



**2009-10  
Community Meeting #1: Teaching**



Crossroads United Methodist Church  
Saturday, January 23, 2010  
10:30AM-1:00PM

**Meeting Results**



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

# SCHOOL WORKS INTERVIEW DATA: A+ Schools

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

Schools 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 were covered the following categories: staffing, learning tools and extracurricular activities, student courses and services, student transition support and parent or caregiver involvement. Principals' responses will be reported publicly in increments between January and May of 2010. The schools and volunteers are described below, followed by a selection of the principals' interview responses.

## Pittsburgh Public Schools Interviewed:

### School Level

- Grades 9-12: 43% (9)
- Grades 6-12: 19% (4)
- Grades 6-8: 38% (8)

### Magnet School

- Magnet schools: 33% (7)
- Non-magnet schools: 67% (14)

### Enrollment

- Lower than the district average 71% (15)
- Higher than the district average 29% (6)

## PPS Middle and High Schools Divided by:

### 2009 Achievement Gap\* in Math:

- Larger than the district gap: 43% (9)
- Smaller than the district gap: 38% (8)
- Not Available: 19% (4)

### 2009 Achievement Gap\* in Reading:

- Larger than the district gap 38% (8)
- Smaller than the district gap 43% (9)
- Not Available: 19% (4)

### Vulnerability Index\*\*

- Lowest Vulnerability: 19% (4)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Lowest Vulnerability: 19% (4)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Lowest Vulnerability: 19% (4)
- Highest Vulnerability: 24% (5)
- Not Available: 19% (4)

## Public Charter Schools:

- 2 Charter High Schools- however, they were not grouped with Pittsburgh Public Schools for any of the comparisons

\* The achievement gap in a school is defined as the difference between the percent of advanced or proficient black students in a school compared to the white students in the district.

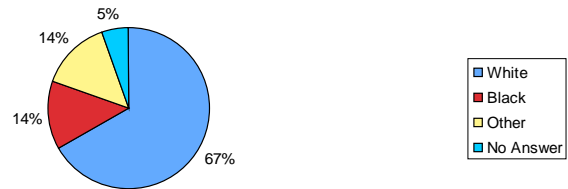
\*\*The vulnerability index was calculated by researchers at the Learning Policy Center. It is a variable that takes onto account poverty, disciplinary actions and overall achievement in a school.

## Volunteer Fast Facts:

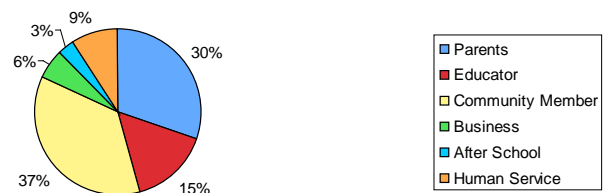
- 130 signed up
- 23 interviews were conducted by a volunteer team of 3 or 4 people
- 85 people volunteered
- 0% of teams were racially homogeneous

## Demographics:

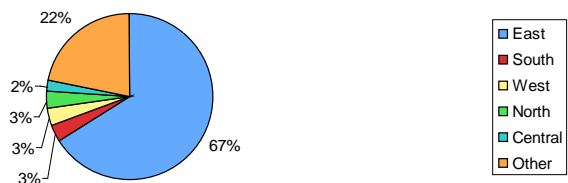
Breakdown by race



Breakdown by category



Breakdown by region



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## What We Have Learned about Teaching in PPS: Tools, Rules and Schools

Extensive research was done by the Learning Policy Center at the University of Pittsburgh on behalf of A+ Schools regarding the system in which teachers work in Pittsburgh. The study, which focused on elevating the quality of teaching in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, examined teacher distribution and movement as well as the staffing rules and working conditions influencing these trends. The result was an endorsement of the district's Empowering Effective Teachers Plan and encouragement to both the Pittsburgh Public Schools and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, which collaborated on the plan, for focusing on the following items:

- Changing the hiring process to give both candidates and schools more time, information and freedom of choice;
- Establishing a core team of highly effective and committed teachers at the most vulnerable schools;
- Addressing specific needs at vulnerable schools to provide their teachers with the learning environment and resources they need to deliver quality instruction.

