



Remaking Our High Schools: Graduating All Students With A Plan For The Future

**A Report on a Community Discussion Held by
A+ Schools: Pittsburgh's Community Alliance for
Public Education**



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Facilitators

Alida Baker
Darla Cravotta
Christina Dixon
Elaine Evosevic-Lozada
Heather Harr
Maureen Hogan
Michele Margittai
Carmelle Nickens-Phillips
K. Chase Patterson
Karen Rafalko
Shalonda Scott
Will Thompkins
Amy Van Horn
Wanda Wilson

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A+ Schools: Pittsburgh's Community Alliance for Public Education
425 Sixth Avenue
Suite 1850
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
412-258-2660
www.aplusschools.org

A+ Schools

“Remaking Our High Schools: Graduating Each Student with a Plan for the Future” Report

On April 27, 2007, over 170 parents, grandparents, educators, students, residents and other stakeholders participated in A+ Schools’ community forum to discuss high school reform. The goal of the meeting was for members of the public and professional communities hear about the work of the Pittsburgh Public Schools High School Reform Task Force and to bring ideas to contribute to the reform plan.

Superintendent Roosevelt provided an overview of recent work done by the Task Force. The small group discussions were an opportunity for community input. This report summarizes the Superintendent’s remarks as well as the discoveries from 13 small group discussions.

“Excellence for All: High School Reform Task Force”

Summary of Comments by Mark Roosevelt, Superintendent, Pittsburgh Public Schools

The High School Reform Task Force has been working over the past year to develop a plan for the makeover of our high schools. Students are dropping out of high school at a high rate. The old delivery model of a comprehensive high school from 40 to 50 years ago is outdated and is missing important components. PPS is at the beginning of what will be a five year plan. There is still room for input and ideas for year one and beyond. There will be no school closings in the first year and no school openings. Year one will be about systemic change throughout the high schools. There will also be some changes in high school readiness.

The work of the Task Force began with the presumption that high schools are not meeting the needs of students. Too many graduates are leaving unprepared for college. Many of our students are not proficient; many ninth graders enter high school unprepared and reading and math scores are terribly low.

Our vision is that ***the Pittsburgh Public Schools will be one of America’s premier school districts—student focused, well managed and innovative.*** We will hold ourselves accountable. Our children need to learn strength of character. We have to educate kids and give them the opportunity to succeed. But things may get worse before they get better. Change is hard and there is a lot to learn.

Our starting off point is better than other districts. Many districts have one or two premier high schools. We are finding that it is much more challenging to do what we are trying to do and that is improve opportunities for every student in every school.

The Task Force has been traveling to see innovative high schools and is excited about much of what we’ve seen. We’ve learned that implementation is often more important than the ideas. We have traveled to Boston, Detroit, San Diego and Washington and also visited some charter schools. The school that we are most taken with is the University Park School in Wooster, Massachusetts. This school has a deep partnership with universities and is the highest achieving feeder pattern high school in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Such a partnership would seem to be a huge opportunity for Pittsburgh. Currently, college and university involvement in our high schools is non-existent.

The Task Force has reached consensus on overarching elements for the High School reform plan. Students and parents in Pittsburgh should have more options in high school than they have now. Everyone should have to think through what kind of high school they want to attend. The quality of those schools is so important. (Bill) Gates has spent \$1.3B exploring ways to improve high schools. The Gates Foundation has learned that it isn’t a small high school that matters; it is the quality of smallness.

We need to start paying more attention to our ninth graders. Ninth grade is where the rubber meets the road and it's where we lose the most kids. Many of our students drop out at this level. We also know that school culture matters more than any other single thing. When you walk into a school building you know within 5 minutes whether a school is good or not – you can feel the culture. Many communities are grappling with how to have deeper parent-teacher-student relationships which are necessary to change the culture in many of our schools.

We have visited many of our own schools over the last year. We observed the classrooms and listened to the students. The number one experience, in my opinion, was meeting kids at the Student Achievement Center. It was the most illuminating meeting that I have had since being in Pittsburgh. One student told me that being in one of our comprehensive high schools is like being in a video game where you have endless lives and no consequences. Students realize that there is no true discipline. Why do we suspend students and send them home for 10 days? It is not the best model and they are falling even farther behind.

Our vision for high school reform in this district is simple. We want every student to feel welcome and safe when they walk in the door. We want them to engage in relevant learning experiences. We want them to achieve high academic standards. If we know the vision that we have for our students then we can educate them and make sure they graduate with a plan for the future. Our students will also develop strong and respectful relationships with others and take ownership for what they are learning in school.

Choice is also a necessity for the students in our district. But what does it mean? Not much at all if they are not good choices. We need to be able to provide our students with the high school choice that suits their needs. We have been working with students at the Heinz School at Carnegie Mellon University for several months on models in science and technology. Career and technical assistance is also important and we have really slipped on these. There also needs to be more discussion around a core curriculum. Students move between schools a lot and need to be able to pick up where they left off in their old school. Too many of the schools are using different books and curriculums. We are also working on a new course in ninth grade for civics and learning more about Pittsburgh. We hope that it will make studying Civics more engaging. We already have some key initiatives underway for new coursework in English, Math, Science and Social Studies.

The Pittsburgh Promise is another one of our key initiatives for the reform plan. It is more than just paying for college. It is about planning and preparing. Too many of our student cannot envision college and we want to change that. This initiative could be a very important step for us. Kalamazoo, Michigan School District did a 4-minute special with Katie Couric recently on the nightly news. She asked their Superintendent if all districts would be able to offer something like this. Her answer was yes...all you need is will and it can happen. Money will not inhibit them from going on to college...if they can do it in Kalamazoo then we can definitely do it here. We just have to put our minds to it and make it work. This is an initiative that could help bring Pittsburgh back.

Personalization is important to this plan. We have to make this concept a reality! We want kids to feel welcome and comfortable and in a personalized environment. What would bring that about? Some charter schools have advisory committees and teachers that follow the students all four years. We need to implement some programs for ninth graders over the summer to help introduce them to high school. We want them to have a running start when it is time for school to begin in the Fall.

We believe that in order for this to work all stakeholders must work together. The teachers, parents, students, district and community all have to work together to ensure high school success. Our schools

will start to improve and our teachers will be better prepared for the students. There will be the implementation of a compact between students, parents and the school. This means that everyone is making a pledge to make our schools better. Our students have to make a compact with parents or guardians. We ask too little of our students and that is not fair to them—showing up is not enough! Homework and hard work are required. If we do not stress that then we are not doing them a favor. The community also needs to step up. We need to let our children know that we will stand by them.

Our next steps include continuing to meet with folks to talk about the reform plan. Ninety percent of the plan is going to be about year one and will be both broad and deep. I hope that you can help us fill in a lot of pieces that are missing from your conversations tonight. We are all in this together and we are trying to do something different. At every meeting there are one or two ideas that are new—we are really open to all of your ideas! No one in the country has done this to the standards we set forth. We need to do this for the future of our kids and for the future of this district.

After these remarks the Superintendent then took questions from the audience about the federal budget priorities, teacher's contract, and student tracking.

Small Group Discussions

Participants were organized into thirteen small discussion groups which were led by experienced, volunteer facilitators. Each group was asked to consider the following questions:

1. What did you hear tonight that made you feel hopeful about the future of Pittsburgh's High Schools? What elements of the High School Reform plan do you think are most promising and why?
2. What elements of the High School Reform plan are you concerned about or unsure of?
3. What other specific ideas do you have about remaking our high schools to better prepare our students to thrive in the world?

To assist with their discussions each participant had an informational packet that included substantial background information on the high school reform plan-including Superintendent Roosevelt's PowerPoint presentation and articles on high school reform nationwide as well as closing the graduation gap.

Small group discussions lasted for one 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 appendix.

Findings

From the small group discussion summary reports as well as the detailed table discussion notes, we highlight some common themes about participant ideas on the high school reform effort for the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Key discoveries are as follows:

Participants were cautiously optimistic by the scope of the reform. Participants support big picture thinking and ideas, but are anxious about the implementation of such a large scope.

Participants were encouraging of efforts to reach out into the community to build partnerships to support learning. They were very supportive of university partnerships in particular, but also a strong call for partnerships with after school providers, human service providers, arts and culture and the community in general.

There was strong support for the personalization aspect of the plan – individual students feeling their education is of importance to adults and that their specific needs can be met.

Participants indicated that preparation for high school is essential and should begin with rigorous education in much earlier grades.

Participants expressed skepticism about standards and testing culture. There was concern about too much focus on testing and what might be lost as a result (arts, sports, love of learning, creativity)

Participants were skeptical about an all-choice model. They were concerned that it would reinforce inequitable distribution of high achieving students, quality teachers, and resources in general. They were further concerned that specialized high schools would eliminate the opportunity for students to become well-rounded and limit the choices within a building.

