

More School Works Q&A

Q: What exactly do School Works interviewers do?

A: During their 30-minute interviews, volunteers follow a checklist of questions, or interview instrument, to collect specific information regarding the learning conditions and opportunities that exist for the students in each school — the things that make them “work.” Volunteers are expected to remain neutral and objective while collecting information as researchers on behalf of A+ Schools. Principal, guidance counselor, teacher and volunteer evaluations from the 2009, 2010 and 2011 School Works programs indicate a high level of satisfaction with the experience.

Q: What kind of questions do they ask?

A: In 2011, our volunteers focused on such issues as the implementation of the initial parts of the Empowering Effective Teachers plan; the use of the RISE rubric as it relates to contributing to improving the quality of teaching; the ways in which all students access rigorous courses that prepare them for college or careers; how behavior is addressed and managed to create safe learning environments for all students; and the ways in which systems operate to engage and support students most likely to disengage.

Q: How were these questions developed?

A: This year’s questions included many of the questions from previous years along with new questions developed to further understand the priorities identified through earlier interviews and hear the unique perspective of teachers. A+ Schools staff members worked with researchers, district administrators, and PFT leaders to develop the questions for the 2011 interviews.

Q: When does the next round of recruitment, training and interviews begin?

A: Recruitment of School Works volunteers is ongoing with training sessions held in early fall. Most interviews are scheduled during October.

Q: How often do interviews take place?

A: We conduct School Works interviews once during the school year..

Q: Where did volunteers go this past fall?

A: In fall 2011, School Works volunteers were sent in teams to interview more than 100 teachers at the district’s high schools and middle schools (including four 6-12 schools). Teachers at the three Pittsburgh charter schools (City Charter High School, Career Connections High School and Urban Pathways Charter School) were also invited to participate. Our goal was to interview a representative number of teachers from all public schools (approximately 10 percent).

Q: How many volunteers are involved in each interview?

A: We assign two to three volunteers per interview. One person asks questions, one person records the answer and the third person, if available, serves as an extra set of eyes and ears.

Q: How is the information tabulated and analyzed?

A: Volunteers bring the data they have collected to A+ Schools to be tabulated and analyzed.

Q: How is this information used?

A: Each spring, we release the latest School Works data at community meetings. We engage the public in these meetings so they can participate in analyzing the information, prioritizing needs and forming recommendations for action aimed at improving the quality of education in all of our schools. **Individual names and school names are always kept confidential.**

Over the past two years, A+ Schools has hosted six community meetings — with nearly 400 people participating — to present and discuss the findings from the 2009 and 2010 School Works interviews. These participants were polled about their view on priorities, which became the basis for the recommendations we made to the District. (Full reports from each meeting can be found at www.aplusschools.org.) In the second year of School Works research, we found evidence that school practices have changed in response to these recommendations and priorities. **Our next community meeting will be held on March 24, 2012.**

Q: Is School Works meant to be an evaluation of schools?

A: No. This information is reported as a description of the overall conditions in high schools and middle schools, and not a school-by-school comparison or evaluation.

Q: What are the bottom line results A+ Schools hopes to achieve through School Works?

A: As a community advocate for improvement in public education, A+ Schools seeks to mobilize the public through the School Works program to make sure that for every student in Pittsburgh, “school works.”

Q: How long does A+ Schools plan to continue the School Works program?

A: A+ Schools will continue the School Works program as long as it is able to produce reliable data about our schools that can be used to take action and fulfill our mission to inform and mobilize the public to ensure our schools are places where teachers can teach and students can learn at high levels.

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