Many of the responses that were captured from principals during the School Works interview directly support the recommendations made as a result of Tools, Rules and Schools and the work of the PPS and PFT's Empowering Effective Teaching plan. Looking at both the academic and community action research findings together helps us get a better picture of what's happening in schools, so that we can have a better informed plan of action to address equity. Below are School Works responses that relate to teaching; responses related to other topics will be addressed in March or April.

## School Works Findings

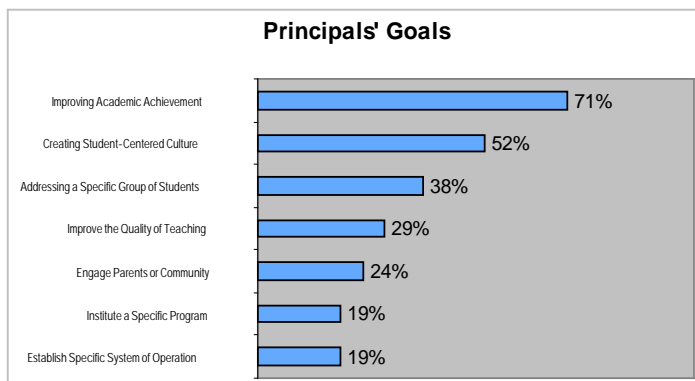
Interview responses are reported as a breakdown of the percentage of the 21 PPS principals that responded in specific ways. Schools were also categorized according to school level, magnet status, enrollment, achievement gap size and vulnerability to look for any trends in responses from principals of 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 red. 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 red.

## ....about Teaching

### Principal's Goals for 2009-2010

The majority of principals reported their goals for the school very broadly, such as improve student achievement or improve school culture. Many others reported specific interventions or groups of students they planned to target with programs or services. In the case of many newly established