Participants expressed a lot of concern about teaching and teachers. Are teachers adequately prepared for what is demanded in high schools today? Do they get adequate professional development and training? Do they support or buy into the reforms being planned? Is the teachers' contract a barrier to making needed changes? How can we hold teachers' accountable?

Likewise, **participants expressed concern about parent engagement.** They saw it as a critical component to the success of the reform plan as well as individual student success. They wondered about how the district could support parents and parent engagement more effectively.

Participants were generally supportive of the Pittsburgh Promise and underscored the importance of the plan and prepare aspects of the program.

Participants felt the focus on safety and discipline was very important and appreciated that the Superintendent expressed a clear understanding of the issue.

Many wonderful ideas were generated by participants during these discussions. These thoughts and ideas are captured in the appendices by table and by category.

What's Next?

A+ Schools immediately compiled the findings from the forum to pass on to the Pittsburgh Public Schools administration to be used to inform the final recommendations to Pittsburgh Public School Board on April 10, 2007. This information, along with photos and table notes from the meeting, will be shared with Board members and other staff members. As always, A+ Schools will incorporate the findings from this meeting into its planning for future initiatives.

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.

Appendix-Table Discussion Notes

“Remaking Our High Schools: Graduating Each Student with a Plan for the Future”

Discussion Questions

1. What did you hear tonight that made you feel hopeful about the future of Pittsburgh’s High Schools? What elements of the High School Reform plan do you think are most promising and why?

2. What elements of the High School Reform plan are you concerned about or unsure of?

Probing questions:

- What questions do you have?
- What would make you feel more optimistic about these elements?
- What would you change?

3. What other specific ideas do you have about remaking our high schools to better prepare our students to thrive in the world?

Table I (Darla Cravotta, Facilitator)

Summary Report:

- We like ramping up...
- Holistic approach means that there has to be whole school systemic changes and also elementary, not just high school
- Students must believe that they will be able to go to college at elementary level
- trust...a lot of questions about how to implement it; for year 1 and year 2; how do you trust the system?
- Welcoming schools and accountable; school pride and accountability for teachers; stressful but things that protect them
- More training for teachers

Question #1

- No one has done this; good to admit that!
- Ramp Up Program → “No Child Left”; helps kids overcome the 5+ generations
- Whole school not just high school
- Provides hope to all
- Pittsburgh Promise → important to know that you (everyone!) can go to college
- Push at elementary school to learn
- “5 legged stool” (+)
- All learning
- Different time/era; high schools need to change
- Administrative supports
- Raising the bar; need some expectations
- Don’t suspend!
- University partnerships
- Advisors to HS; change, selection critical
- Changing the school culture
- Re-instill school colors and school pride!

Question #2

- Loss of thinking skills
- Explain to kids why they are in school
- Need a plan past year 1
- Unsure of choice
- How does it really work with unequal educational opportunities?
- Structure

- Not a rigid academic atmosphere but creative Discipline?
- How do you create a safe and welcoming environment?
Teachers and administration held responsible, even the secretaries!
- Instruct Secretary/office "folks" in how to engage first point of contact!
- Block scheduling; how do you implement?
- Large changes
Who stabilizes?
Teachers: tenure problems, contract problems; need to meet expectations
PSSA problems, tests, lists, etc.
How do you communicate better?
Dashboard waste of money, teachers must communicate with parents, Union issue!

Question #3

- Community and Service Learning
- After school clubs and activities
Big Brothers, Big Sisters → no equal access to schools
- Get rid of the coaches! Always take the good teachers!
- Technology available to all → parents and children; give kids the access and ability to be creative and explore
- Partner for Social Service/Human Services

Table 2 (Karen Rafalko, Facilitator)

Summary Report:

- Great grandparents, parents, professor
- University partnerships and Pittsburgh Promise
- How will each student academic needs be met without tracking?
- Are we more concerned about contracts that student learning?
- Hiring and retaining the best teachers
- Not ramping up
- Psychological research; later start times to match kids biological clock
- Make sure that kids, parents and teachers understand that the brain is another muscle and there has to be hard work
- It is about hard work and not innate intelligence
- KIDS FIRST...PERIOD!

Question #1

- University partnerships
- Path toward life
- Systemic approach and fix whole framework; district wide at all levels
- Pittsburgh Promise
- Sense of hope in entire community
- Five point focus of the plan (page 7, second slide)
- Courage/Content/Implementation needed:
Courage from School Board and Administration
Content that is directed to life
Implementation thru coalition of parents/teachers
Redirecting federal funding from war effort, etc. to support all schools
- Quality of teachers -- flexibility for principals to bring in the most qualified teachers

Question #2

- What will happen with discipline?
- Will there be meaningful community service for disciplined students?
- How will each student's academic needs be met w/out tracking?
- We are more concerned about teacher's contracts than student's learning
- Focus on district-wide improvement may neglect schools in greatest need
- Extent to which high schools will be narrowly themed (pre-mature specialization)
- People do not know about existing effective programs (e.g. Passport Program)
- Lack of communication between school personnel and parents
- How we will get more parents engaged?
- How can we be a leading school with such a great focus on testing and standards?
- Will we be teaching skills or ideas?
- Will we imbue kids w/a love of learning?
- Principals have flexibility to hire and retain best teachers
- That too much time will be spent on testing
- Not ramping up early enough

Question #3

- Later start time to match kids' biological clocks
- Teach kids to focus on hard work versus innate intelligence; the brain is like a muscle
- Retain art, music and physical education
- Kids First Period! Not teachers, school bus schedules, teacher's union...
- Performance-based teachers contracts
- Best teachers at most needy schools (who want to be there)

Table 3 (Christina Dixon, Facilitator)

Summary Report:

- Do it right the first time; go slow so that we can go fast later
- "It doesn't mater if you buy filet mignon...if you shove it down their throats, they will choke on it."
- Robust outreach to families and the community; how do you get involvement when it is implemented
- Professional development should be emphasized and related to different learning styles; diverse
- Mentoring for students and teachers; inexperienced teachers with seasoned ones
- Evaluation; something broader than metrics on test scores; other relationships

Question #1

- Not just high school, but earlier, system-wide improvement
- Partner with universities
- New "3 R's": Rigor, Relationships and Relevance
- Creative, outside box programs; health careers, etc.
 - Marriage of career and tech programs
- Mentoring from industry-specific people
 - Like job, follow-up/check-up
- Excellence for All
- Tie higher education to parents, schools etc. at all ages
- 9th grade special transition
- Pittsburgh Promise
 - access to school afterwards for all kids
 - attracts population back to city
- No consequences questions
- Parent involvement

Question #2

- Impatience, good and bad trait
 - Implement it right the first time, let it work
 - People could get scared
- Community engagement
 - Community meetings happen at 10th hour
 - Appears programs are being rushed in
 - Doesn't allow for enough community input
 - Who facilitates conversation?
- Low self-confidence; parents need to be involved
- Good programs get cut at expense of "new ideas"
- Teacher professional development
 - Should be relentless and continually relevant
- How do we learn from experience?
 - How do we make adjustments in implementation quickly?
 - Create new system that's flexible
- Communication with community
 - How did people find out about tonight?
- "Systemic change"; could be scary, go slow and smooth
- Who pays for Pittsburgh Promise?; it's premature
- How do you evaluate/track progress/outcomes?
- Measurements
 - What are other evaluation measures?
 - Could we go beyond standardized tests?
 - Multiple metrics connected to 5 key areas (safe & welcoming, etc.)
- Developmental assets; possible evaluation tool
- Inclusion/Special Ed classes should also be included in full-size/primary classes
- Does testing measure student completely
- Alternative High Schools
 - How do we deal with kids who don't fit "normal" mode?
 - More one-on-one? Parents, tutors, etc.
- Are teachers learning how to deal with special needs students?
- Tracking equity-does current test (IQ) serve as accurate gauge?
- Discouraged by explanation of "Excellence For All"
 - What does it mean for each kid?
 - Can we build in more flexibility to meet needs? Not just create programs and hope students fit them
- Dumbing down of education; how does it compare to peers nationally?
 - How to supplement individual learning programs?

Question #3

- What new technologies are teachers learning and teaching?
- Why no consequences for teachers' bad teaching, inefficiencies?
- What are we doing about quality parent involvement/engagement?
- How do we "go out and get" parents more involved?
 - Reduce intimidation
 - Positive support/interaction from faculty/staff
- How do you implement a full choice district?

