



School Works Findings

June 13, 2013

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School Works Findings 2013

Staff instability and school climate concerns common at high poverty schools. Progress made on equitable resource distribution despite budget cuts.

The findings from A+ Schools' 2013 School Works community action research are set in the context of another year of enormous change and challenge in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). Although PPS is among the highest spending districts in Pennsylvania, the 2012-13 school year bore witness to significant budget cuts of over \$50 million resulting from both decreased investment from the state as well as increasing costs internally. The cuts resulted in: reduction of about 500 employees, mostly through retirement but also through 170 teacher furloughs, closing of seven schools, and the establishment of a new educational delivery model. Our findings therefore cannot be seen in isolation.

Despite decreasing resources, PPS has increased some opportunities for students at high poverty schools and has focused on one of the greatest levers we know to close the achievement gap: great teaching. Yet staff stability remains a major concern, especially at our most vulnerable schools. Progress must be acknowledged and celebrated while additional changes necessary to make schools work for every child must be pursued with urgency. To this end, parent leaders working with **A+ Schools Parent Nation** have articulated a call to action for improved school climates to support the changes already underway at our schools:

- ✂ PPS should make significant changes to school climate policies including changing some zero-tolerance policies that suspend students on a first offense for minor and subjective infractions.
- ✂ Parents want increased parent engagement in schools by involving parents in decision-making.

Key Findings:

- 👍 Principals feel able to provide better support to teachers. About 3 out of 4 principals said that RISE (PPS' observational evaluation process) was either very or exceptionally effective at helping them identify effective teachers (78%) and differentiate support for teachers at different levels (68%).
- 👎 Staff instability is higher at our more vulnerable schools. Schools with higher vulnerability were more likely to report a higher percentage of teachers new to their buildings, more classes taught by long-term substitutes, and more substitutes in the building daily (as a percentage of total teachers).
- 👎 Creating positive school climates is a challenge for many schools. While there has been an increase in schools reporting positive behavior management plans, only 1 in 4 principals said their school was very or exceptionally effective at teaching social and emotional learning skills, and only 50% said the same about the effectiveness of their school's behavioral supports.
- 👍 Students in most schools have the same if not more access to art, music, languages and advanced courses since last year, despite budget cuts. PPS students were more likely than the suburban schools that participated to have art, music, and library access. Unfortunately, students at more vulnerable schools were less likely to be able to take textbooks home.

Community Action Research

Background on School Works

School Works is community action research designed to assist the public in understanding what resources and opportunities exist for students in Pittsburgh Public Schools and to develop a plan for community action to ensure we have an equitable school system in Pittsburgh.

A+ Schools defines an equitable education system as one that provides each student with the individual support to reach and exceed a shared standard of success, which includes graduating from high school and completing post-secondary education or training.

Equity is not an even split of resources but a strategic allocation based on individual students' needs. To achieve equity, the following strategies must be in place:

- great teachers in every classroom
- differentiated supports that can unlock the potential of individual students
- opportunities to boost student learning
- resources based on student need

School Works helps us to understand how these strategies and the resources to support them are present in and across schools in Pittsburgh.

A+ Schools' volunteers have conducted School Works interviews with school staff for the past four years: middle and high school principals (2009), middle and high school principals and counselors (2010), middle and high school teachers (2011), and K-12 principals (2012-13).

School Works Interviews

In February 124 volunteers interviewed 49 principals from PPS schools grades K-12. Before conducting interviews, volunteers were required to participate in a two-hour training session with A+ Schools to learn and practice the interview protocol. In the one-hour confidential interviews conducted by volunteer teams, principals responded to approximately 60 questions in yes/no, rating scale, and short answer format.

Interview questions covered the following categories: effective teaching practice and supports, positive behavioral supports and interventions, access to materials and course opportunities, and resources. Questions on course opportunities were tailored to the grade levels served by each school; otherwise, all principals answered the same set of questions.

