



**2009-10  
Community Meeting #2: Courses and Tools**



**Langley High School  
2940 Sheraden Blvd  
Thursday, March 11th, 2010**

**Meeting Results**



425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 1850  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
412-258-2660  
[www.aplusschools.org](http://www.aplusschools.org)

## Results from A+ Schools Community Meeting on Courses and Tools

In October of 2009, A+ Schools launched a new program called *School Works*. It is a community action research project that involves volunteers who interviewed the principals of middle schools, high schools, 6-12 schools and charter high schools in the city of Pittsburgh. They asked questions about the resources and opportunities they are able to provide for students in the building, things they would like to provide but currently can't and the barriers that stand between them and being able to prepare every student for post-secondary education or training. The results of those interviews are being released in a series of community meetings, each one focusing on a different topic. *The purpose of the series of community meetings is to deliberate on what should be included in a community agenda for equity.*

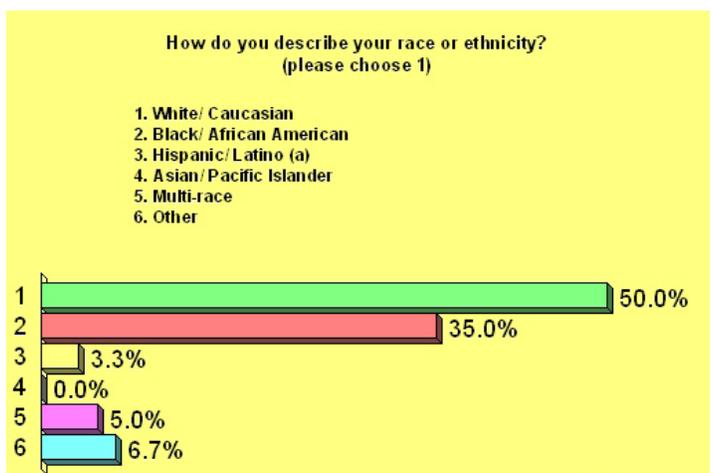
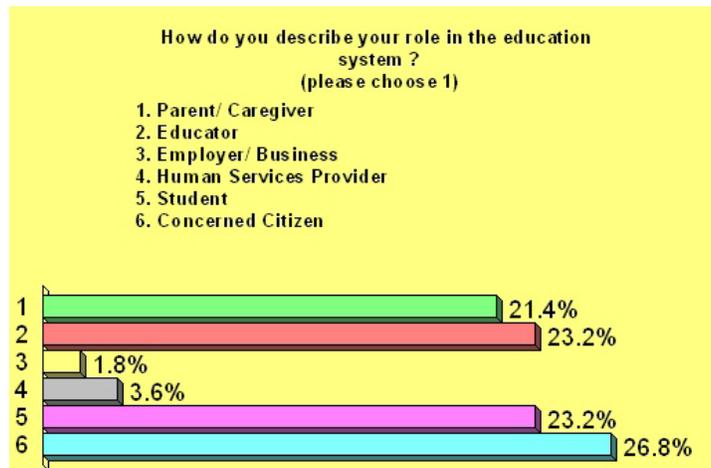
On January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010, A+ Schools hosted the first community meeting to release a portion of the School Works interview responses related to staffing and teaching supports. On March 11<sup>th</sup> 2010, A+ hosted the second community meeting at Langley High School which focused on the responses from principals related to the courses and tools available to students.

Those that attended the meeting learned about issues raised by A+ Schools about books, technology, libraries, courses and extra-curricular activities in schools. Together, they discussed the areas that concerned them the most. Afterwards, they voted on what changes they felt would have the biggest positive impact on students and issues they'd be most likely to take action. The information presented at each School Works meeting can be found at [www.aplusschools.org](http://www.aplusschools.org).

The next few pages of this summary describe the results of the community discussion and the views of those that attended.

### Who Was There?

Approximately 80 people attended to learn and discuss the responses from principals related to courses and tools. About 45% of the audience came from east or central neighborhoods, while 27% came from the west, 23% came from the south and 9% came from the north. The audience was a diverse group of parents, educators, students, human service providers and concerned citizens represented in the images to the right.