Table 4 (Wanda Wilson, Facilitator)

Summary Report:

- Potential for collaboration; new initiatives, with nonprofit programs and reaching out to private schools
- Concerned about ability to change the culture in the school and within the district as a whole
- Ways to increase incentives for parental involvement

Question #1

- Kids recognize no consequences
- Behavior issues-no control
- Strategies are the right ones to focus on
- Choice=opportunity no matter where you live
- Want to know more; middle school years
- Could also have collaborations with private schools
- PPS-reach out
- Summerbridge collaboration with Sewickley Academy/formerly WT
- Use this as a model
- Low-performing middle schools are a joke; zoo
- Going in right direction but still stuck in old models
- There are ideas to be a creative approach
- We need unity for implementation; School board and administration must be a united front

Question #2

- Not convinced Pittsburgh Promise is the best use of funds; gap financing
- Wouldn't it be better to prepare students better?
- Preparation and planning for college is important
- Need trade and technical support
- Issues with ramp up programs not starting until 5th or 6th grade
- Implementation of elementary right-sizing curriculum is issue (Colfax)
- High stakes testing environment is not conducive to learning for learning's sake and safe and welcoming culture
- Art programs
- Unity of faculty
- Teachers-embody high expectations, enthusiasm for learning
- Teaching skills is paramount, classroom control the most important factor
- Culture of respect
- Summerbridge model
- Collaboration must be meaningful; reach out, recognize well-run programs
- Don't ignore small, good models
- How to replicate these models at scale
- The district is not facilitating collaboration with good programs
- Be sure not to focus only on H.S.; earlier focus
- Don't think K-8 is done, though
- Choice must come with parental education
- Open house mandatory, creates requirements for parental involvement
- Bus monitors
- Classroom participation
- Tie incentives for Pittsburgh Promise to parental involvement; Waivers for application fees, etc.
- Makes a difference in behavior to have parents there
- Be sure the business community is part of community leg of stool; internships
- A savings program like work-study; \$1 of earnings put in savings
- Strategy for teacher accountability
- Bank it in school program; students earn money to attend and get money when they graduate
- Also do service and meet behavior requirements, proficiency tests for some special schools; motivation

-Is that just a cheap tool? Invest in education for education's sake!

Table 5 (Maureen Hogan, Facilitator)

Summary Report:

- Diversity; paid attention to
- Parents need to understand who they need to talk to and how to have access
- “It still takes a village to raise a child...”; no single approach to education, meeting needs
- Teachers as role models, important that teachers appear to be the teachers and dress codes
- Step by step procedures, how are we supposed to do them
- How do we measure success?; what are the outcomes?
- Drill down to reach success
- Are there any students or parents on the task force?; is there separate involvement/initiatives around them?
- Ways to make bonds between teachers and students, mentoring program or counselors

Question #1

- Consequences for actions; suspension not answer
- Choice (IT, Career, Schenley IS)
- Something for kids in trouble
- Shadow/Orientation program
- Reform is exciting!
- Teacher buy in; PFT vs. individual teacher
- Community partners
- Rigor
- Student support; goal setting for future relationships with caring adult role models
- Support to get to Pittsburgh Promise

Question #2

- Brass tacks-action!
- Student representative—each high school on task force, with regular parents; empower
- Deliberative forums for students
- Address basic needs and social family needs, life issues
- Social workers, more of them
- Study successful PPS alums and successful community residents/businesses, bring back in and learn lessons
- Partner with existing/supporting community organizations
- Reform with stakeholders
- Accountability; same accountability as community partners; students' K-12 accountability
- *Teachers look the same!

Question #3

- Diversity initiatives
- Help parents through the system
- Teacher buy in
- Holistic approach; Students, families, teachers, communities; Takes a village to engage the village
- Roles defined, model of engagement
- Skill building courses and workshops; courtesies, respectful, etiquette, social skills
- Teachers as role models in dress and actions
- Set realistic expectations
- Mentors for teachers; continuing education workshops
- Step by step procedures; how to be better, details
- Measures for success; Outcomes, success indicators
- Students/Parents on
- Smaller class sizes
- Fewer class preps and build/improve student teacher relationships

- Teacher support staff
- Core teachers stay connected four years with student advisors (homeroom teacher)
- Principals shift too often
- Unions focus shift to teacher-student bonding
- Flexible schedules to allow more time at schools w/o class responsibility

Table 6 (Michele Margittai, Facilitator)

Summary Report:

- Don't lose the students who do not want to go to college; let's acknowledge them for the vocation they choose
- Classes sizes should be regulated
- Self esteem and strength of character; elementary schools have programs that come in and are missing in HS; safety net of community school
- Possibly looking at co-teaching model; someone on content and someone focusing on behavior
- Amazement of caliber of teachers; some allowed to stay within the school district
- Isn't just students checking out, but parents are too...some feel that their children can handle it
- Level of concern about high school parents who cannot reach a teacher after 3 PM—parents cannot get calls from teachers
- If you want to build strength and character, require community service

Question #1

- Utilizing local resources → university
- Tech schools; don't lose kids who aren't going to college!
- Math/science magnet
- Hopeful view of reform; implementation is the key!
- Change needs to happen in lower levels
- “We can't work miracles in high school.” (High school teacher quote)
- Willing to challenge basic ideas of high schools; 42 minute periods are ridiculous!
- “9th grade is not working!” (High school teacher quote)
- Emphasis on relationships; not letting kids fall through cracks
- Give the message, “We believe in you!”
- Building up self-esteem; lying to them → be careful!
Must be authentic in all that we do in this reform

Question #2

- Change plan built first and then implement
- Kaplan Math was bad implementation
- Adequate and ongoing training; not just in first year
- How do you do the curve (in Roosevelt's presentation) when the state will penalize you?
- Discipline not consistent at schools
- Ask teachers to teach kids to be good people; isn't that a parent's job?
- Facility issues-wearing a “hoodie” because it's cold and then being disciplined because of dress code policy
- Reach beyond school community to help w/discipline
People who deal with these issues; seek their help with social issues
- You as a teacher must be consistent in discipline
But the system around you also needs to be consistent and it is not
Teacher writes referral → breakdown when referral is implemented
- Amazed at teachers who are allowed to stay in the district; would not be tolerated in suburban school district
- How do we build a community?
Have more conversations like tonight!
- Perception that high schools do not like parents/teachers/programs in their schools
- Parents checking out

Getting info from teachers impossible because no one is there after 3PM
Assumption by parents that HS kids do not need parental involvement

Question #3

- Co-teaching model; 1 to teach content and one to re-direct behavior
- Social workers-pilot program in PPS
 - Not spread out across 3 schools
 - Social workers working in schools with teachers/administrators to address issues interfering with education
 - Teachers can't do this!
- Incentive for good teachers
 - Tuition reimbursement
 - Give teachers supplies (paper)
 - Compete with suburbs; make teachers want to teach in PPS
- Create a net through partnerships
 - Allow programs into school during the day
 - Keep schools open in afternoon
- Doing community service to build character; make it mandatory
- Look at the times school start; it needs to be later!!

Table 7 (Alida Baker and Carmelle Nickens-Phillips, Facilitators)

Summary Report:

- Strong character
- Superintendent Roosevelt understands that we are in a crisis
- Quality of smallness and culture, caring involvement doesn't cost anything
- Buy in from teachers—there is none, silence on their end for cultural change; strong input from the union is important
- Cultural relevancy of the plan
- Concerned about parents in communities; have not been historically involved; meaningful respectful role
- Difficult to have the discussion in this room; does this show a lack of respect (location?)

Question #1

- Superintendent understands we are in a crisis
- Quality of smallness/culture
 - Caring/loving environment is important
 - Money not needed for caring environment
- Open to ideas is good
- Innovation is good
- Theory of Pittsburgh Promise is good

Question #2

- Buy-in from teachers isn't evident
 - Silence on need for cultural change
 - Need concrete strategy and strong input from union
- Studied schools, schools visited are not like Pittsburgh demographic
- Examine cultural-relevancy of the Plan
- Whole-school reform must be interdisciplinary
- Implementation of strong "affect" initiatives
- Music and art are "right brain"

Question #3

- All teachers need to do personality inventory to determine whether they should be teachers
- Students should be canvassed; what kind of school do they want?
- Idea to think about → same teachers stay with students grade to grade
- Idea → Keep K-6 and 7-12 (no middle school)
- Give principals more authority/power, less paperwork to run school
- Union must respect principal
- Parents-community-students have not historically been engaged in decision making. Can it happen?
- Meaningful, respectful role for parents and community and students and their dreams
- This room is bad environment for this discussion. Is it a lack of respect for community? Not inviting.