A+ Schools staff compiled and analyzed the results, looking for trends based on school configuration, magnet status, and vulnerability (**A+ Schools identifies schools with higher vulnerability relative to other PPS schools as those with greater percentages of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, greater racial achievement gaps, and lower percentages of students scoring proficient or advanced on PSSAs**).

Schools Interviewed

Grade Configuration:

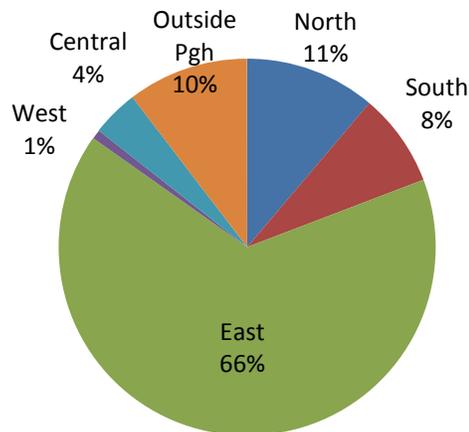
- 9-12: 4 schools
- 6-12: 5 schools
- 6-8: 7 schools
- K-8: 11 schools
- K-5: 22 schools

Magnet Status:

- Full magnet schools: 13
- Schools that are not full magnets: 36

Volunteer Demographics

- 124 volunteers
- Parents comprised 44% of volunteers with children who attend 24 schools
- Volunteers were community members, educators, students, elected officials, and members of faith-based and education-related organizations
- Volunteers reside across the city:



Interviews with Suburban Districts

This year, A+ Schools had a unique opportunity to work with a team of regional leaders through Leadership Pittsburgh. The team interviewed fourteen principals from surrounding suburban school districts in February and March to help us identify how other districts are using resources and implementing strong school practices. The school districts and the principals' responses from these interviews will also be kept confidential. We intend for any comparisons made between PPS and suburban districts to be for informational purposes only, as the suburban districts differ greatly from those of Pittsburgh Public Schools relative to total enrollment, race, percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, and per capita spending. For this reason and because the sample of suburban schools was less comprehensive than that of Pittsburgh Public Schools, we did not look for significant trends between PPS principals' responses and the responses of the suburban principals.

Increasing support for great teaching but turnover a challenge

- 👍 **New teacher evaluation process focused on helping teachers improve**
Principals use the teacher observation and evaluation system to understand teachers' strengths and to help them improve – they see RISE as supportive of growth rather than punitive toward teachers.
- 👍 **Principals can identify effective teaching and can help teachers grow**
Most principals feel that RISE helps them identify effective teachers and support teachers at different levels of proficiency.
- 👍 **Principals taking more responsibility for student learning**
Instead of viewing student needs as barriers, more principals now place responsibility on teachers and schools for providing quality instruction and course rigor.
- 👍 **More college preparation opportunities across PPS**
Access to rigorous courses still remains a challenge for students who attend more vulnerable schools, but this school year saw an increase in enrollment in AP, CAS, and CTE courses.
- 👎 **Instability in the teaching force creating problems for PPS**
More vulnerable schools have higher teacher turnover, more long term substitutes, and more teacher absences.

Effective teaching is the most significant school-based contribution to student learning, and it is a core equity issue. A+ Schools supports defining and measuring effective teaching, ensuring our most vulnerable students have effective teachers, and creating positive teaching and learning environments that support teachers to teach and students to learn.

Principals believe that quality instruction and course rigor depend on school factors such as resources and teacher practices.

Quality Instruction – Observation and Evaluation, Course Rigor, and Supports for Teachers

- When asked to identify the main barriers to providing quality instruction to all students, principals reported a lack of resources at the school (57%) and teacher practices (27%). To a lesser degree, principals reported student-related (16%) and parent-related factors (10%).

Classroom observation and evaluation through RISE

For the past three years, principals have formally observed teachers in their building through the Research-based Inclusive System of Evaluation (RISE) developed by

classroom teachers, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers (PFT) and Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). RISE involves multiple classroom observations throughout the year in which teachers receive an evaluation and feedback on practices within four different teaching domains: planning and preparation, the classroom environment, teaching and learning, and professional responsibilities. RISE is part of the Empowering Effective Teachers Plan designed by teachers, the PFT and PPS to increase the number of effective teachers, increase exposure of students with high needs to effective teachers, and ensure all teachers work in learning environments that support their ability to be effective.

