

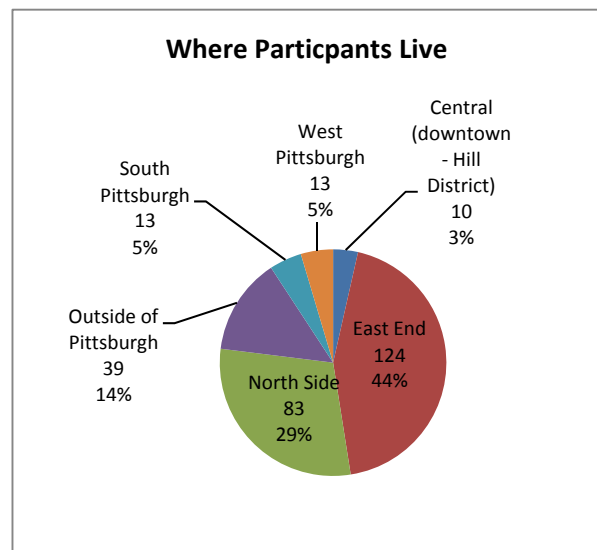
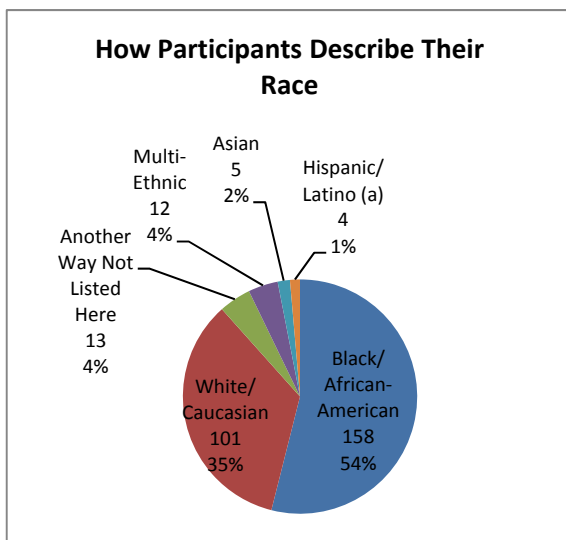
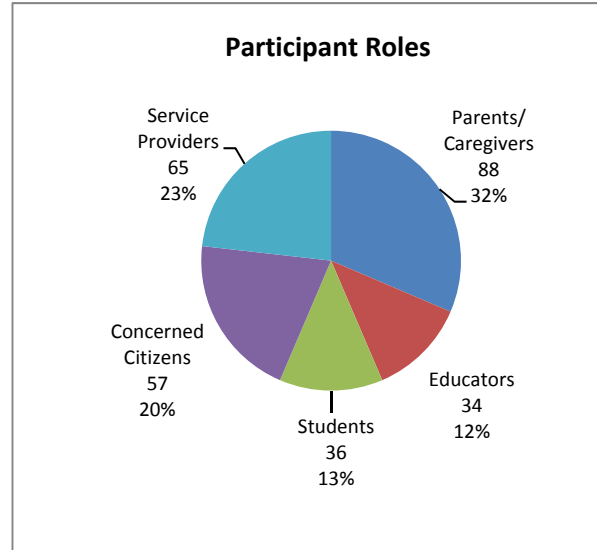
Community Budget Priorities for Pittsburgh Public Schools Results from Meetings in June-August 2011

Introduction

Like almost every other school district in Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh Public Schools will incur a reduction in state and federal funding over the next year. Compounded by a projected deficit PPS estimates a budget gap of \$100 million by 2015 if actions are not initiated. Superintendent Dr. Linda Lane has stated that significant changes are required in order to remain financially stable while still building a strong school system that effectively serves students. A+ Schools believes that the public has an important responsibility to understand what's happening and provide input into these very important budget decisions.

On May 19th, an initial meeting was held for Dr. Lane to present information about the current budget challenge. On June 27th, the community was reconvened to learn more and weigh in on their priorities and in July and August, A+ Schools and its community partners hosted eight community meetings to continue the conversation. Additional meetings were held at the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, Project Destiny, Operation Better Block, The Kingsley Association, The Pittsburgh Project, PAEYC and Northview Heights Community Center.