Table 8 (Heather Harr, Facilitator)

Summary Report:

- Liked attention in this plan that there should be a welcoming and safe environment for each child; students are greeted and teachers are pleased to see them when they come in
- Relationships, rigor, relevance and reward for students to buy in; one said that she would cook breakfast for her students when they had good attendance
- Compact and sense of involving the community and businesses and faith based community
- Concerns-balance; like the idea of having course that show passion for interests
- Is it developmentally appropriate for 8th and 9th graders to pick major concentrations; students should be exposed to a variety of things; balance the quest to offer this with preservation of community
- How do we achieve all these great things with fewer resources? Social work personnel; labor intensive proposition
- The need to challenge all students
- Going to school later; later start time
- Good ideas: business and communities should offer internships and retirees as mentors, field trips to work site
- City council and members should be involved in a civics course, train professionals and parents to get involved

Question #1

- Welcoming and safe
- Relationships, rigor, relevance, rewards
- School culture; preserve and build on existing cultures
- Kids shouldn't be criticized by school administrators as soon as they get off the bus
- Maslow's Hierarchy and relationships; students, teachers and parents
- School ownership
- Not just size of classes, but also need breadth in quality of courses
- Need "ramp up" before HS
- Work with community before kids come to school
- Focus on 9th graders—kids say, "When am I going to use this?"; university partnerships can add relevance
- Kids need a sense of ownership
- Career and technical was eliminated
- Don't tolerate absences; teacher rewarded them
- Need teachers who care about kids; even if not the highest grades in the school--more important than how well the teacher did in school
- Capsulate into a clear, motivating vision
- We want to do something that is not being done anywhere else in the country
- Something for the students--support a total community buy-in
- Compact=commitment
- Business community is looking to see if there is a workforce coming out of this town
- Show ways for specific businesses, churches and universities to get involved
- The kids say, "Who cares about me?"; This will show the community cares

- University Park statistics are promising--100% are college-bound
- The vision to reach individual students where they are; involving students in developing the vision

Question #2

- Personnel--will there be social workers?; Trained people to follow up-classroom
- Saving \$\$ but losing the students
- Why are we one of the highest spending per student but low results?
- Don't mess up what's good now
- Nothing about challenging the top student; excellence
- Full choice throughout district--100%; takes away community identity; destroys communities; we need some choice!
- Do kids have to specialize at HS?
- Offer lots of opportunities at every site
- Civics is supposed to be about government, not Pittsburgh; we need to know names of judges; Pittsburgh course should be an elective
- Are 8th and 9th graders ready to pick a career?; More general liberal arts--address by learning about careers
- Kids should love learning in general
- Marcus Buckingham--"Developing Strengths"; corporate world; work with your strengths
- Identify passions early on
- How can PPS do this with less \$\$ and fewer teachers?
- If you keep cutting staff you have less manpower to execute the vision
- Will more HS require more administrators?; if small need more! School within school addresses that
- Not realistic to say all kids should go to college

Question #3

- Offer training to Pittsburgh professionals parents (they did it-Donna Vlassich) on how to interact with students
- Compact-Businesses/Community
 - Offer internships to students
 - Retirees as mentors (baby boomers)
 - Field trips to worksites
 - City council and government help teach the civics course
- Take advantage of loyalty to Pittsburgh, people who love it; "You could offer me Paradise and I would take Pittsburgh"
- Delay school start times so kids get more sleep; HS kids biologically late risers
 - Edina, MN saw a decrease in absenteeism when kids got more sleep and increased attention in earlier classes
- Fatigue is a huge issue
- Prioritize what's most important; conflicts with sports
- Involve the media in positive PR
- If I could tell the Board one thing it's:
 - Include all stakeholders
 - Keep thinking big
 - Do things you know are going to work; research based
 - We shouldn't take incredible risks; calculate risks
 - Provide caring for each and every student
 - Try something new; what we've been doing isn't working
 - Spend the money on implementation, not just on studies
 - Chart well; study and give some results
 - Don't pay people to do something; mix of outside expertise and local expertise
 - Reorganize Vo-Tech

Table 9 (Will Thompkins, Facilitator)

Summary Report:

- Working with parents; expect more from them and the students
- Smaller classroom size
- Alternative to suspension
- Safety of school
- Knowing all of the students in the school by name; Mr. Walters, Frick's principal knows every student by name
- Music and arts being dismantled and extra curricular activities, what happens to them now?
- Importance for educational resources for grandparents
- Do not lose high achieving students
- Kaplan components for civics are weak
- Students who cannot read do not get help in high school
- Equivalent to Paul O'Neil; safety and attendance for students and teachers
- Developing websites
- Utilize cultural resources
- Make sure that community leaders are involved with alternative school

Question #1

- Loss of students and people in Pittsburgh; responsibility of Pittsburgh Leaders (not all schools)
- Don't eliminate good or what is working
- Concern for kids who are in 9th, 10th and 11th grades and in the middle of the change
- Truancy
- Address achievement gap
- Music/arts being dismantled
- No mention of extracurricular activities, sports and arts
- Kids not prepared for 9th grade, start in 7th grade
- Grandparents raising kids; very complicated
- Resources for parents
- Too much focus on test scores
- Don't lose the high performing kids
- School security staff too low
- Kaplan civics no rigorous; too watered down
- Implementation; teachers must be on board
- Kids who cannot read are not getting appropriate help in HS

Question #2

- Daily newspaper (& web) attendance at each school; kids and teachers
- Preserve and strengthen CAS & IB at Schenley
- Gifted all days, all kids in all schools (enrichment)
- Understand graduate success at Perry
- Standardized tests schools become part of grade average
- PPS should better communicate consequences of NCLB act watch list-plans
- Better utilize Pittsburgh cultural resources like museums, etc.; build cultural resources into curriculum
- Dress code to create expectations
- Follow and enforce the rules (discipline rewards)
- Know each kid; all kids should find and achieve to their talents
- Pittsburgh community leaders must be involved with the contractor of the alternative school (beyond focus groups)
- Rename the gifted program
- Recognize and encourage teacher excellence

Question #3

- Focus on discipline
- Parent/student/school contracts
- Expect more from the kids, parents and school
- Community and parent involvement
- Not hiding problems...acknowledge them
- Good, phased approach
- Small classroom size
- PFT cooperation
- Alternatives to suspension
- Ready for college and Pittsburgh Promise
- University partnerships (more)
- Choice
- Look at other models for ideas and excellence
- Best school district (not urban)
- Good base to build on
- Listen to HS students
- Personal, safe; know the kids

Table 10 (Amy Van Horn, Facilitator)

Summary Report:

- Group is hopeful about leadership, safety,
- Concerned about accountability, students, teachers, community; be specific
- Will this reform work?; different from any reform effort
- Radical changes, need the best teachers in middle school; career development from K-12

Question #1

- Career and Technical Education
- Acknowledging that children are behind
- Personalization and attention
- Will take a while
- Creating expectations
- Community
- Systemic reform
- Will and vision
- Leadership
- Inclusive
- Safety addressed
- Partner (University) to commit
- Student engagement; driven and focused
- Working with PFT and teachers
- Promising; grant makers on board; data driven; team left city to do site tours

Question #2

- University partnerships; do they have answers?
- Race/class/finances; may be more flight
- Cuts from state
- Need change in how schools are funded
- College not only type of success
- Accountability for principals, teachers; parents and students should be accountable
 - Need definitions of what they are accountable for
 - All are accountable and therefore no one is

- Need system for success when parent isn't there
- How to create system of staff ownership
- Unions
- Anything in the way of quality
- Need ability to affect unions
- What input from study?
- How do we inspire children?
- Concerned some children don't form attachments
- Introduce child to outside world and teachers
- Teacher orientation around new curriculum during summers
- Concerned this reform will work
 - Build in success strategy

Question #3

- Need something radical
 - Make all PPS Charter Schools
- Reinvest in students...they are future educators
- Set standards and tie into academic standards
- Some kids cannot be in classroom; radical alternative
- Give teachers tools
- Health partners in school (including mental health)
- Mental health issues need other assistance
- Career development K-12
- Make "credits" transfer earlier than 7th grade
- Development needs of children should be considered in transitions
- Put best teachers in middle school; "these teachers have a special place in heaven!"
- Teachers protected during reform
- Better food, nutrition

Table 11 (Shalonda Scott, Facilitator)

Summary Report:

- Child choice; 5 years makes sense b/c leaves time with NCLB
- Teacher support
- Teacher accountability
- City population; attract, attract or repel, captures reform aspects
- Addressing and identity crisis, may seem macro but it will have an effect on reform, racism and discrimination
- Create a school district liaison for parents, staff, teachers and parents connected

Question #1

- Every child has a caring adult in their school
- Area college/university partnerships(business community too)
- More school location/type choices
- 5 year plan-smart choice due to NCLB change, etc.