- When asked how they use RISE, principals said they use it in order to understand teachers' strengths, opportunities for growth, and to support teachers to improve their practice.
- When asked how they felt best supported to fulfill their responsibilities, half of principals said they felt best supported in growing teacher practice through RISE.
- About 3 out of 4 principals said that RISE was either very or exceptionally effective at helping them identify effective teachers (78%) and differentiate support for teachers at different levels (68%).
- The majority of teachers are formally observed and evaluated by principals. Other staff members who evaluate teachers using RISE are Instructional Teacher Leaders and other administrators.

Course rigor. A rigorous course is defined as one challenging each student at his or her level of ability and holding students accountable for higher level academic skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and independent work.

Access to rigorous courses remains a challenge in vulnerable schools.

- Principals in schools with higher vulnerability reported a smaller percentage of students enrolled in rigorous English and Math courses. Principals in magnet schools reported higher percentages of students in rigorous courses.
- 23 principals said 100% of students in their school were enrolled in rigorous courses, 12 said between 75-99%, and 11 said 50% or fewer.

Most principals define a “rigorous course” as one challenging each student at his or her level of proficiency and holding students accountable for higher-level academic skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and independent work.

Culture Shift: Fewer principals view students as a barrier to course rigor than they did two years ago: for middle and high schools, the percentage of principals reporting student-related factors as barriers to all students enrolling in rigorous courses decreased from 77% in 2010 to 15% in 2013.

- Most principals place responsibility for course rigor on teacher practice and support: of the 35 principals who listed barriers to enrolling every student in rigorous English and Math courses,
 - 17 cited reasons related to teacher practice (i.e., effectiveness, ability to differentiate instruction, and content knowledge),
 - 9 cited lack of supports for teachers, and
 - 4 cited student-related factors (i.e., behavior, skill, and motivation).
- Additional reasons provided by principals for lack of course rigor were lack of course options, differences in course tracks, course pre-requisites, lack of high-level curriculum, and lack of access to timely data.

Supports for teachers are essential to help teachers grow their professional practice and accelerate student learning.

- When asked which supports they would like to provide for their teachers that they currently do not, principals responded with professional development support (45%) and more time for things like planning and collaborating with colleagues (33%).
- 39 principals reported having at least one Instructional Teacher Leader 2 at their school, with three-quarters of them rating their ITL 2s as very or exceptionally effective.
 - ITL 2 teachers work in secondary (grades 6-12 and 9-12) and K-8 schools. They serve as content experts, ensure instructional quality, and support teacher effectiveness through teaching, formatively evaluating their content peers in their school, designing and delivering customized or differentiated professional development based on those formative evaluations, and serving as RISE raters of teachers in their content area at other schools.
- Nearly two out of three principals said that one of the supports offered to teachers at different levels of proficiency involved guidance from another teacher.
- The vast majority of classes meet the size requirements of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (25 + 5 for grades K-5, 28 + 5 for grades 6-8, and 30 + 5 for grades 9-12). In cases where the district's Central Office knows that a class exceeds these requirements, it has sent additional supports (usually paraprofessionals). Central Office estimates that 3% of total classes are core classes with greater than 30 students.

Teaching and Learning Environment (TLE) Action Plans

- Every principal reported that their school has developed a TLE action plan, with 46% of those schools focusing their plans on behavior.
- All 49 schools involved teachers in developing the plans, 38 schools gained parent input (7 K-5s, 2 K-8s, 1 6-12), and 21 schools gained student input.

- Data used in development of plans includes the Working Conditions Survey taken by teachers, student behavior data, Parent Perceptions Survey, and the Tripod Survey taken by students.

Staff Stability and Absenteeism

All schools experienced a greater degree of turnover this year, but schools with higher vulnerability experienced even less stability.