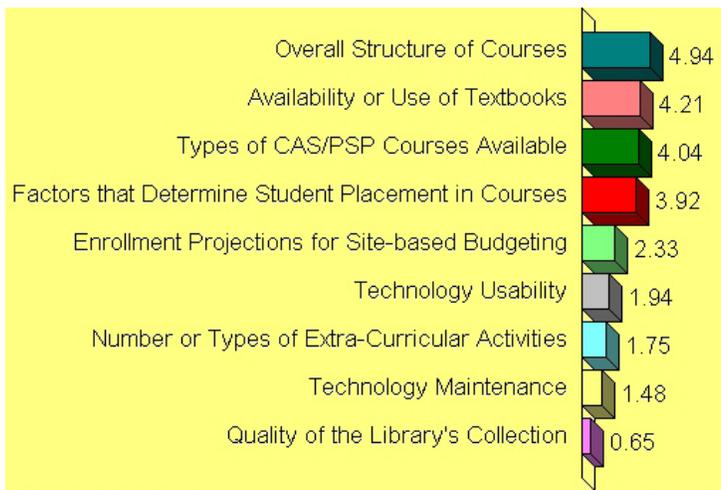


## How Were People Able to Express Their Opinions?

*Everybody got to vote!*

After the presentation and discussion, hand-held polling devices were used as a way for each person at the meeting to express themselves as an individual in response to the discussion questions. The community was asked to rank their top 3 choices for each question. A person's first choice was worth 10 points, the second was worth 9 and the third was worth 8. The numbers in the next few graphs represent the average weight the item received from the group. The higher the number the more important that item was to the community members that voted.

### What Issues Concerned People the Most?

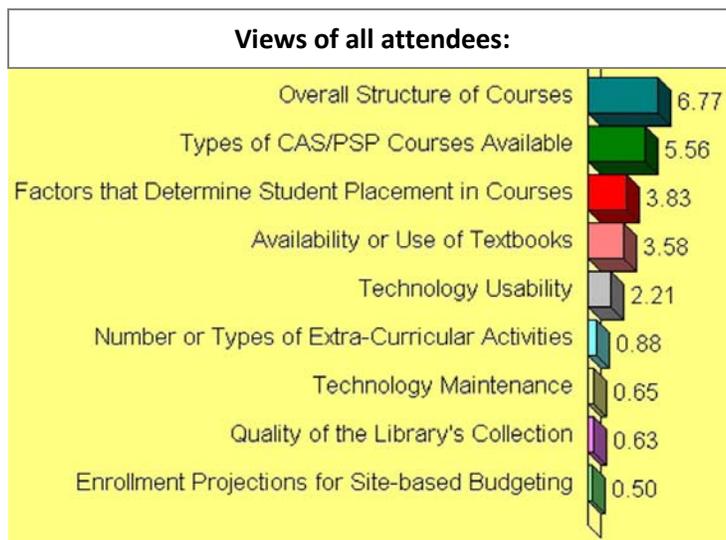


⇒ *Availability or use of textbooks and issues around courses such as the overall CAS/PSP/Mainstream structure, the types of courses available and the factors that determine student placement concerned many in the room.*

The closeness of the rankings of the top 4 issues indicates that the people in the room were concerned by a variety of issues. When we looked at the differences between the responses of different groups of people to this question, we found that students and concerned citizens were most troubled by the

overall structure of courses, while parents were most concerned about the availability or use of textbooks. Educators were the most concerned by the factors that determine student placement in courses.

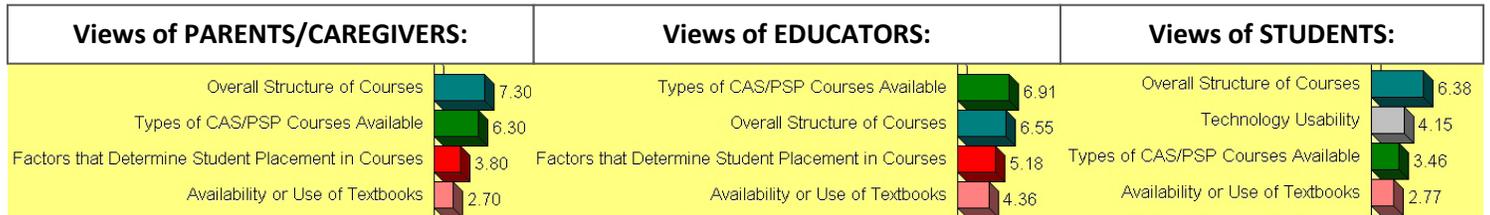
### What, if Changed, Would Have the Most Impact on Preparing ALL Students for College or Careers?



⇒ *The issues that people felt would make the biggest positive impact on students if it were changed was the overall structure of courses and the types of courses available.*

Many people raised questions about the structure of courses that were related to there not being enough challenging courses. Students, educators and parents are the groups with the most first-hand knowledge or experience of the courses available in schools, and thankfully through the voting process, we are able to see their point of

view separately. It is the consensus of these three groups that changes in the structure and types of courses available should be a priority.



