found in a school with effective teaching and learning environments?

→ *The practices that attendees most believed were likely to be found in a school with effective teaching and learning environments were a commitment to educating all students and high expectations*



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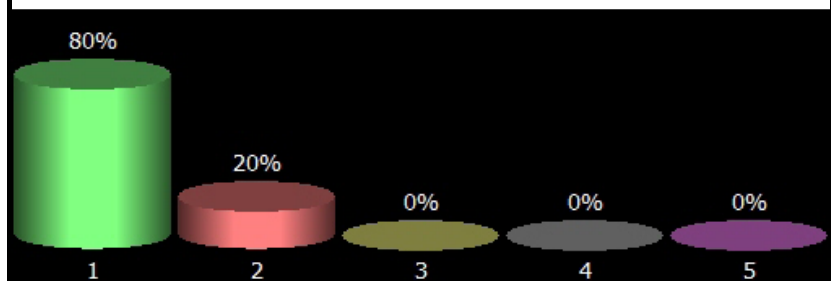
Takeaway: All of the choices above are found in schools with effective teaching and learning environments except for the following: strict zero tolerance policies, sorting students according to academic ability, and classrooms for students who misbehave. These three practices, however, occur in some of Pittsburgh’s public schools.

How did the community feel about the role of the School Board in ensuring positive teaching and learning environments in Pittsburgh’s public schools?

Question: The role of the School Board is to set priorities and goals for the district, monitor progress and put

1. Definitely yes
2. Yes
3. No opinion
4. No
5. Definitely not

policies in place that ensure all students are served equitably by your tax dollars. To what extent do you think that ensuring positive teaching and learning environments exist in every school should be a priority for the School Board to address?



→ Meeting attendees strongly believed that the School Board should place priority on ensuring that every school has a positive teaching and learning environment

What did community members want to do as next steps - We asked everyone in the room in which two actions they would like to participate as a follow up to the meeting. Different groups prioritized different choices, which told us that it could be useful to explore any of the below options as follow up steps.

Question: Which 2 things would you like to do as a follow up to this conversation?

→ Learning more about the district’s specific plans for teaching and learning environments was most important to meeting attendees, followed by hearing more student perspectives

Learn more about the district’s specific plans for teaching and learning environments 4.69

Hear more student perspectives 3.42

Learn more about best practices for addressing student behavior 2.69

Advocate for a Board policy 2.42

Learn how to recognize a positive teaching and learning environment 2.36

Hear more teacher perspectives 1.89

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Summary - What Are A+ Schools' Next Steps?

A+ Schools is committed to monitoring our schools and supporting their staff to ensure that all schools have what they need show results. Last year, community members asked us to prioritize monitoring the systems by which PPS and schools support student behavior management and drop-out intervention. This year, we have seen an increase in the number of schools that have school-wide behavior management plans and that monitor students at risk of dropping out. We learned about practices regarding staffing, disciplinary actions, and teaching expectations & behaviors that are also linked to higher graduation rates. A+ Schools will continue to monitor behavior management and drop-out intervention systems through the upcoming year's School Works, gaining further perspectives from teachers and incorporating the priorities expressed by community members. We will explore the feasibility of implementing follow-up actions to support community members in gaining knowledge and a sense of accountability for helping Pittsburgh Public Schools keep all of its kids engaged in their education.

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