- Across the district, 20% of full time teachers were new to their buildings, 69% of schools had lost at least one teacher since the beginning of the school year, and 92% of schools had at least one long-term substitute.
- Schools with higher vulnerability were more likely to have a higher percentage of teachers new to their buildings, more classes taught by long-term substitutes, and more substitutes in the building daily (as a % of total teachers).
- Principals of schools with higher vulnerability and higher rates of student absenteeism (missing at least 10% of school days) were more likely to report teacher absences as a greater barrier to student learning suggesting that a culture of absenteeism may exist in our neediest schools

Schools with higher vulnerability experienced more teacher turnover and less staff stability once school started.

Creating positive school climates is a challenge for many schools

👍 **More schools have positive behavioral support systems in place.** Most principals report having school wide systems for developing social and emotional learning skills and supporting positive behavior – 50% more middle and high schools have them now than in 2010.

👎 **Modest confidence in effectiveness of systems.** However, the average principal only has moderate confidence in the effectiveness of those supports – only half believe that (1) their staff consistently models the school's expectations and (2) their school effectively teaches students to replace inappropriate behaviors.

👎 **Good alternatives to suspension or detention not in place in many schools.**

Across the district, principals report many zero tolerance behaviors that result in automatic suspension – it's concerning that only 20% of schools list more than 2 alternatives other than detention or in-school suspension. To guarantee each student his/her right to a high quality education, students need supports to develop positive behaviors that don't interfere with academic learning.

👎 **Suspensions and office referrals more likely in high poverty schools.**

Research suggests that creating positive learning environments for teachers and students involves school wide implementation of social and emotional learning skills development and positive behavioral supports to keep students in school and open up their potential for learning.

According to the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, best practices for implementing positive behavioral intervention support systems include 1. proactively addressing student behavior by involving the whole staff in carrying out practices that contribute to positive student behavior, 2. establishing a school wide focus on teaching all students socially acceptable behaviors and providing positive reinforcement, 3. regularly monitoring specific data and using it to determine when to intervene with high risk students to provide effective supports, and 4. providing supports that staff would be able to provide consistently.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning defines social and emotional learning (SEL) skills as the processes through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to recognize and manage their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging social situations constructively. **Positive behavioral support and social emotional learning are particularly important educational components in high poverty schools where the socio-economic and culture divide between staff and students is wide.**

We asked principals if they had school wide plans for developing students' social and emotional learning skills and for positive behavioral supports for students.

- Although most said they had plans (90% had plans for behavioral supports and 86% said they had plans for teaching SEL skills), only 1 in 4 principals said their school was very or exceptionally effective at teaching SEL skills, and only 50% said the same about the effectiveness of their school's behavioral supports. By comparison 50% of the suburban school principals we interviewed said their school was very or exceptionally effective at teaching SEL skills, and 93% said the same about their behavioral supports.
- On average, principals gave their school a rating of 3.3 out of 5 for effectiveness developing SEL skills and 3.6 out of 5 for effectiveness with positive behavioral supports. By comparison the suburban principals we interviewed gave their schools an average effectiveness rating of 3.0 for SEL skills development and 4.2 for behavioral supports.
- Suburban school ratings may reflect a greater degree of social closure, which is the common culture and socio-economic background between staff, students and families.

Social and emotional learning skills development

- The 14 principals who reported that their schools were very or exceptionally effective at teaching SEL skills identified the following strategies: targeting specific skills on a regular basis, having a positive reward/incentive system, in-depth focus on students by a team or by teachers, having outside partnerships to support mental health, and using Student Assistance Programs or Success Schools.

Positive behavioral supports

- The most frequent supports principals reported for students with the greatest behavioral challenges were parent involvement (43%), individual tracking sheets with regular check-ins (39%), and mental health / social programs (27%).
- Principals felt their schools did a better job teaching behavioral expectations than modeling them or teaching students how to replace inappropriate behaviors with appropriate ones (see Figure 1).

Principals reported feeling only moderately confident in their schools' supports for their students' social and emotional learning and positive behavior.