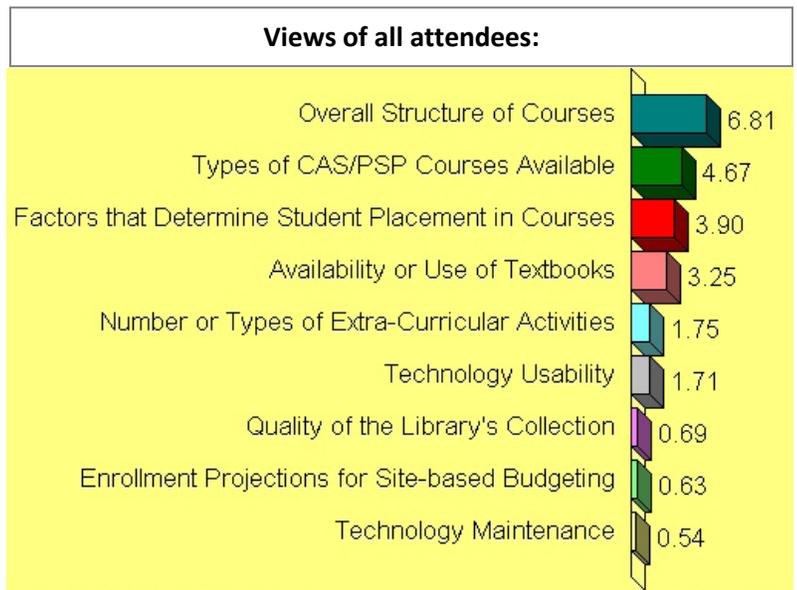
### On Which Issues Would You Be Most Likely to Take Action?

⇒ *Courses! Courses! Courses!*

There was a clear theme to the responses of the individuals in the community meeting. Courses were what concerned them the most, what they felt were the most important thing to change and the issue they felt strongly enough about to take action.

#### What are A+ Schools' Next Steps?

The purpose of this series of community meetings is to understand what's important to the public in relation to what we heard from principals during School Works interviews. A+ Schools will be forming a collective community agenda for equity and working on ways to respond to the priorities expressed by participants at this community discussion and the others. Stay tuned for more and get ready to take action on behalf of students!



The data guide that was distributed to the community at the meeting is included on the next several pages.

# SCHOOL WORKS INTERVIEW DATA: A+ Schools

Pittsburgh Public Schools: 6-12s, 9-12s, 6-8s and 2 Charters:  
**Principal Responses Regarding Courses and Tools**

**School Works** is community action research aimed to assist the public in understanding what resources and opportunities exist for students in Pittsburgh Public Schools. The goal is to develop a plan for community action to ensure we have an equitable school system in Pittsburgh. The initial phase of A+ Schools' School Works Program was to train volunteers to conduct interviews with each principal from Pittsburgh Public Middle, High, 6-12 and Charter High Schools. Volunteers interviewed 21 principals from PPS schools and 2 charter school principals using a survey consisting of 61 yes/no or short answer questions. The question topics covered the following categories: staffing, learning tools and extracurricular activities, student courses and services, student transition support and parent or caregiver involvement. *Principals were asked to answer the questions to the best of their ability during the 1 hour interview and in some cases were asked to make approximations. Principals' responses are being reported publicly in increments between January and May of 2010. Below is a selection of the principals' interview responses.*

**Interview results** are reported as a breakdown of the number of the 21 PPS principals that responded in specific ways. Schools were also categorized according to school level, magnet status, enrollment, achievement gap size and vulnerability to look for any trends in responses from principals of schools in those categories. Any statistically significant differences in responses according to any of the categories are reported with at least 95% ( $p < .05$ ) certainty that the differences were not by chance. They are noted in italics. Charter school responses were not grouped with other Pittsburgh Public Schools and because there were only 2, we were not able to determine whether any differences were statistically significant. However, some of their responses are noted.