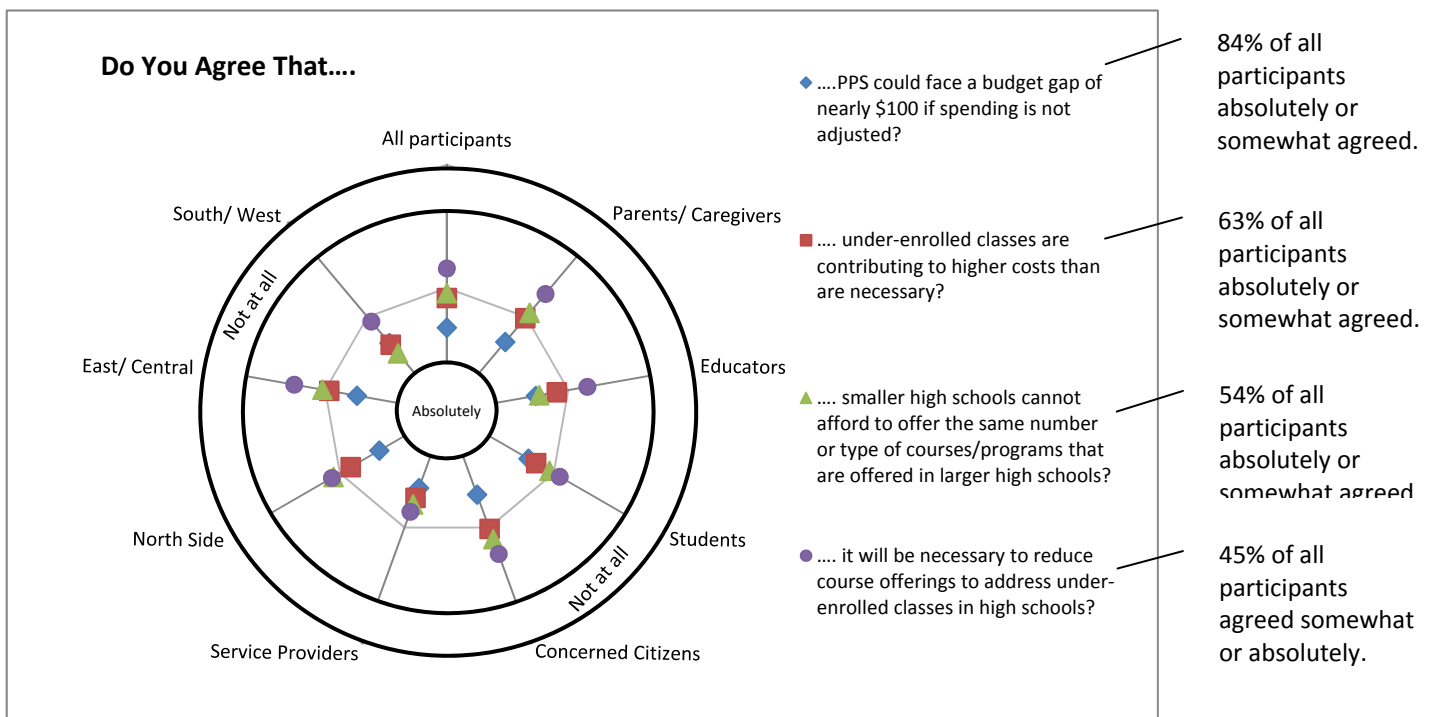
During these meetings, a video of Dr. Lane's original presentation made on June 27th was provided along with information regarding where the district anticipated cuts would have to be made. In all, over 300 community members participated and weighed in on what they hoped the District would accomplish, the extent to which the information made sense, where they'd be likely to support making changes to course availability in high schools and what they'd like to learn moving forward. The charts on this page separate the participants according to how they described their role, neighborhood and race.