Almost every middle and high school principal (94%) reported having a school wide plan for positive behavioral supports—up from 60% in 2010.

- Principals of suburban districts reported more confidence in their school's effectiveness at teaching students to replace inappropriate behaviors with appropriate ones and in their staff consistently modeling their school's behavioral expectations.

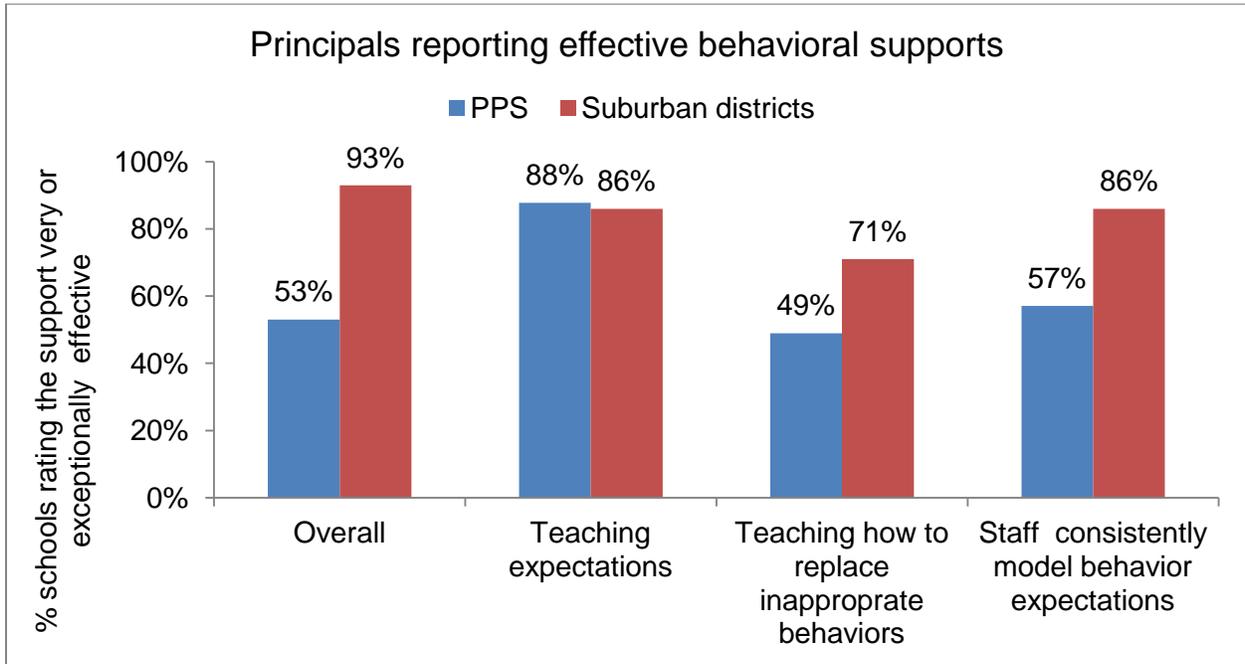


Figure 1 - Effectiveness of Behavioral Supports

Referrals, Suspensions, and Alternatives to Suspensions

We asked principals to estimate how many student referrals they had received in January, as well as how many of those referrals resulted in suspension. Schools with higher vulnerability were more likely to report higher referral and suspension rates. Across the district, the average referral rate was 9%, with 26% of those referrals leading to a suspension on average. The average suspension rate as a percentage of total enrollment was 2%. All of these numbers were higher in PPS than in the suburban schools interviewed (see Figure 2).

Schools with higher vulnerability were more likely to have higher referral and suspension rates, and middle schools had the highest suspension rates.