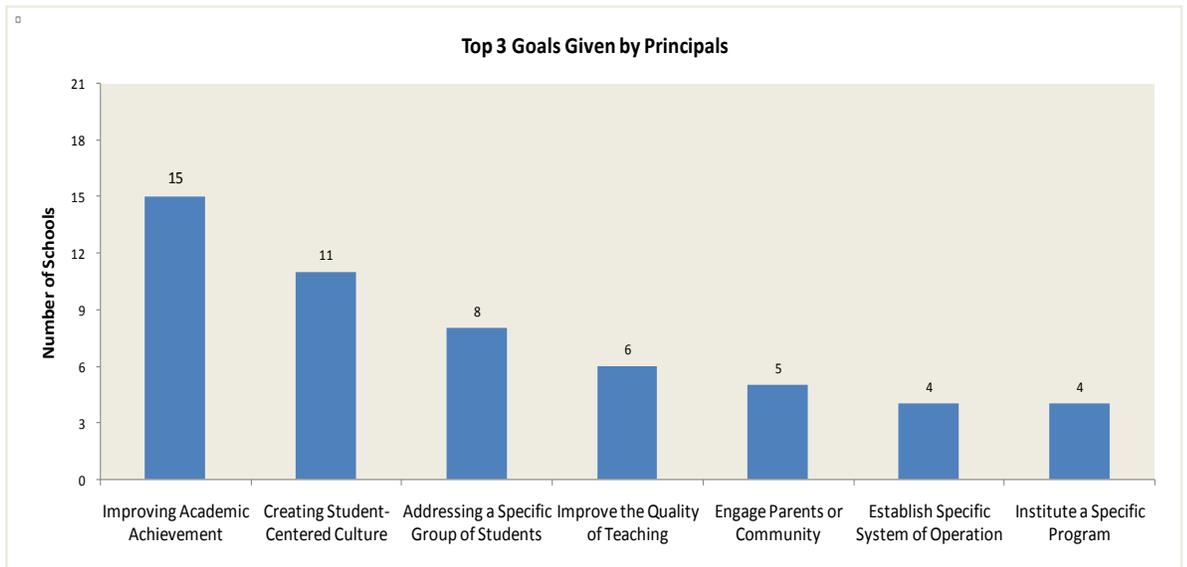
DC Voice, an organization similar to A+ Schools has been a partner in helping to design, implement and analyze the results of School Works. There are some questions that our interview teams asked in Pittsburgh that interview teams also asked principals in DC Public Schools. Significant differences between the responses of principals from DCPS and PPS are also noted in italics.



We intend for this guide to provide the community with information to use in deliberations about the kind of changes that can benefit students. These issues are highlighted throughout this document in magnifying glasses like the one to the right. Our intention is to engage families, youth and the community in what issues are most important to include in our collective advocacy agenda to ensure that all students are prepared for post-secondary education or training.

## Principal's Goals for 2009-2010

The first question we asked principals was to share their top 3 goals for the year. The graph to the right shows what principals described. The majority of principals reported their goals for



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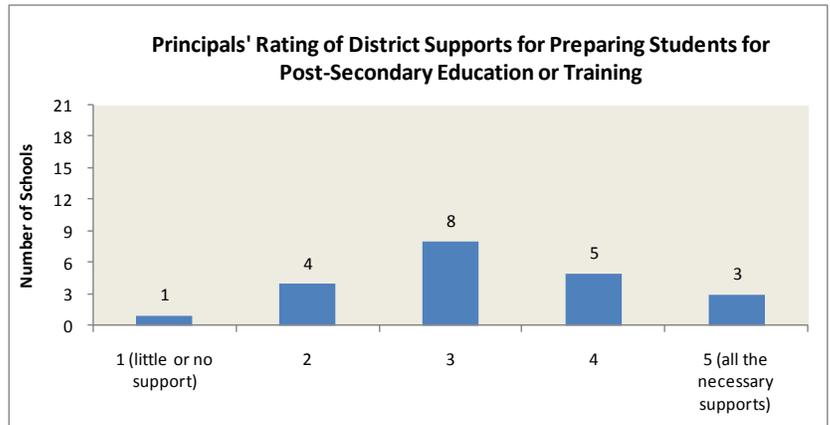
## Principal Responses Regarding Courses and Tools

the school broadly, such as improve student achievement or improve school culture. Others reported specific interventions or groups of students they planned to target with programs or services. In the case of many newly established schools, many principals had goals related to creating effective operations systems or implementing school-specific programming.

