**Tool Box - What can you do to support student success through great teaching?**

**If You Are An Advocate**
Sometimes it’s difficult to know how to support great teaching so we can help our students succeed. We’ve asked teachers, principals, counselors this question, and we’ve also taken a look at what should be in place along with an effective system of evaluation.

**Invest time in schools.** Visit them, connect them with resources, and spread the word about the importance of education – we heard this from principals, counselors, and teachers over the past four years of School Works interviews.

**Join A+ Schools in advocating for the changes we lay out in this brief.** Email info@aplusschools.org or call 412.697.1298 to join our growing list of community partners committed to equity and excellence for all of Pittsburgh’s children.

**If You Are A Parent**
It is important to build strong relationships with your child’s teacher and school leader so that you can be a powerful partner in your child’s academic success—this means being empowered to ask questions about the quality and rigor of teaching and doing your best to help your child succeed.

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*As much as you may want to know, please DO NOT ask principals or teachers for evaluation scores! Pennsylvania Act 82 prohibits school districts from releasing teachers’ evaluation scores to the public.*

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**Ask your child:**
- What homework, tests, quizzes, and/or projects do you have this week?
- Do you feel comfortable asking questions in class and requesting support from your teacher?
- What subject(s) do you like best? What subject(s) do you have trouble with, and do you think you need support?
- Do you agree that...
  - your class stays busy and doesn’t waste time?
  - your teacher explains difficult things clearly?
  - you like the ways you learn in this class?
  - you learn a lot in this class every day?

If you find your child doesn’t agree with these statements, find a constructive way to discuss your concerns with the teacher and/or principal. Ask A+ Schools for help.

**Ask your child’s teacher:**
- What are your goals or expectations for my child’s performance in your class, and how can I help support my child in meeting these goals and expectations?
- At what grade or proficiency level is my child currently performing in core subjects (math, English, science, and history/social studies)? How do you know?
If your child is not performing at his/her grade level: What kind of supports will you be providing to bring my child up to the appropriate level by year’s end? How can we work together to identify specific needs or supports that will help?

If your child is performing at grade level: How do you know throughout the year if my child is still on grade level? How can my child’s learning be accelerated or enriched? How do you know if students are ‘getting’ the subject? How do you help struggling students?

- How will you communicate my child’s progress to me, and how often should I expect an update?
- Ask to go over samples of your child’s work with his or her teacher and ask about the quality of the work. How does it compare with the state and/or district standards? What could make it better?
- Does my child complete his or her homework, seem happy in school, and participate in class?

**Ask your child’s principal:**

- How do you help teachers improve? Does your school have an area of focus for instructional improvement?
- How well do students in my child’s grade level perform in this school? Are there patterns of performance, and if so, do you know why that’s happening? What support do you provide teachers to help them improve achievement in that grade?
- How do you define an effective teacher? What is being done to ensure every child at this school is benefiting from excellent classroom instruction? How do you know it’s working?
- What do you do to support new teachers and retain effective teachers?
- What are some ways I can be a full partner in my child’s academic success?

**Talk to other parents about great teaching:**

- **Improving teaching quality helps students:** If we want to close achievement gaps and ensure all of our children graduate ready for college or career training, great teaching is the one thing schools provide that will most contribute to a student’s academic success.
- **Pittsburgh’s evaluation system is really a teacher improvement system:** The critical partnership between the PFT and PPS and the careful piloting of different measures to get feedback from teachers and principals about what works has made this system strong and focused where it should be: helping all teachers get better.
- **Evaluation is important and should be bolstered by improved conditions that support effective teaching:** These supports include quality professional development and training, positive learning environments, and strong school leadership.
- **No system is perfect and improvements should continue to be made:** Because it is critical to maintain a teacher evaluation system that is reliable, accurate, and provides meaningful feedback for improvement, PPS and the PFT should be willing to refine and improve the system based on growing research about teaching and learning.