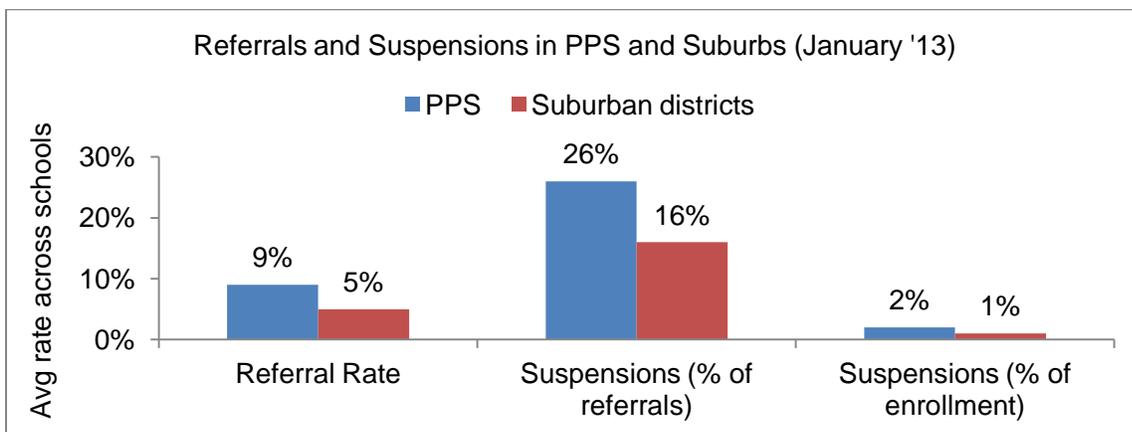


Figure 2 - Referral and Suspension Rates

Middle schools were most likely to have the highest suspension rates of any grade configuration, and schools with higher vulnerability were more likely to have higher suspension rates than less vulnerable schools (see Figure 3).

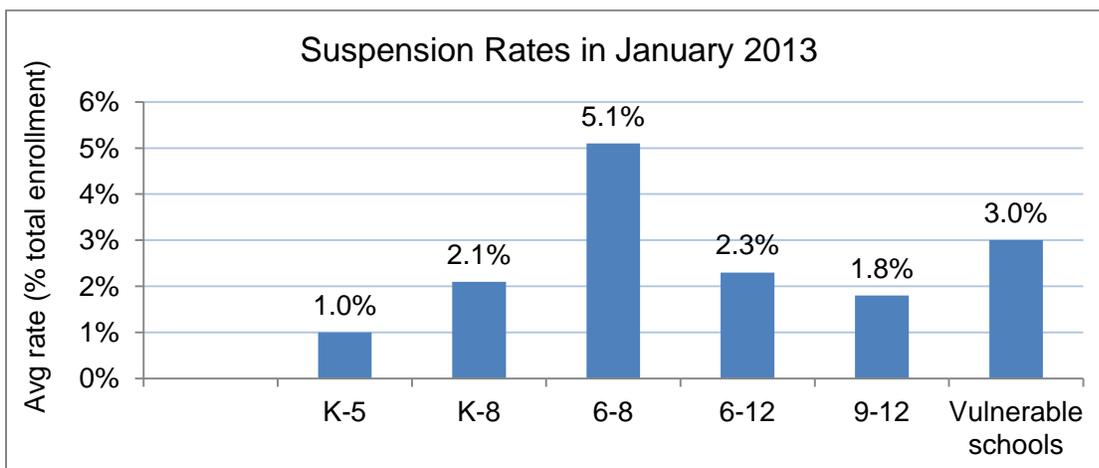


Figure 3 - Suspension Rates by Grade Configuration

Tracking office referrals

- Principals reported the following as top infractions for student referrals to the main office: fighting (45%), disrupting class (31%), disrespect (29%), and noncompliance (22%).
- 34 principals reported tracking office referrals in order to identify specific teachers who may have challenges with classroom management. The top supports offered to these teachers were help from a peer or other staff member, opportunities to observe peers, increased observation and feedback, and professional development.
- 44 principals reported tracking office referrals by student demographic information (i.e., gender, race, attendance, grades, etc.). Most principals said they tracked this information to identify students who need support, with 41% saying they give it to a Discipline Committee or another team.