Question #2

- People are moving because of reform
- Retain and attract city population (total choice districts); be aware of consequences
- Need teacher support--tools, resources and additional staff
- Teacher favorites...allow students to play...pass time
- Teacher/test assessment (benchmarking)
- Principal turnover
- Bring back community education partners

- Extra student attention
- Ongoing teacher accountability
- Career/technical prep integrated with academic
- District staff liaison for parents
- Greater expectations for parents and guardians
 - Observation: Dropouts tend to have less parent involvement
- All students' needs met
- CAS vs. PSP, etc.
- Tracking and teachers
- Differentiating learning and individual instruction
- PPS racist/segregated; all aspects
- Teach everything!
- Role of school districts to help parents?
- Community service
- What's accountability for parent paperwork?
- Paraprofessional concerns
- Reform in relation to NCLB and 2008 presidential election
- Uncertainty on the higher achieving students; seems to focus on low performing
 - Close gap at expense of higher achieving students
 - Affects "middle" students
 - Goes back to reaching all students

Question #3

- Evidence-based form
 - Base decisions off pertinent and current research
 - Increase funds for educational research
 - "Best practices applied by best teachers"
 - Student interest
 - Wanting to learn

Table 12 (Elaine Evosevic-Lozada, Facilitator)

Summary Report:

- The connection to the arts
- Like partnerships with universities, lacks role of arts, culture and sports, teach skills and give a reason for celebration
- Connecting the older population that could bring a lot to the table; character building
- Acceptable levels of readiness
- Very important that students see connections between their education and the world around them and their futures
- Empathy and problem-solving skills

Question #1

- School/university partnerships, hospitals, cultural organizations
- Safety
- Schools becoming more arts-friendly
- Promotion of interdisciplinary learning methodologies
- Single-gender school options
- Options/choices increased
- Preparation for non-college bound students
- Speaking, reading and writing skills strengthened
- Flexibility
- Strengthening technical schools

- Students need a sense of purpose
- Arts at center of developing critical thinking
- Students need empathy and self-discipline; good character
- Collaboration between schools and human services
- Parent-Teacher-Student partnerships
- Athletic connections improvement
- After school programs improved; extra curricular connections
- Ramp up programs important
- Pre-school, early childhood programs
- Lack of role for arts in R.U.?; need for all grade levels and all schools
 - = increased community involvement and cause for celebration
 - Gives reason and purpose

Question #2

- Safety and discipline lacking=teacher time wasted
- Need to adjust accepted readiness levels at schools
- Timing of school day reconsidered?
- Concern of shrinking population; more elderly than youth
- How to engage the elderly community with kids/schools?
- Mentoring/tutoring/community service opportunities
- Too much changing of schools/closings/restructuring=disruptive
- Showcase evidence of community partnerships that already exist

Table 13 (K. Chase Patterson, Facilitator)

Summary Report:

- Hopeful because the district has finally identified our goals; strategic and systemic change
- Concerned about open enrollment; could backfire that students will leave if not accepted into a school
- School in NY for open enrollment and school ended up failing
- Other ideas: students are viewed as the customer and superior service is provided
- Coaches coaching athletes and do not have success in a certain sport
- Big brothers and big sisters in our program
- 360 degree progress for our schools

Question #1

- Action district-wide
- 9th grade prepared
- Career/technical education
 - Focus (non-traditional) on new areas: culinary, beauty, knowing how to run a business (entrepreneurship)
 - Supportive structure for skill sets
- One school centrally located, one bus; model CAPA/Connelly sites
- Partner with business community just like colleges
 - Bidwell & PPG Chemists
- New focus on innovative partnerships
- Encouraged
 - 5 years ago-up in arms about state of flux
 - We have learned change is necessary, systemic change not piecemeal
- Safety, stop cruelty
- Readiness
- Global thinking
- Roosevelt first to acknowledge problems; sincerity in finding a strategic plan
- Hopeful for university partnerships

- Caution against 9th grade funneling
- Offer different programs at different schools so if student minds change they don't have to change schools
- Acknowledge safety issues in high school and middle schools
 - Hazing-figure out ways to cut back
 - Big brother/sister assigned to 9th graders
- Beef up psychological services; partnership?
- Volunteer group-mentoring family; show them the ropes for schools
- Pittsburgh Promise incentive to move/stay in Pittsburgh
- Raise bar for students
 - Push kids harder
 - Need support for homework
 - Non-traditional hours
- We need to help every student to envision college
- Feel safe
 - Security guards-training; respect students
- Offer new things, new languages (Chinese)

Question #2

- Implementation across different high schools; equity
 - Who will monitor? Board?
- Prepared teachers
- Misguided idealism may destroy the city
 - Trying to maintain a middle class in the city
 - Achievement not just due to resources
- Fear regarding open admission to Alderdice
- Schenley IB good example
- CAPA good example
- Equity concern could backfire → middle class flight; people vote with their feet!
- Community is the city, not just the neighborhood
- Improve parents and sense of community
- CAPA draws kids from outside PITTSBURGH; kids want to be there
- Carrick had to offer choice last year due to NCLB; no big flight
- Audition/application process to get in where you want to be
- Needs committal parents
- If you don't get into your choice, you move
- Room for improvement at the good schools too
- Make sure all kids have opportunities; it's cheaper than the alternative
- Cincinnati had a viable system; if you passed exam you got into the top school
 - Had to maintain to stay there
 - Schenley IB a good example
- What for kids who don't want to be there? Discipline plan?

Question #3

- Thrive in the world
- Algebra for all pre-6th graders
- 7th grade opposition up; same w/foreign language
- Listen to students (administrators must)
- Hire teachers, now we wait until August
 - Should hire competitively ahead of time
- Sports handling is awful; coaches not skilled, poor match
- Arts and music
- Sports for every level
- Student is the customer
- Customer survey (students); not popularity but effective

- 360° reviews; public and teacher
- Therapeutic mental health in middle and high school; social services to meet these needs
- Full year schedule
- Trimester
- Internships

Appendix-Categorized Statements

Everything listed here was taken directly from the notepads used by A+ Schools' facilitators. Every word or phrase written here was said once. Each "+" sign indicates how many additional times the word or phrase was used. This list was categorized for ease of use and analysis by A+ Schools.

What did you hear tonight that made you feel hopeful about the future of Pittsburgh's High Schools? What elements of the High School Reform plan do you think are most promising and why?

Safety and Discipline

- Don't suspend!
- Behavior issues-no control
- Kids recognize no consequences
- No consequences questions
- Consequences for actions; suspension not answer
- Welcoming and safe
- Truancy
- School security staff too low
- Safety addressed
- Safety
- Safety, stop cruelty
- Acknowledge safety issues in high school and middle schools
 - Hazing-figure out ways to cut back
 - Big brother/sister assigned to 9th graders
- Feel safe: Security guards-training; respect students

Partnerships

- "5 legged stool" (+)
- University partnerships
- University partnerships
- Hopeful for university partnerships
- PPS-reach out
- Summerbridge collaboration with Sewickley Academy/formerly (WT)
- Use this as a model
- Partner with universities
- Mentoring from industry-specific people
 - Like job, follow-up/check-up
- Community partners
- Utilizing local resources → university
- Work with community before kids come to school
- Something for the students--support a total community buy-in
- Compact = commitment
- Business community is looking to see if there is a workforce coming out of this town
- Show ways for specific businesses, churches and universities to get involved

- The kids say, "Who cares about me?"; This will show the community cares
- Partner (University) to commit
- Area college/university partnerships(business community too)
- School/university partnerships, hospitals, cultural organizations
- Collaboration between schools and human services
- Parent-Teacher-Student partnerships
- Athletic connections improvement
- After school programs improved; extra curricular connections
- Partner with business community just like colleges
 - Bidwell & PPG Chemists
- New focus on innovative partnerships
- Parent involvement
- No mention extra curricular activities, sports and arts
- Grandparents raising kids; very complicated
- Resources for parents

Career and Technical

- Creative, outside box programs; health careers, etc.
 - Marriage of career and tech programs
- Tech schools; don't lose kids who aren't going to college!
- Career and technical was eliminated
- Career and Technical Education
- Preparation for non-college bound students
- Strengthening technical schools
- Career/technical education
 - Focus (non-traditional) on new areas: culinary, beauty, knowing how to run a business (entrepreneurship)
 - Supportive structure for skill sets

Pittsburgh Promise

- Pittsburgh Promise → important to know that you (everyone!) can go to college
- Pittsburgh Promise

- Path toward life
- Tie higher education to parents, schools etc. at all ages
- Pittsburgh Promise
 - Access to school afterwards for all kids
 - Attracts population back to city
- Support to get to Pittsburgh Promise
- Theory of Pittsburgh Promise is good
- Pittsburgh Promise incentive to move/stay in Pittsburgh