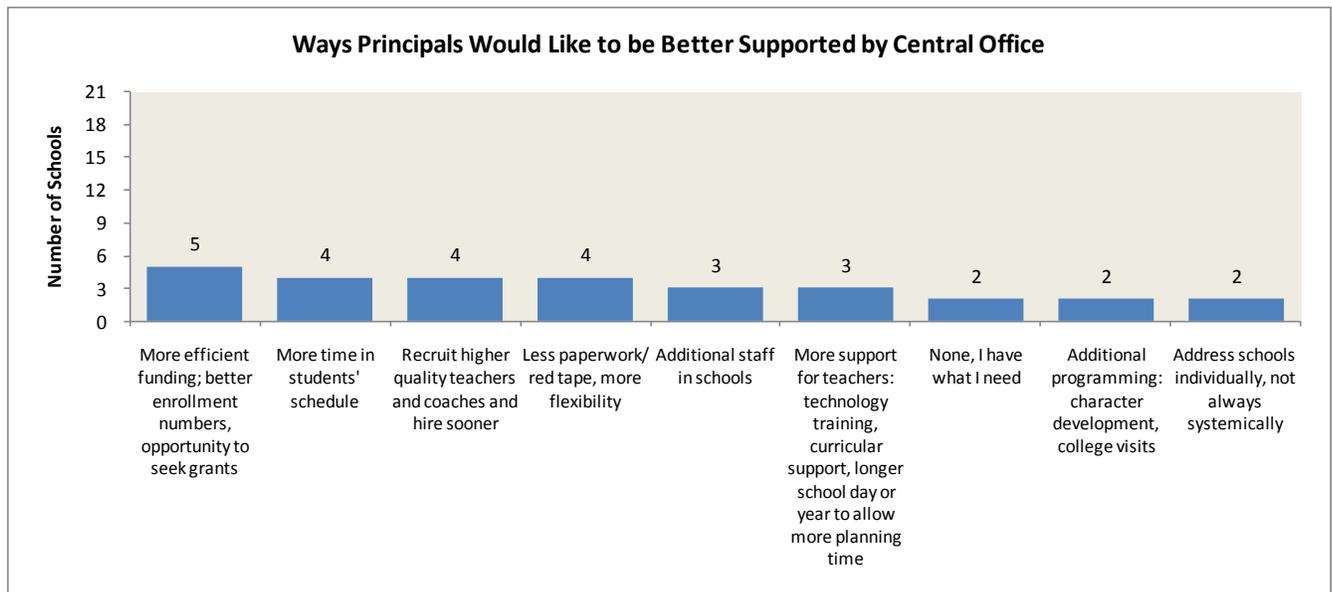
### Overall Support for Principals

Principals were asked to rank the overall district supports they receive in order to prepare all of their students for post-secondary education or training with 1 meaning little support and 5 meaning all the necessary supports. The average ranking was a 3.24 with the highest ranking given as a 5 and the lowest as a 1.

Below is a graph that shows the variety of ways that principals described they would like to be better supported by the district.



In contrast, when charter schools were asked to rank the level of support they receive from PPS, the average was a 1. Some of the ways they said that PPS could better support them is to share information on best practices or allow charters to purchase services from PPS.



The rest of this guide describes the responses of principals to questions regarding the types of learning tools and courses they are able to provide in their schools.

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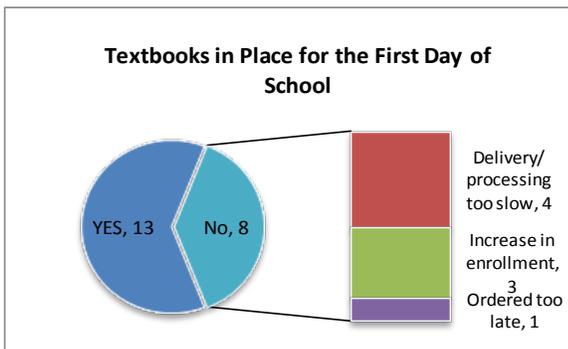
## Principal Responses Regarding Courses and Tools

### TOOLS FOR LEARNING:

This guide includes information about the physical materials students can use such as books, technology and libraries. Our expectation is that these items would be distributed equitably across schools so that they all students have access to tools and courses to prepare for post secondary education or training. We would also expect for students to be able to access these resources starting on the first day of school.

#### Books

- Out of 21 PPS principals, 18 (or 86%) reported that all students are permitted to take books home. *The same was reported by both Charter High School principals.*



- We asked principals if all required textbooks were in place for the first day of school. *Both Charter principals said yes.* The graph to the left shows the responses from PPS principals: 13 said yes and 8 said no. The causes for the delay were that the delivery or processing took too long, they had an unexpected increase in enrollment or that they ordered too late.