Participants Responses:

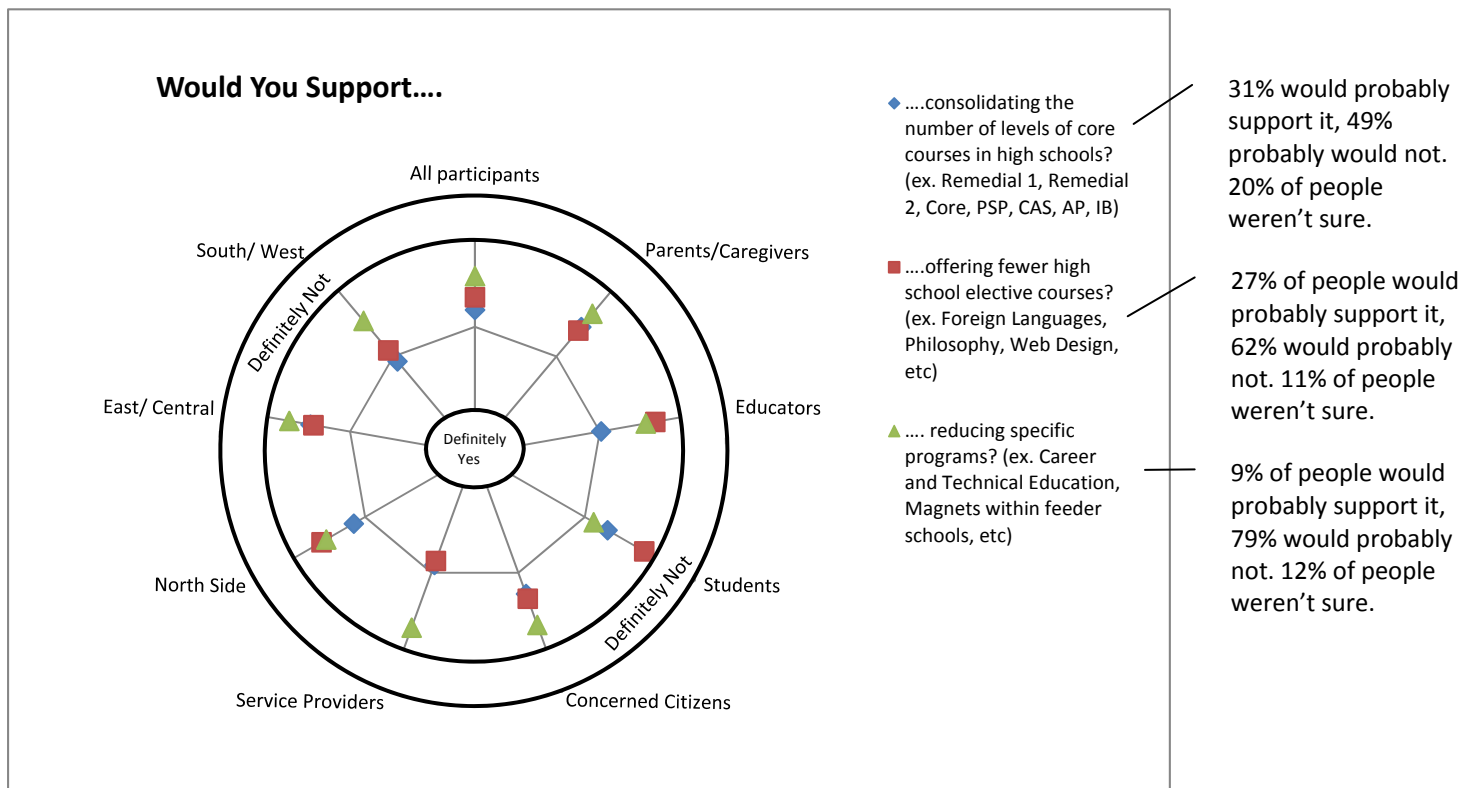
Overall, the majority of the 308 people who were polled understood the challenge that PPS is facing a potential budget gap of approximately \$100 million. The majority of people also agreed that under enrolled classes are contributing to high student costs and that smaller high schools wouldn't be able to offer the same amount of courses or programs as larger high schools.

However, the majority participants did not agree that it was necessary to reduce course offerings. Some were likely to support consolidating the numbers of levels of courses, while the majority would not support reducing electives or specific programs. See the graphs below. The closer the symbol is to the middle of the circle, the more people were in agreement with the statement. The overall responses are at the 12:00 position, with the responses broken down by role and region around the rest of the circle.