Preparation for High School

- Ramp Up Program → “No Child Left”; helps kids overcome the 5+ generations
- Push at elementary school to learn
- 9th grade special transition
- Change needs to happen in lower levels
- “9th grade is not working!” (High school teacher quote)
- Need “ramp up” before HS
- Focus on 9th graders—kids say, “When am I going to use this?”; university partnerships can add relevance
- “We can’t work miracles in high school.” (High school teacher quote)
- Kids not prepared for 9th grade, start in 7th grade
- Ramp up programs important
- Pre-school, early childhood programs
- 9th grade prepared
- Readiness
- Caution against 9th grade funneling
- Want to know more; middle school years
- Low-performing middle schools are a joke; zoo
- Advisors to HS; change, selection critical

Scope of the Reform

- No one has done this; good to admit that!
- Whole school not just high school
- Systemic approach and fix whole framework; district wide at all levels
- Strategies are the right ones to focus on
- Five point focus of the plan (page 7, second slide)
- Courage/Content/Implementation needed:
 - Courage from School Board and Administration
 - Content that is directed to life
 - Implementation thru coalition of parents/teachers
 - Redirecting federal funding from war effort, etc. to support all schools
- Not just HS, but earlier, system-wide improvement

- Going in right direction but still stuck in old models
- There are ideas to be a creative approach
- Reform is exciting!
- Willing to challenge basic ideas of high schools; 42 minute periods are ridiculous!
- Superintendent understands we are in a crisis
- Open to ideas is good
- Innovation is good
- Relationships, rigor, relevance, rewards
- Capsulate into a clear, motivating vision
- We want to do something that is not being done anywhere else in the country
- Concern for kids who are in 9th, 10th and 11th grades and in the middle of the change
- Don’t eliminate good or what is working
- Will take a while
- Creating expectations
- Community
- Systemic reform
- Will and vision
- Leadership
- Inclusive
- 5 yr plan-smart choice due to NCLB change,
- Action district-wide
- Encouraged: 5 years ago-up in arms about state of flux; We have learned change is necessary, systemic change not piecemeal
- Global thinking
- Roosevelt first to acknowledge problems; sincerity in finding a strategic plan
- Loss of students and people in Pittsburgh; responsibility of Pittsburgh Leaders (not all schools)
- Promising: grant makers on board; data driven; team left city to do site tours

Culture Change and Building Hope

- Provides hope to all
- Re-instill school colors and school pride!
- Changing the school culture
- Sense of hope in entire community
- Hopeful view of reform; implementation is the key!
- School culture; preserve and build on existing cultures
- Students need a sense of purpose
- Students need empathy and self-discipline; good character

Personalization and additional supports

- Administrative supports
- Shadow/Orientation program

- Student support; goal setting for future relationships with caring adult role models
- Emphasis on relationships; not letting kids fall through cracks
- Give the message, "We believe in you!"
- Building up self-esteem; lying to them → be careful!
 - Must be authentic in all that we do in this reform
- Quality of smallness/culture
 - Caring/loving environment is important
 - Money not needed for caring environment
- Kids shouldn't be criticized by school administrators as soon as they get off the bus
- Maslow's Hierarchy and relationships; students, teachers and parents
- School ownership
- Kids need a sense of ownership
- Don't tolerate absences; teacher rewarded them
- Need teachers who care about kids; even if not the highest grades in the school--more important than how well the teacher did in school
- The vision to reach individual students where they are; involving students in developing the vision
- Kids who cannot read are not getting appropriate help in HS
- Acknowledging that children are behind
- Personalization and attention
- Student engagement; driven and focused
- Every child has a caring adult in their school
- Flexibility
- Beef up psychological services; partnership?
- Volunteer group-mentoring family; show them the ropes for schools

Arts

- Music/arts being dismantled
- Schools becoming more arts-friendly
- Arts at center of developing critical thinking
- Lack of role for arts in; need for all grade levels and all schools; Equals increased community involvement and cause for celebration; Gives reason and purpose

Choice

- Choice=opportunity no matter where you live

- Could also have collaborations with private schools
- Choice (IT, Career, Schenley IS)
- Math/science magnet
- University Park statistics are promising--100% are college-bound
- More school location/type choices
- Promotion of interdisciplinary learning methodologies
- Single-gender school options
- Options/choices increased
- One school centrally located, 1 bus; model CAPA/Connelly sites
- Offer different programs at different schools so if student minds change they don't have to change schools
- Offer new things, new languages (Chinese)

Rigor and Standards

- Raising the bar; need some expectations
- New "3 R's": Rigor, Relationships and Relevance
- Excellence for All
- All learning
- Something for kids in trouble
- Rigor
- Not just size of classes, but also need breadth in quality of courses
- Too much focus on test scores
- Don't lose the high performing kids
- Address achievement gap
- Kaplan civics no rigorous; too watered down
- Speaking, reading and writing skills strengthened
- Raise bar for students
 - Push kids harder
 - Need support for homework
 - Non-traditional hours
- We need to help every student to envision college

Teachers and Implementation

- Quality of teachers → flexibility for principals to bring in the most qualified teachers
- Teacher buy in; PFT vs. individual teacher
- Implementation; teachers must be on board
- Working with PFT and teachers
- We need unity for implementation; School board and administration must be a united front

What elements of the High School Reform plan are you concerned about or unsure of?

Probing questions:

- What questions do you have?
- What would make you feel more optimistic about these elements?
- What would you change?

Scope of Reform

- Need a plan past year one
- Large changes
 - Who stabilizes?
 - Teachers: tenure problems, contract problems; need to meet expectations
 - PSSA problems, tests, lists, etc.
 - How do you communicate better?
 - Dashboard waste of money, teachers must communicate with parents, Union issue!
- Focus on district-wide improvement may neglect schools in greatest need
- Impatience, good and bad trait
 - Implement it right the first time, let it work
 - People could get scared
- Good programs get cut at expense of “new ideas”
- “Systemic change”; could be scary, go slow and smooth
- How do you evaluate/track progress/outcomes?
- Measurements
 - What are other evaluation measures?
 - Could we go beyond standardized tests?
 - Multiple metrics connected to 5 key areas (safe & welcoming, etc.)
- Developmental assets; possible evaluation tool
- Implementation of elementary right-sizing curriculum is issue (Colfax)
- Don't think K-8 is done, though
- Brass tacks-action!
- Student representative—each HS on task force, with regular parents; empower
- Deliberative forums for students
- Change plan built first and then implement
- How do you do the curve (in Roosevelt's presentation) when the state will penalize you?
- Studied schools, schools visited are not like Pittsburgh demographic
- Examine cultural-relevancy of the Plan
- Whole-school reform must be interdisciplinary
- Don't mess up what's good now
- Concerned this reform will work
- People are moving because of reform
- Race/class/finances; may be more flight
- PPS racist/segregated; all aspects

- Misguided idealism may destroy the city
 - Trying to maintain a middle class in the city
 - Achievement not just due to resources
- Equity concern could backfire → middle class flight; people vote with their feet!
- PPS should better communicate consequences of NCLB act watch list-plans
- Reform in relation to NCLB and 2008 presidential election
- What input from study?
- Concern of shrinking population; more elderly than youth
- Timing of school day reconsidered?

Standards and Rigor

- Loss of thinking skills
- Explain to kids why they are in school
- Not a rigid academic atmosphere but creative
- How will each student's academic needs be met w/out tracking?
- How can we be a leading school with such a great focus on testing and standards?
- Will we be teaching skills or ideas?
- Will we imbue kids w/a love of learning?
- That too much time will be spent on testing
- Does testing measure student completely
- Discouraged by explanation of “Excellence For All”
 - What does it mean for each kid?
 - Can we build in more flexibility to meet needs? Not just create programs and hope students fit them
- Dumbing down of education; how does it compare to peers nationally?
 - How to supplement individual learning programs?
- High stakes testing environment is not conducive to learning for learning's sake and safe and welcoming culture
- Classroom participation
- Tracking equity-does current test (IQ) serve as accurate gauge?
- Accountability; same accountability as community partners; students' K-12 accountability
- Kids should love learning in general
- Standardized tests schools become part of grade average

- Cincinnati had a viable system; if you passed exam you got into the top school
 - Had to maintain to stay there
 - Schenley IB a good example
- Uncertainty on the higher achieving students; seems to focus on low performing
 - Close gap at expense of higher achieving students
 - Affects "middle" students
 - Goes back to reaching all students
- Anything in the way of quality
- Room for improvement at the good schools too
- Understand graduate success at Perry