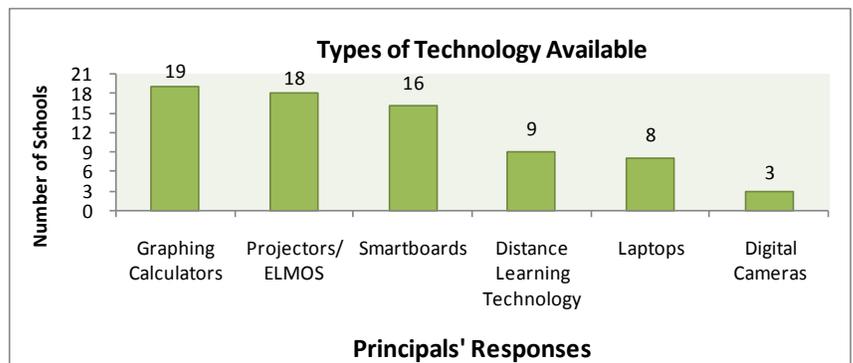
- The same question was asked by DC Voice and in 89% of the 102 schools in Washington DC, principals reported having all of their textbooks for the first day- which is a*

*significantly higher percentage than PPS, which was 62%.*



#### Technology

- The graph to the right shows how many principals said that the following types of technology were available at their school in addition to desk top computers.
- According to principals' estimate, schools have an average of 219 computers, with the smallest amount being 75 and the largest being 700.



- We asked principals to estimate the percentage of computers in the school that were usable by*

*students, meaning they were in working condition and were not restricted to staff use only for security purposes. We found that the least vulnerable schools were the most likely to report a higher percentage of computers that students were able to use in the school.*

- According to the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers' Collective Bargaining Agreement, if, for some reason, technology equipment breaks down or needs to be fixed, it must be done by a technology specialist. Some schools employ a specialist in the building and some schools request assistance from specialists employed by central office.
  - We found no relationship between the amount of computers in a school and the presence of a technology specialist in the building.*

# SCHOOL WORKS INTERVIEW DATA: A+ Schools

## Pittsburgh Public Schools: 6-12s, 9-12s, 6-8s and 2 Charters: Principal Responses Regarding Courses and Tools

- o Larger schools were most likely to have a technology specialist in their building and he/she was most likely to be part time.
- o If smaller schools employed a technology specialist, he/she was most likely to be full time.

Maintenance or Use of Technology

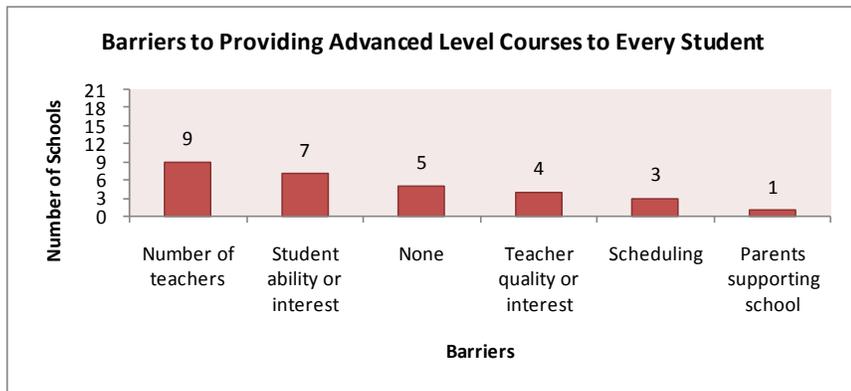
### Library

- The majority of schools interviewed (57% or more) give students access to the library through the following ways: with a teacher that schedules time for his/her class, with a pass from a teacher, on their own during lunch or as part of their regular schedule.
- The library is open to students for an average of 30 hours per week, with a librarian there to assist students for an average of 26 hours per week.
  - o Larger schools were more likely to have their library open for more hours and have a librarian there to assist students.
  - o 6-12s and 9-12s were significantly more likely to have a librarian available for more hours compared to 6-8s.
  - o The most vulnerable schools were significantly more likely to have a librarian available for more hours.

Quality of the Library's Collection

### COURSES:

This section includes information about the core courses that are available to students in a school. Our expectation is that all courses would be rigorous and relevant, no matter the level or type. We would also expect that no student would be excluded from being able to take advanced level courses.



### For all students:

- When asked if every student in the building had access to advanced level courses, 18 of PPS principals interviewed said yes, 2 said no and 1 didn't provide an answer.
- Principals were asked to identify their barriers to being able to provide advanced level courses to every student. Their responses are shown in the graph to the left.