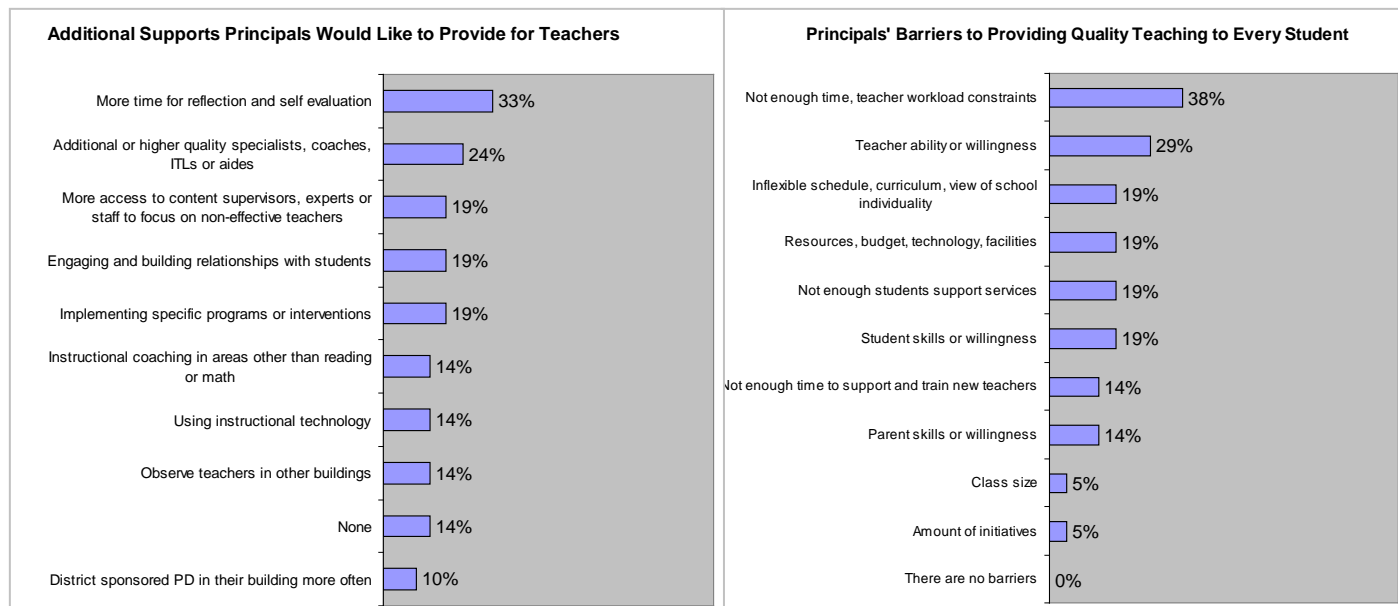


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schools, many principals had goals related to creating effective operations systems or implementing school-specific programming.

Principals were asked about the types of support they were able to provide for teachers in order for every child to experience high quality instruction. In addition, they were asked to share what, if any, additional supports they would like to provide to teachers and what barriers they face in order to do so. Their responses are described below.



### ...but More Specifically About

#### Giving more time, information and choices available during the hiring process:

- The average number of teaching vacancies per school that principals had to fill for the 2009-2010 school year was 4.4. Charter schools had an average of 2 positions to fill per school and Washington DC Public Schools' (DCPS) average was 1.7.
- 81% of principals reported that they were able to complete all of their recruitment, interviewing and hiring of new teachers by the first day of school. In comparison, 89% of principals in Washington DC Public Schools (DCPS) were able to complete their hiring by the first day of school, which was similar to PPS.
- 19% of principals reported a vacancy at their school at the time of the School Works interview. PPS reported having 1 vacancy in the district at the start of the school year. The discrepancy may be due to any number of specific instances principals were considering at the time of the interview.
- 100% of charter school principals were able to complete their hiring, interviewing and recruiting of new teachers by the first day of school and 100% had 0 vacancies at the time of the School Works interview.
- **Principals of 6-12s were most likely to report the highest number of teachers that were their first choice.**
- **In terms of reasons for delays in hiring, PPS principals were significantly more likely to report that they did not have enough applicants or that HR was too slow in processing paperwork than principals from DCPS.** The Empowering Effective Teachers plan includes steps to address these delays, including adding HR staff, implementing an online application process, and improving management of the eligibility list.

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### **Establishing a core team of highly effective teachers:**

- 29% of principals reported that one of their goals for the 2009-2010 year is to improve teacher effectiveness (see chart entitled Principals Goals on page 2)
- At least 50% of principals reported the following conditions negatively affected their ability to staff their building with quality teachers: Not enough applicants in general, not enough quality applicants and Human Resources was slow to process paperwork. Approx. 1/3 of principals also reported other reasons such as, they were not informed early enough by staff that was leaving or they could not hire the candidate they wanted.
- 29% of principals stated that teacher ability or willingness is a barrier to being able to deliver quality instruction to all students (see chart above)
- 19% of principals said that the district could better support them by recruiting higher quality teachers and coaches (see the chart on page 5)
- Charter schools described staffing structures and support systems that were unique to their schools such as, teachers following students for multiple years and combined classes with teams of teachers