Partnerships

- Summerbridge model
- Collaboration must be meaningful; reach out, recognize well-run programs
- Don't ignore small, good models
- How to replicate these models at scale
- The district is not facilitating collaboration with good programs
- Be sure the business community is part of community leg of stool; internships
- A savings program like work-study; \$1 of earnings put in savings
- Partner with existing/supporting community organizations
- Reform with stakeholders
- Study successful PPS alums and successful community residents/businesses, bring back in and learn lessons
- Pittsburgh community leaders must be involved with the contractor of the alternative school (beyond focus groups)
- University partnerships; do they have answers?
- Bring back community education partners
- Showcase evidence of community partnerships that already exist
- Better utilize Pittsburgh cultural resources like museums, etc.; build cultural resources into curriculum
- Mentoring/tutoring/community service opportunities+
- How to engage the elderly community with kids/schools?
- Community is the city, not just the neighborhood

Career and Technical

- Need trade and technical support
- Career/technical prep integrated with academic

Teaching and Implementation

- Block scheduling; how do you implement?
- We are more concerned about teacher's contracts than student's learning
- Principals have flexibility to hire and retain best teachers
- Teacher professional development
 - Should be relentless and continually relevant
- How do we learn from experience?
 - How do we make adjustments in implementation quickly?
 - Create new system that's flexible
- Are teachers learning how to deal with special needs students?
- Unity of faculty
- Teachers-embody high expectations, enthusiasm for learning
- Teaching skills is paramount, classroom control the most important factor
- Culture of respect
- Strategy for teacher accountability
- Teachers look the same!
- Adequate and ongoing training; not just in first year
- Kaplan Math was bad implementation
- Ask teachers to teach kids to be good people; isn't that a parent's job?
- Amazed at teachers who are allowed to stay in the district; would not be tolerated in suburban school district
- Buy-in from teachers isn't evident
 - Silence on need for cultural change
 - Need concrete strategy and strong input from union
- Implementation of strong "affect" initiatives
- Nothing about challenging the top student; excellence
- If you keep cutting staff you have less manpower to execute the vision
- Recognize and encourage teacher excellence
- Teacher orientation around new curriculum during summers
- Need teacher support--tools, resources and additional staff
- Teacher favorites...allow students to play...pass time
- Teacher/test assessment (benchmarking)
- Ongoing teacher accountability
- Implementation across different high schools; equity
 - Who will monitor? Board?
- Prepared teachers
- Unions
- Need ability to affect unions
- Introduce child to outside world and teachers
 - Build in success strategy

- Tracking and teachers
- Will more HS require more administrators?; if small need more! School within school addresses that
- Accountability for principals, teachers; parents and students should be accountable
 - Need definitions of what they are accountable for
 - All are accountable and therefore no one is
- Principal turnover
- How to create system of staff ownership
- Paraprofessional concerns

Choice

- Unsure of choice
 - How does it really work with unequal educational opportunities?
- Extent to which high schools will be narrowly themed (pre-mature specialization)
- People do not know about existing effective programs (e.g. Passport Program)
- Alternative High Schools
 - How do we deal with kids who don't fit "normal" mode?
 - More one-on-one? Parents, tutors, etc.
- Choice must come with parental education
- Open house mandatory, creates requirements for parental involvement
- Also do service and meet behavior requirements, proficiency tests for some special schools; motivation
- Teach everything!
- Full choice throughout district--100%; takes away community identity; destroys communities; we need some choice!
- Offer lots of opportunities at every site
- If "you" don't get into your choice, "you" move
- Preserve and strengthen CAS & IB at Schenley
- CAS vs. PSP, etc.
- CAPA good example
- CAPA draws kids from outside PITTSBURGH; kids want to be there
- Carrick had to offer choice last year due to NCLB; no big flight
- Make sure all kids have opportunities; it's cheaper than the alternative
- Fear regarding open admission to Allderdice
- Rename the gifted program
- Retain and attract city population (total choice districts); be aware of consequences
- Audition/application process to get in where you want to be

Preparation for High School

- Not ramping up early enough
- Issues with ramp up programs not starting until 5th or 6th grade
- Be sure not to focus only on H.S.; earlier focus
- Do kids have to specialize at HS?
- Are 8th and 9th graders ready to pick a career?; More general liberal arts--address by learning about careers

Personalization and Other Supports

- Address basic needs and social family needs, life issues
- Social workers, more of them
- Inclusion/Special Ed classes should also be included in full-size/primary classes
- Identify passions early on
- Gifted all days, all kids in all schools (enrichment)
- Know each kid; all kids should find and achieve to their talents
- Need to adjust accepted readiness levels at schools
- Marcus Buckingham--"Developing Strengths"; corporate world; work with your strengths
- Differentiating learning and individual instruction
- Extra student attention
- All students' needs met
- How do we inspire children?

Music and The Arts

- Art programs
- Music and art are "right brain"

The Pittsburgh Promise

- Who pays for Pittsburgh Promise?; it's premature
- Not convinced Pittsburgh Promise is the best use of funds; gap financing
- Wouldn't it be better to prepare students better?
- Preparation and planning for college is important
- Bank it in school program; students earn money to attend and get money when they graduate
- Not realistic to say all kids should go to college
- College not only type of success

Parent Engagement

- Lack of communication between school personnel and parents
- How we will get more parents engaged?
- Community engagement
 - Community meetings happen at 10th hour
 - Appears programs are being rushed in
 - Doesn't allow for enough community input
 - Who facilitates conversation?
- Low self-confidence; parents need to be involved

- Tie incentives for Pittsburgh Promise to parental involvement; Waivers for application fees, etc.
- Makes a difference in behavior to have parents there
- Communication with community
 - How did people find out about tonight?
- How do we build a community?
 - Have more conversations like tonight!
- Perception that high schools do not like parents/teachers/programs in their schools
- Parents checking out
 - Getting info from teachers impossible because no one is there after 3PM
 - Assumption by parents that HS kids do not need parental involvement
- District staff liaison for parents
- Greater expectations for parents and guardians
 - Observation: Dropouts tend to have less parent involvement
- Role of school districts to help parents?
- Needs committal parents
- Need system for success when parent isn't there
- What's accountability for parent paperwork?
- Improve parents and sense of community

School Funding

- Is that just a cheap tool? Invest in education for education's sake!
- Saving \$\$ but losing the students
- Why are we one of the highest spending per student but low results?
- Need change in how schools are funded
- How can PPS do this with less \$\$ and fewer teachers?
- Cuts from state

Safety and Discipline

Discipline?

- How do you create a safe and welcoming environment?
 - Teachers and administration held responsible, even the secretaries!
- Instruct Secretary/office "folks" in how to engage first point of contact!
- What will happen with discipline?
- Will there be meaningful community service for disciplined students?
- Bus monitors
- What for kids who don't want to be there? Discipline plan?
- Discipline not consistent at schools
- You as a teacher must be consistent in discipline
- But the system around you also needs to be consistent and it is not
 - Teacher writes referral → breakdown when referral is implemented
- Reach beyond school community to help w/discipline
- People who deal with these issues; seek their help with social issues
- Personnel--will there be social workers?; Trained people to follow up-classroom
- Dress code to create expectations
- Follow and enforce the rules (discipline rewards)
- Safety and discipline lacking=teacher time wasted
- Daily newspaper (& web) attendance at each school; kids and teachers
- Concerned some children don't form attachments
- Too much changing of schools/closings/restructuring equals disruptive
- Facility issues-wearing a "hoodie" because it's cold and then being disciplined because of dress code policy

What other specific ideas do you have about remaking our high schools to better prepare our students to thrive in the world?

Scope of Reform

- Kids First Period! Not teachers, school bus schedules, teacher's union...
- Parents-community-students have not historically been engaged in decision making. Can it happen?
- Good, phased approach
- Not hiding problems...acknowledge them
- Diversity initiatives
- Take advantage of loyalty to Pittsburgh, people who love it; "You could offer me Paradise and I would take Pittsburgh"
- Best school district (not urban)
- Good base to build on
- Prioritize what's most important; conflicts with sports
- Involve the media in positive PR
- Evidence-based form
 - Base decisions off pertinent and current research
 - Increase funds for educational research
 - "Best practices applied by best teachers"
 - Student interest
 - Wanting to learn
- Student is the customer
- Reinvest in students...they are future educators
- If I could tell the Board one thing it's:
 - Include all stakeholders
 - Keep thinking big
 - Do things you know are going to work; research based
 - We shouldn't take incredible risks; calculate risks
 - Provide caring for each and every student
 - Try something new; what we've been doing isn't working
 - Spend the money on implementation, not just on studies
 - Chart well; study and give some results
 - Don't pay people to do something; mix of outside expertise and local expertise
 - Reorganize Vo-Tech

Standards and Rigor

- Set realistic expectations
- Roles defined, model of engagement
- Measures for success; Outcomes, success indicators
- Students/Parents on board