Overall Course Structure

### For students in grades 9-12 (in a 9-12 or 6-12 school):

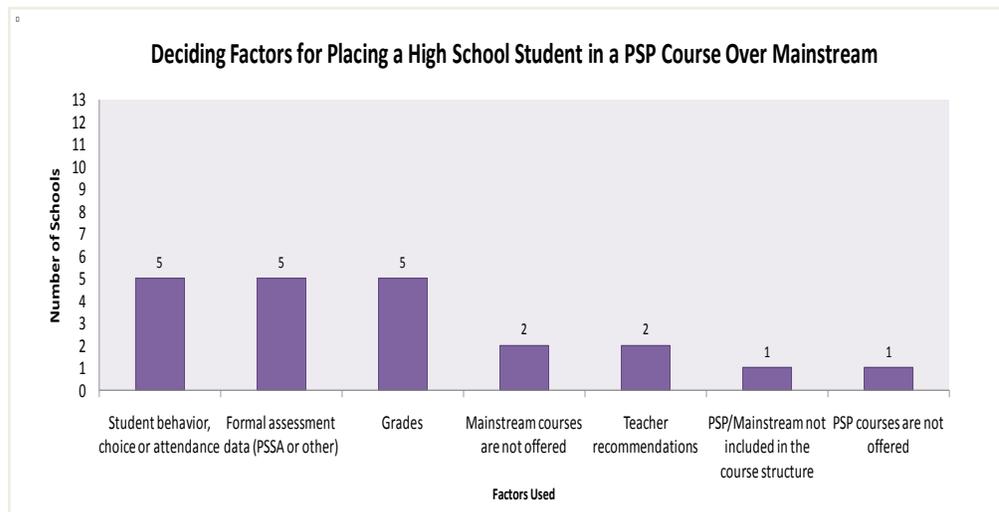
- Other than magnet-specific courses, four different types of courses that schools can offer in high school are AP, CAS, PSP or Mainstream. Mainstream courses are the general courses that every student can take. PSP stands for Pittsburgh Scholars Program and those courses are considered to be more advanced than mainstream. There are no district-level criteria used to determine if a student is eligible for a PSP course. CAS stands for Center for Advanced Studies. These courses are only available to students who have been identified as gifted through an IQ test or other means. AP stands for Advanced Placement. They are college-level courses with no specific district-level criteria used to determine if a student is eligible. Students taking AP courses can take an exam at the end of the course to earn college credits if they score well enough.

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## Principal Responses Regarding Courses and Tools

- Out of 13 PPS schools that have high school students, all offer AP courses, 11 offer CAS courses and 11 offer PSP courses. One PPS school and both *Charter Schools* do not include specific CAS/PSP courses in their course structure. *Of those interviewed,*
- 10 PPS principals said yes, that students in PSP courses were encouraged to take AP courses (1 said no and 2 didn't answer).
- 8 PPS principals said yes, students in mainstream courses were encouraged to take AP courses. (4 said no and 1 didn't answer).
- The graph below shows the main factors principals described that are used to determine whether or not to enroll a student in a PSP course. There was not a single factor given by the majority of principals, however the 3 most often cited were: 1. formal assessment data like PSSAs or 4Sight, 2. grades and 3. student behavior, attendance or willingness.



- We asked principals in what type of class (CAS, PSP, Mainstream, All or None) would they be likely to see certain things happen. Below is a chart that describes only those items that the majority of principals said they would be likely to see in each type of class.

CAS (Center for Advanced Studies)	PSP (Pittsburgh Scholars Program)	None
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15 or fewer students in a class (82%)</li> <li>A class of mainly white students (55%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More than 30 students in a class (64%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The same teacher for multiple years (62%)</li> </ul>
ALL (CAS, PSP and Mainstream)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students using high-tech resources (85%)</li> <li>Students discussing college options (77%)</li> <li>Students attending academic field trips (77%)</li> <li>A class with similar numbers of black and white students (54%)</li> <li>Students talking with teachers about academic work (62%)</li> <li>Students using the literacy of the discipline they're studying ( i.e./ Students studying science using scientific language) (62%)</li> <li>Students working in groups to solve complex problems (62%)</li> <li>Conversations focused on critical thinking (54%)</li> </ul>		