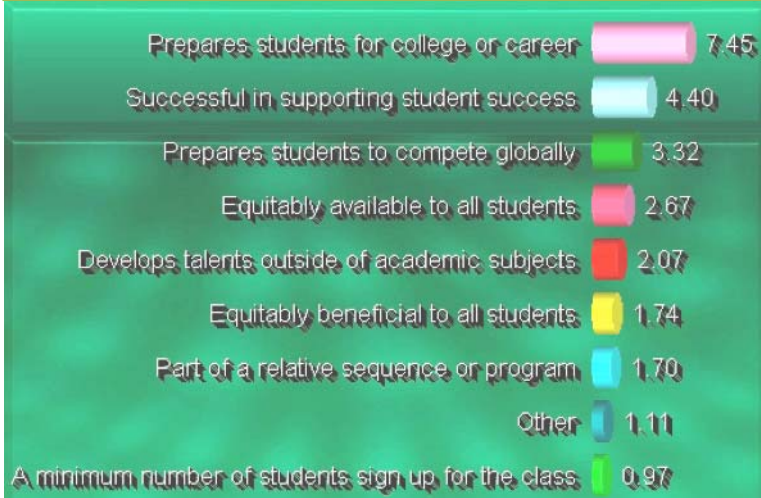
When asked about specific strategies for reducing courses, the majority of participants would not support consolidating or cutting courses. Overall, 49% of participants said they would probably not support consolidating the number of levels of core courses in high schools. An even greater percentage (62%) of participants said they would probably not support schools offering fewer high school elective courses. Students were particularly against this idea.

Participants were even less likely to support cutting programs than cutting courses. Overall, 79% of participants said they would probably not support reducing specific programs such as Career and Technical Education or magnets within feeder schools.



Because the District has identified reducing course offerings as the way to save significant costs, we asked participants to vote for the top three criteria they would use to decide which programs or courses to keep. The numbers in the chart below reflect the priorities of the respondents. A priority rank of 5 or more tells us that at least half of the people who were polled voted for that specific item as one of their top 3 choices.

What 3 Criteria Would You Use to Decide What Programs/ Courses to Keep?



The 3 reasons that most participants felt that a course should be kept were:

1. If the course or program prepares students for college or career
2. If the course or program had proven to support student success, and
3. If the course or program prepares students to compete globally

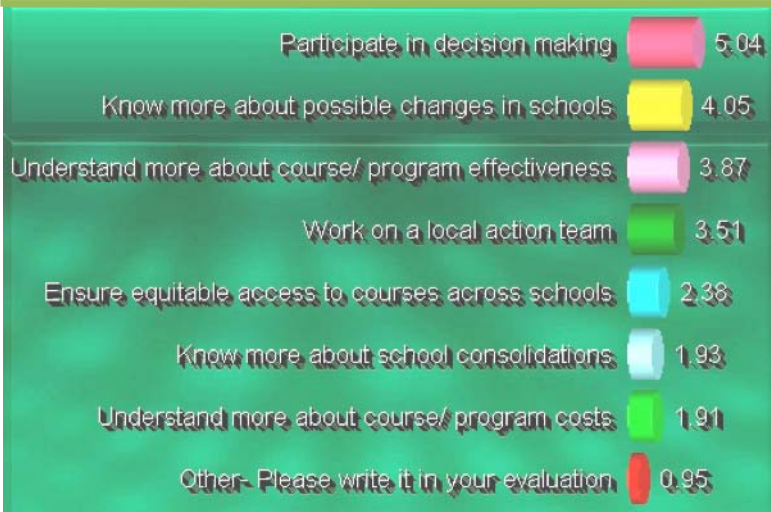
Participants who voted for “other” identified additional criteria. Some suggested allowing schools to determine what courses to keep or keeping those that fulfill social or emotional learning. Some suggested using student feedback as part of the criteria and some called for a precise definition of student success by which to measure a course’s value. Given that few participants supported

cutting courses in the first place, a number of them suggested other options such as reductions in administrative salaries as a means to preserving high-quality courses or programs.

One of the greatest challenges shared by participants was the lack of specific information presented, including details of how cuts in courses or programs would ultimately affect students.

The majority of participants (61%) said that the information presented at the meeting was valuable.

What Would You Like to Do Next?



The 3 next steps that the community would like to take next are:

1. Participate in decision making
2. Know more about specific changes in schools
3. Understand more about the effectiveness of specific courses and programs

What Next?