### **Providing teachers with the learning environment and resources they need:**

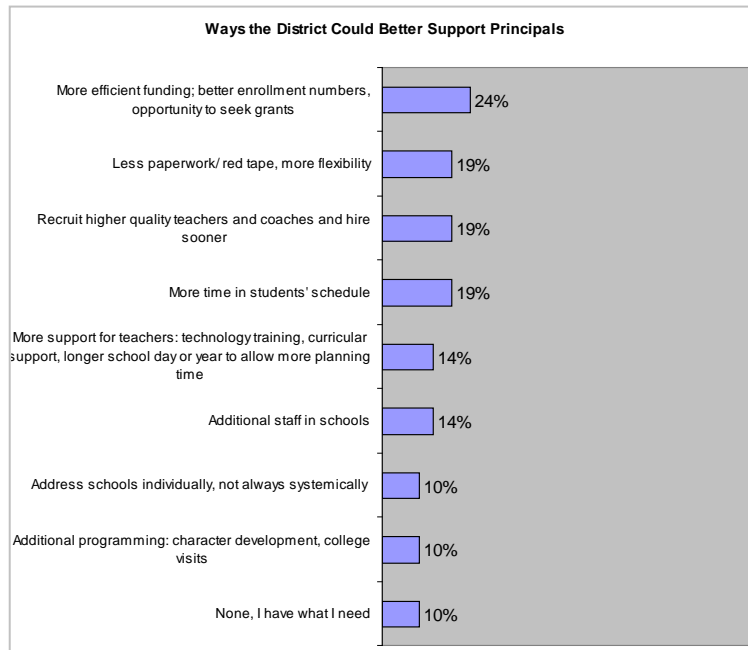
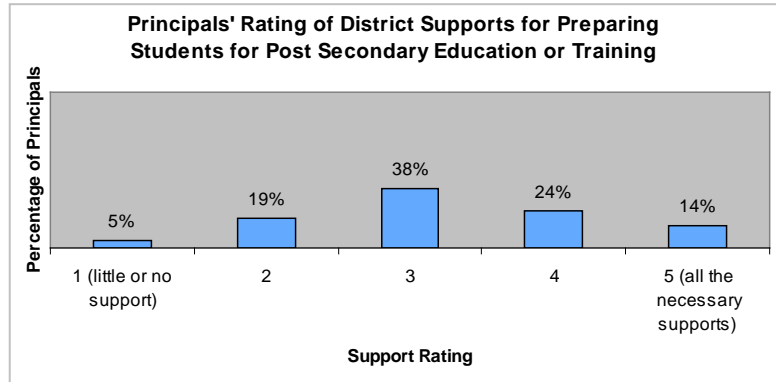
- 81% of principals said they were at least somewhat able to provide the support that teachers need in order to be able to deliver quality instruction in their school. (24% said yes, 57% said somewhat and 19% said no).
- 91% of principals reported that all of their new teachers were receiving mentoring support
- At least 91% of principals reported that teachers are provided time in their weekly schedules to confer with the following people to inform their practice: teachers of the same grade level and subject, teachers of the same grade but different subjects, teachers of the same subject and different grade levels, coaches, principal, instructional cabinet and parents. At least 24% of principals also reported teachers had time to confer with students, other staff committees or teams or student services.
- 91% of principals reported that teachers were also given time during the school day to independently work with student data
- At least 90% of principals reported that their reading and math coaches were certified in their coaching area
- At least 75% of principals reported that professional development was offered in their building on the following topics: core curriculum content, instructional practice, using technology, using student data, managing student behavior, special education or inclusion.
- At least 50% of principals reported additional professional development provided on implementing specific programs or interventions and contents of subject areas OTHER than reading, math, social studies and science
- **Schools that were most likely to offer PD in content areas other than reading, math, social studies and science were:**
  - Those with enrollment higher than the district average compared to smaller schools
  - Those with the most vulnerable populations compared to schools with less vulnerable students
  - 6-12s compared to 9-12s or 6-8s
- There was no clear majority for responses to questions about the additional supports that principals want to provide for teachers and the barriers they face to being able to provide quality teaching. Therefore, the implication is that schools are unique with unique needs, despite many perceived similarities (see charts on page3).
- Charter school principals had similar responses to PPS in terms of professional development topics, time to work with student data, and other staff members teachers confer with weekly.

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## 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.



To the right is a graph that describes the ways that principals would like to be better supported by the district. The majority of principals (58%) said that the biggest way that PPS could better support them is to provide additional support for teachers.

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.

## Results from A+ Schools Community Meeting on Teaching

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.