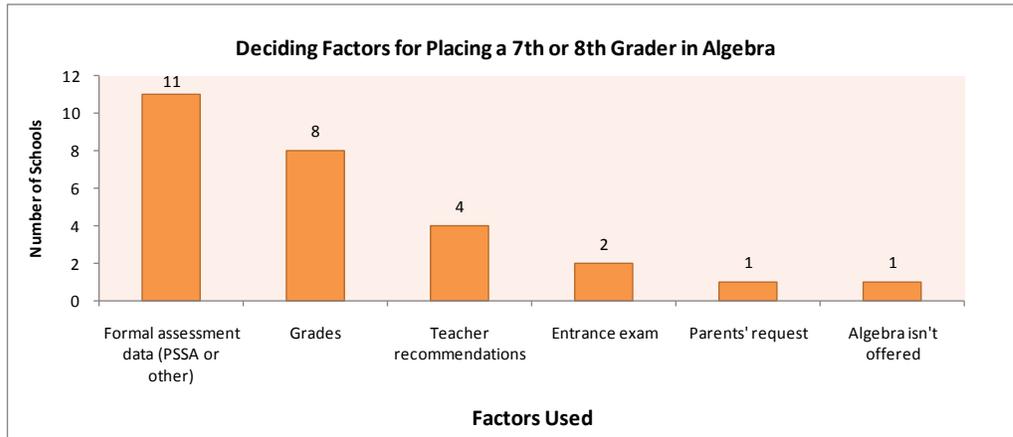
# SCHOOL WORKS INTERVIEW DATA: A+ Schools

Pittsburgh Public Schools: 6-12s, 9-12s, 6-8s and 2 Charters:  
Principal Responses Regarding Courses and Tools

## For students in grades 6-8 (in a 6-8 or 6-12 school):

- In grades 6-8, the primary PSP or advanced level course that students can take is Algebra.
- Out of 12 schools that have middle school students, 11 offer algebra in the building.

▪ The graph to the right shows the main factors principals described that are used to determine whether or not to enroll a student in algebra in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The majority of schools use either formal assessment data (PSSA or 4Sight) or grades. The next most frequently used factor is a teacher recommendation.



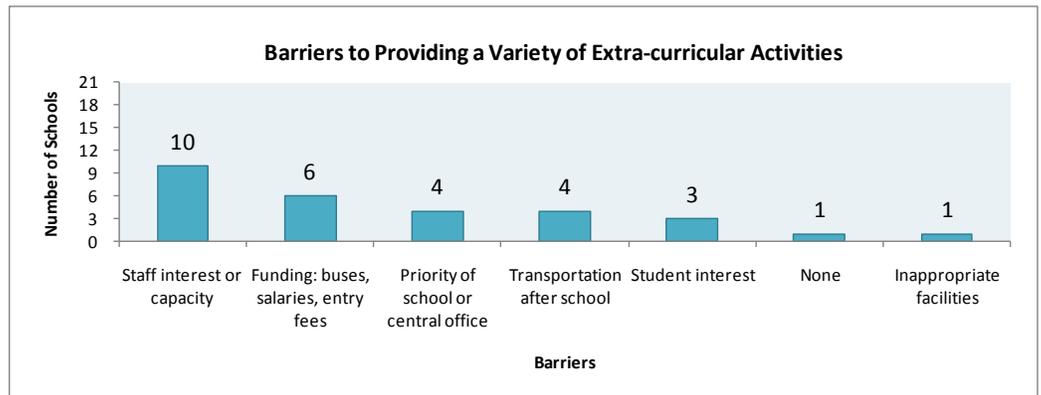
## EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:

Includes information related to the types of activities available to students and the percentage of students that participate.



- Principals estimated between 82% and 21% of their students participating in extracurricular activities such as clubs, academic competitions, college visits, field trips, community service trips or projects, sports, cheerleading, dance, mentoring and a variety of other things.
  - Principals of the most vulnerable schools were more likely to report a higher percentage of students participating in student clubs, while the least vulnerable schools were most likely to report a lower percentage of students that participate in clubs.
  - Principals of 9-12s were least likely to report a high percentage of students that attend field trips, while 6-12s were the most likely.

▪ The graph to the right shows the barriers that principals described to providing a variety of extracurricular activities to students.



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**Principal Responses Regarding Courses and Tools**

## IN SUMMARY:

Based on the principals' responses to the questions regarding courses and tools, we have identified the following potential issues to explore:



- Enrollment Projections for Site-Based Budgeting
- Technology Maintenance
- Technology Usability
- Quality of the Libraries' Collections
- Availability or Use of Textbooks
- Number and Types of Extra-curricular Activities
- Types of CAS/PSP Courses Available and When
- Factors that Determine Student Placement
- Overall Structure of Courses

The purpose of sharing the information we learned from principals is to uncover some of what may be standing in the way of students being prepared for post-secondary education or training. The issues that we have highlighted are by no means an exhaustive list of the challenges that principals, teachers or students face. Neither is it a to-do list of items that we can tackle at once. We hope that, together with the many Pittsburgh residents who care about how we educate our students, we can use this list as a jumping off point to decide what areas we need to understand better and what would be most important to include in a collective advocacy agenda.