- Set standards and tie into academic standards
- Look at other models for ideas and excellence
- Expect more from the kids, parents and school
- Thrive in the world

Partnerships

- After school clubs and activities
 - Big Brothers, Big Sisters → no equal access to schools
- Partner for Social Service/Human Services
- Holistic approach; Students, families, teachers, communities; Takes a village to engage the village
- Create a net through partnerships
 - Allow programs into school during the day
 - Keep schools open in afternoon
- Compact-Businesses/Community
 - Offer internships to students
 - Retirees as mentors (baby boomers)
 - Field trips to worksites
 - City council and government help teach the civics course
- Community and parent involvement
- Health partners in school (including mental health)
- University partnerships (more)

Teaching and Implementation

- Get rid of the coaches! Always take the good teachers!
- Performance based teacher's contracts
- Best teachers at most needy schools (who want to be there)
- What new technologies are teachers learning and teaching?
- Why no consequences for teachers' bad teaching, inefficiencies?
- Teacher buy in
- Teachers as role models in dress and actions
- Mentors for teachers; continuing education workshops
- Teacher support staff
- Idea to think about → same teachers stay with students grade to grade
- All teachers need to do personality inventory to determine whether they should be teachers
- Core teachers stay connected 4 years w/student advisors (homeroom teacher)
- Co-teaching model; one to teach content and one to re-direct behavior
- Incentive for good teachers
 - Tuition reimbursement

- Give teachers supplies (paper)
- Compete with suburbs; make teachers want to teach in PPS
- Fewer class preps and build/improve student teacher relationships
- Unions focus shift to teacher-student bonding
- Give teachers tools
- Put best teachers in middle school; “these teachers have a special place in heaven!”
- Teachers protected during reform
- Hire teachers, now we wait until August
 - Should hire competitively ahead of time
- PFT cooperation
- 360° reviews; public and teacher
- Give principals more authority/power, less paperwork to run school
- Union must respect principal
- Principals shift too often

Choice

- Community and Service Learning
- How do you implement a full choice district?
- Idea → Keep K-6 and 7-12 (no middle school)
- Doing community service to build character; make it mandatory
- Choice
- Listen to HS students
- Internships
- Sports for every level
- Better food, nutrition
- Career development K-12
- Full year schedule
- Trimester
- Algebra for all pre-6th graders
- 7th grade opposition up; same w/foreign language
- Make “credits” transfer earlier than 7th grade
- Need something radical
 - Make all PPS Charter Schools

Personalization and Other Supports

- Teach kids to focus on hard work versus innate intelligence; the brain is like a muscle
- Skill building courses and workshops; courtesies, respectful, etiquette, social skills
- Step by step procedures; how to be better, details
- Look at the times school start; it needs to be later!!
- Students should be canvassed; what kind of school do they want?
- Smaller class sizes++
- Flexible schedules to allow more time at schools w/o class responsibility

- Delay school start times so kids get more sleep; HS kids biologically late risers++
- Edina, MN saw a decrease in absenteeism when kids got more sleep and increased attention in earlier classes
- Expect more from the kids, parents and school
- Development needs of children should be considered in transitions
- Some kids cannot be in classroom; radical alternative
- Mental health issues need other assistance
- Therapeutic mental health in middle and high school; social services to meet these needs
- Listen to students (administrators must)

Music and The Arts

- Retain art, music and physical education++

The Pittsburgh Promise

- Ready for college and Pittsburgh Promise

Parent Engagement

- Technology available to all → parents and children; give kids the access and ability to be creative and explore
- What are we doing about quality parent involvement/engagement?
- How do we “go out and get” parents more involved?
 - Reduce intimidation
 - Positive support/interaction from faculty/staff
- Help parents through the system
- Offer training to Pittsburgh professionals parents (they did it-Donna Vlassich) on how to interact with students
- Meaningful, respectful role for parents and community and students and their dreams
- Community and parent involvement
- Parent/student/school contracts
- Customer survey (students); not popularity but effective+

Safety and Discipline

- Social workers-pilot program in PPS
 - Not spread out across 3 schools
 - Social workers working in schools with teachers/administrators to address issues interfering with education
 - Teachers can't do this!
- Focus on discipline
- Alternatives to suspension
- Personal, safe; know the kids

Miscellaneous

-This room is bad environment for this discussion.
Is it a lack of respect for community? Not inviting.

-Sports handling is awful; coaches not skilled, poor match

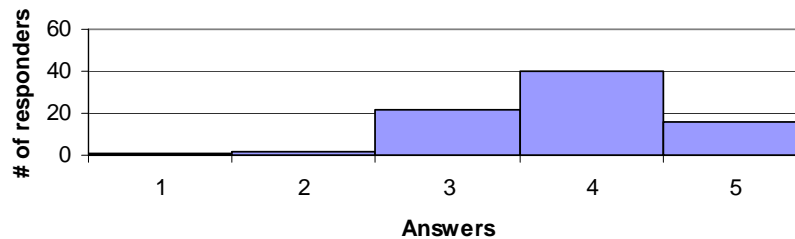
A+ Schools
Remaking Our High Schools: Graduating All Students With A Plan For The Future
March 27, 2007

Event Evaluations

Rating Scale:

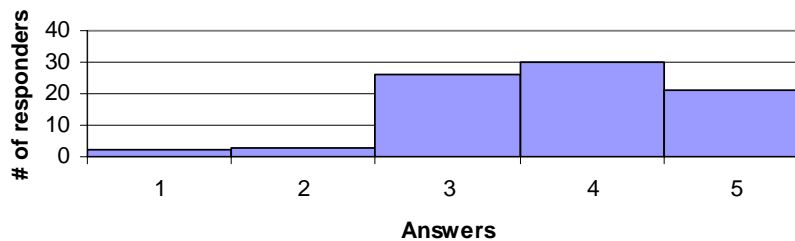
1=Extremely Unsatisfied/Not valuable, 5=Extremely Satisfied/Very Valuable

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



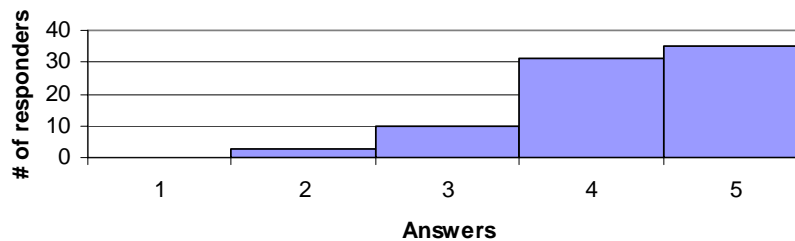
3 out of 84 responders did not answer this question

Question #2: How valuable did you find Superintendent Roosevelt's Presentation?



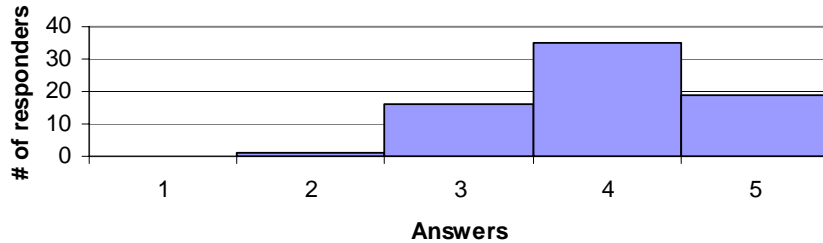
2 out of 84 responders did not answer this question

Question #3: How valuable did you find the facilitated breakout groups?



5 out of 84 responders did not answer this question

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



13 out of 84 responders did not answer this question

Question #5: What did you find to be most valuable about tonight’s program?

“Learning about HS reform, having an opportunity to contribute to my ideas and hear other people's ideas and concerns, Hearing Mr. Roosevelt”

“PowerPoint presentation about reform of Pittsburgh High Schools (However, additional facts could have been presented about schools like University Park and the Vision). Also the group input was quite valuable.”

“The opportunity for the community to participate in this process. It is a tribute to Pittsburgh that people want to participate.”

“Civic participation and willingness to think creatively”

“As a parent, it is very encouraging to be WELCOMED at a school related meeting...to be told that ideas and discussion are valued.”

Question #6: What would you change?

“More HS students might have been helpful here”

“Mr. Roosevelt should have addressed more questions from the groups, and since he left he lost some input. (He could have circulated among the break-out groups.)”

“To meet more often--to be able to develop communities of discussion with the same groups

“Accountability in schools (teachers)--Accountability with parents to give their own kids a head start and help during the K-12 process”

“More input from parents and students and the African American community, the obvious target of the achievement gap”

Question #7: How did you find out about this meeting?

“Notice sent via our principal”

“School flyer”

“(A+ Schools) Mailing and email”

“Email, phone calls, work of mouth from colleague”

“Paper (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)”