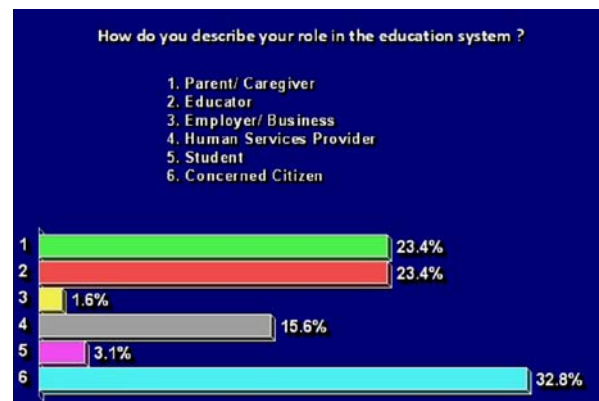
On January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010, A+ Schools hosted the first community meeting to release a portion of the School Works interview responses related to staffing and teaching supports. In addition to the School Works results related to teaching, A+ Schools also released the results of Tools, Rules and Schools, a 15 month long study commissioned by the Learning Policy Center at the University of Pittsburgh that looked at the mobility and staffing patterns of teachers. The meeting began with a presentation of findings from both School Works and Tools Rules and Schools to build a clear and compelling case for changing the teaching system in Pittsburgh.

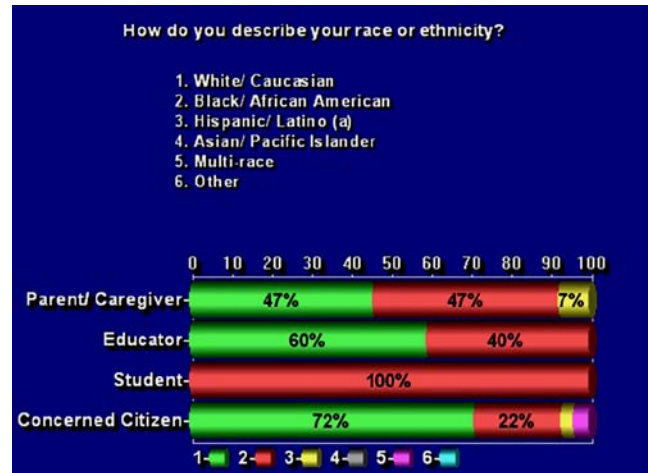
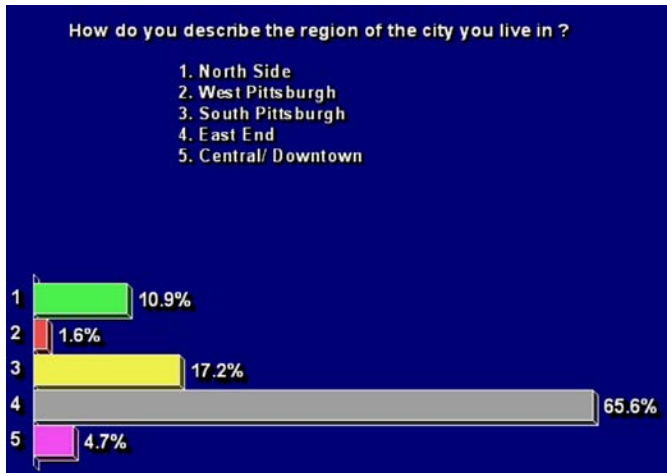
*A+ Schools Community Agenda for Empowering Effective Teachers* outlined the changes we recommended which include strategies that the District could use to ensure that all Pittsburgh Public School students, particularly those in the most vulnerable schools, have access to effective teachers. We also compared our *Community Agenda* to what we knew of the District's Empowering Effective Teachers (EET) Plan. *We found that our own independent research, the responses from School Works and what we knew of the EET plan was aligned and asked for the community's support of the A+ Schools Empowering Effective Teaching Agenda.*

After the presentation, the community was asked to deliberate on a few key issues and consider next steps. Afterwards, people signed on to support the agenda and many wrote letters of thanks to our local teachers. The information presented at the meeting and a link to sign on the agenda 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 discuss the importance of teaching to the success of the students in Pittsburgh Public Schools. The audience was a diverse group of parents, educators, students, human service providers and concerned citizens from all parts of the city represented in the images on the right. The last image shows the roles of the attendees by race. For example, the first bar shows that of all the parents present, approx 47% were White, 47% were Black and 7% were Hispanic or Latino(a).