When asked what they would change about the meeting, participants who responded stated that they wanted more administrative staff from Pittsburgh Public Schools to attend the meetings in order to provide information and answer questions. Participants also felt that they needed to have received more specific information in order to have a meaningful discussion about the impacts of budget cuts, particularly when they involve cutting courses or programs. A summary of their unanswered questions are below:

- How does the district define student success?
- Exactly where are the budget cuts? What is being done?
- How will the consolidation of high school courses affect students in PSP, CAS, AP, IB classes?
- What are the course offerings and their respective enrollment/costs?
- What is the difference between the core courses?
- What are other options to cut costs besides cutting courses and other things that affect students?
- What process was done in the reduction of teachers? How did they decide which ones were furloughed?
- As you look at consolidating schools to have more students in each school, would you continue to keep the same number of pupil services and non-instructional staff?
- How will the district ensure schools educate and not just test students?
- What can parents do to contribute?
- How do fights and behavior problems correlate to class size and achievement?
- Why would our neighborhood want to limit access to higher levels of education?
- How are all these changes going to affect elementary kids?

What the Community Expects from PPS as a Result:

Participants were asked what they hope Pittsburgh Public Schools accomplishes in the next two years. The majority of people said:

1. Help students succeed by providing sufficient behavioral & intervention supports and measuring the value of students' education by their readiness for postsecondary education and global competition in the workplace.

Meeting attendees also challenged Pittsburgh Public Schools to:

2. Make cuts that will increase student and teacher success through a better design that reduces inefficiencies, results in a more equitable distribution of money to students, and keeps the most highly effective teachers and administrators in the district.
3. Continue to address challenges related to access and engagement as it relates to the racial achievement gap by hiring a more diverse, local teaching force as well as prioritizing counseling staff.
4. Prevent school closures in the future and that the decline in district enrollment would cease.
5. Participants also asked Pittsburgh Public Schools to communicate changes clearly and in a timely manner to the community, especially parents, and to answer people's questions. Participants asked Pittsburgh Public Schools to incorporate feedback and input from students, families, and the community.

A+ Schools Next Steps

Over 300 community members, families and residents have now given input on PPS' budget priorities—we know that there is great uncertainty and resistance to supporting cuts to courses or programs and that they want more detailed information describing the impact of course/program cuts on students. Based on the feedback from the community, A+ Schools will do the following as the budget process moves forward:

1. **Provide the public and district with an independent view of the financial situation and the spending reduction process.**

We have commissioned Bill Johns to conduct an independent financial analysis that examines the district's overall budget goals, spending projections, cost reduction options and strategies for making budget-related decisions. Mr. John's analysis will also compare Pittsburgh Public Schools to similar districts. Dr. Lane and her team have graciously collaborated with A+ Schools and have been committed to working with us to engage the public in this ongoing budget conversation. The financial analysis is expected to be available in October.

[Mr. Johns is a former senior vice president-finance of PNC Financial Services who brings private sector expertise as well as an intimate knowledge of PPS finances. He retired in 2005 after 31 years with PNC and served as interim CFO of Pittsburgh Public Schools in 2006/07.]

2. **Advocate that decisions related to course offerings are made with a commitment to equity.**

We want to ensure that, despite significant cutbacks, ALL students will have access to the courses that best prepare them for college or career training after high school. **This was the number one concern of the poll participants.** That is why we ask PPS to make it a priority to involve the community in the decision making process by providing information about specific courses/programs identified for elimination or consolidation, including their effectiveness, enrollment statistics and associated costs. In order to be informed participants in that process, we also urge PPS to provide answers to the questions posed by the community throughout the summer.

3. **Advocate for the creation of teams at schools experiencing changes to help students during the transition.**

Given the great losses incurred with school closings, we recognize that no superintendent or school board makes these decisions lightly. When schools close, students are uprooted and forced to move to new environments with new teachers and new friends. Struggling neighborhoods are left with large vacant structures. When courses or programs are eliminated in schools, students and families are forced make new choices and adapt.

To ease their transition, A+ Schools asks for the district's support and cooperation in building teams at each school experiencing changes immediately after the school board vote. These teams should continue working through the first year in a new school. Teams should include students, families, teachers, administrators and community organizations from both the old and new school to work through and address such challenges as transportation, school and family expectations, safety, and

extracurricular activities. In schools experiencing a reduction in programs or courses, these teams can help work through recruitment, scheduling and communication challenges that arise.

A+ Schools is committed to engaging families, students, and the community in helping to shape the direction of the district as budget decisions are made. We plan to see this process through to completion to ensure that student needs are met. We appreciate the cooperation of the Superintendent Dr. Lane and her staff and look forward to continuing this productive dialogue