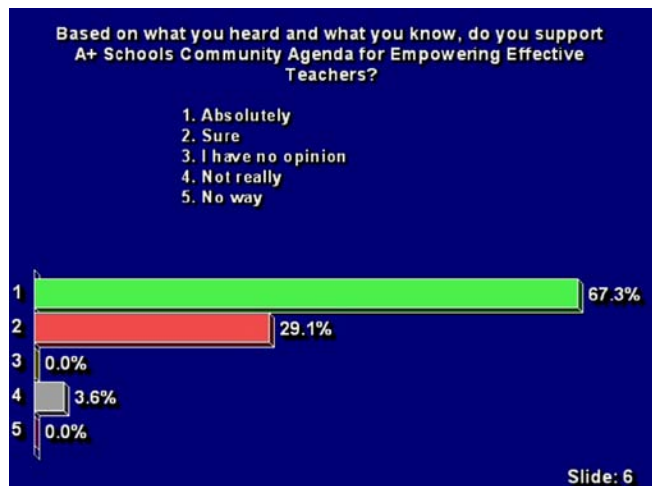
### How Were People Able to Express Their Opinions?

*Everybody got to vote!*

Small table conversations were held and afterwards, 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 either vote for a single response or rank their top 3 priorities for the question. For the priority questions, 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 Did the Community Members Say?

⇒ *The majority supported the A+ Schools Community Agenda for Empowering Effective Teachers*



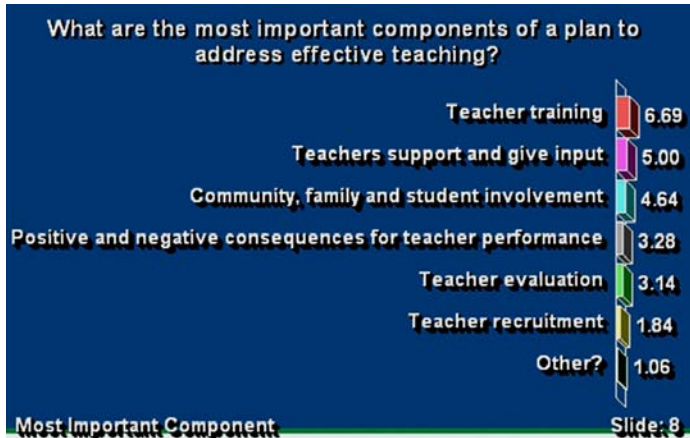
At the meeting, we hoped to build a clear and compelling case for why changes are needed in the teaching system in Pittsburgh. At the end of our presentation, we asked participants tell us if we were successful by voting on whether they supported the *A+ Schools Community Agenda*. The vast majority showed their support as shown on the right. You can too by visiting [www.aplusschools.org](http://www.aplusschools.org) and signing our virtual agenda.

The remainder of the time was spent discussing the priorities and concerns of the community and possible next steps.



## What Were Their Priorities and Concerns?

⇒ *Teacher training was the most important component of a plan to address effective teaching as well as adequate support and input from teachers.*



After hearing the results of our research and learning about some of the major parts of the district's plan, we asked participants to prioritize what they thought were the most important components of a plan to address effective teaching. The image to the left shows the priorities of the people in the room. We also broke down each of the rankings to see how parents felt compared to students, educators and other concerned citizens. We found that parents thought that community, family and student involvement that was most important. Teacher support and input was

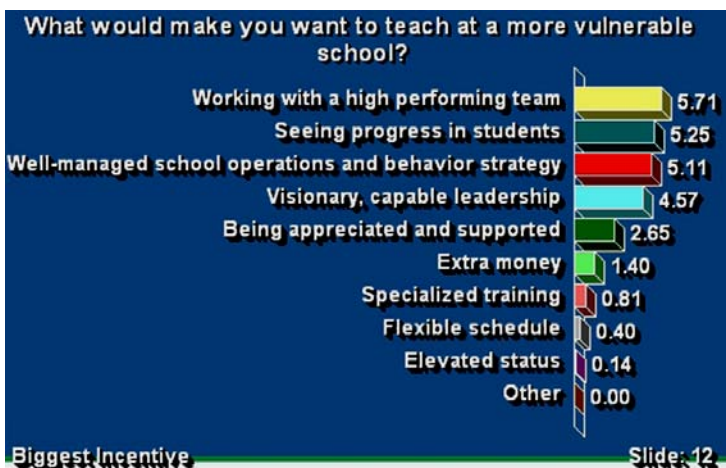
most important to students, while teacher training was most important to educators and other concerned citizens.

⇒ *The biggest concerns were the overall implementation and teacher support of the plan*

To better understand some of the areas where the public may still have some questions, we asked for the attendees to prioritize what concerned them the most about the recommendations and information they heard. The top concerns regarding the feasibility and process were the overall implementation and the level to which the plan is supported by teachers. Those made it to the top of the priority list for educators, parents and concerned citizens. Students were most concerned with having enough quality teachers.



⇒ *Working with a high performing team, seeing progress in students and working in a school with well-managed school operations and behavior strategy were the top incentives that would attract attendees to teach at a more vulnerable school.*

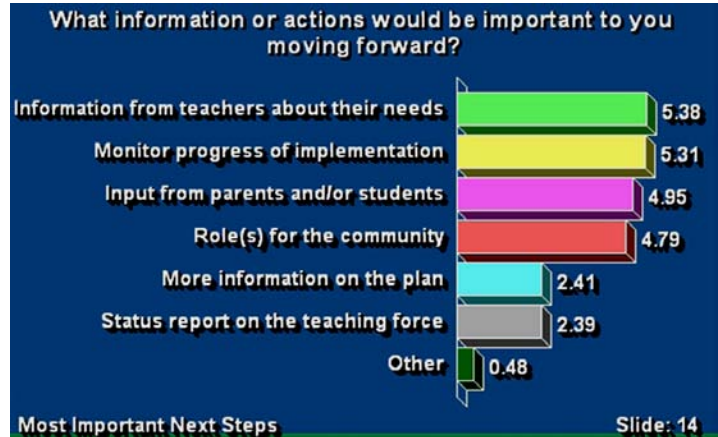


Providing teachers with the extra support they need to teach effectively in a more vulnerable school can be a strategy to retain as well as recruit dedicated staff. To better understand what would attract people to teaching at a

more vulnerable school, we asked participants to rank the incentives listed in the image to the left. The graph shows the priorities of the entire room, and there were distinct differences between the views of educators and other concerned citizens. For educators and students, seeing progress in students received the highest priority ranking by far. For other concerned citizens and parents, working with a high performing team and having visionary, capable leadership were ranked as the top two incentives. Extra money ranked below a score of 2 (or no higher than 5<sup>th</sup>) for all groups.

⇒ *Next, the public would like to hear from teachers about what they need and monitor the progress of implementation.*

We asked the people in the room to share with us what information or actions would be most important to them as changes to the teaching system are implemented. The image to the right describes their responses. Most people, to some degree thought the top two choices were most important. Educators most prioritized input from parents and/or students, while parents or caregivers most wanted to monitor the progress of implementation. The other concerned citizens in the room most wanted role(s) for the community.



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

Throughout the meeting, attendees were asked to submit any questions they had in writing on a notecard. At the end of this summary, we have provided the answers to the questions that we could and listed the ones that we forwarded to PPS for a response on Friday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010. The letters that were written to teachers were compiled and given to principals to post in a location central to the teaching staff in the building. We are also maintaining a virtual petition with all of the signatures of the people who have signed on to support the *A+ Schools Community Agenda for Empowering Effective Teachers*. A+ Schools will be working on ways to respond to the priorities expressed by participants at this community discussion. Stay tuned for more!