Zero tolerance behaviors and alternatives to suspension

- We asked principals to list their school's zero tolerance behaviors—aside from district wide behaviors—meaning that on the first offense, students get suspended. While 15 principals reported no zero tolerance behaviors and 8 reported that suspensions are given on a case by case basis, the remaining principals identified many zero tolerance behaviors (see Figure 4).
- The top zero tolerance behaviors were fighting (29 schools), swearing (8), putting hands on someone (7), and assault (5). Others include disrespect, bullying, threatening a student/teacher, disrupting class, noncompliance, and cell phones.

Schools listed 10 different zero tolerance behaviors that would cause a student to get suspended.

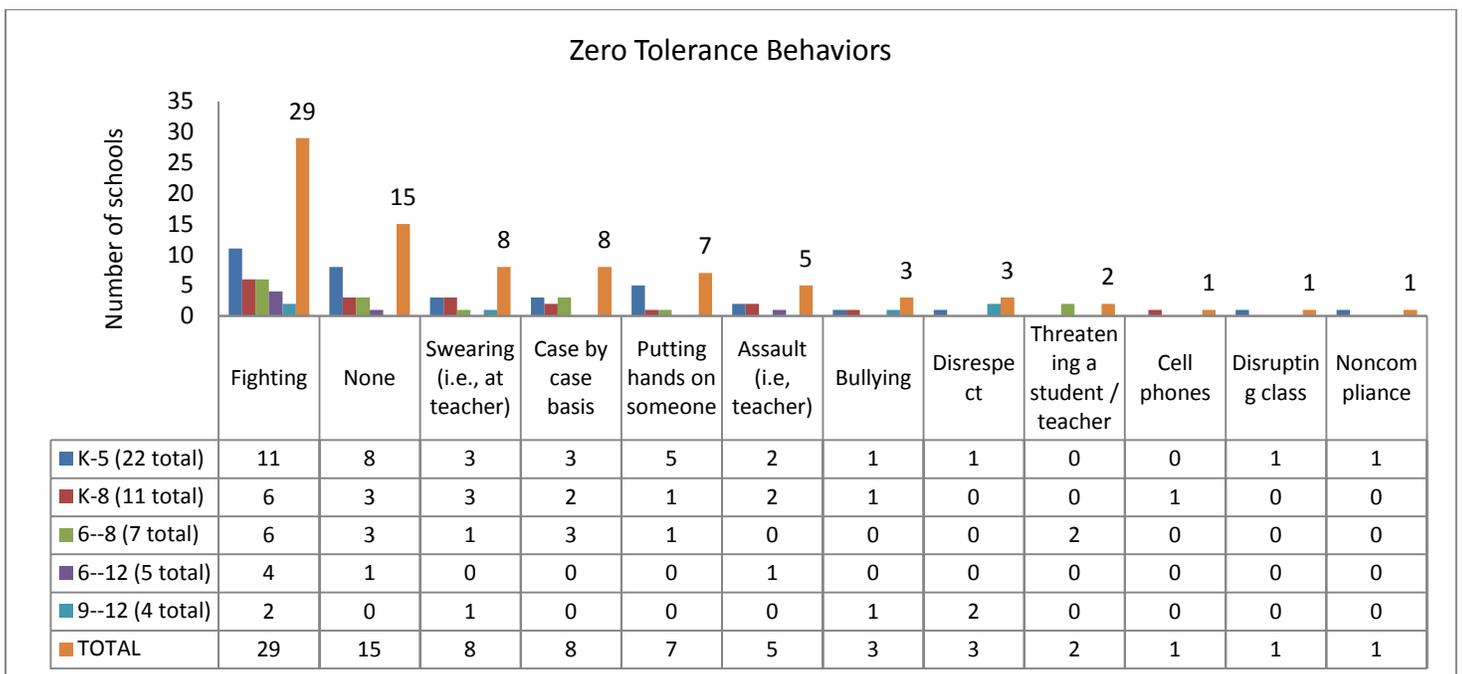


Figure 4 - Zero Tolerance Behaviors by School Configuration

Principals listed many alternatives to suspension, with the top ones being detention (51%), in school suspension (45%), parent meetings (37%), and Saturday detention (29%) (see Figure 5).

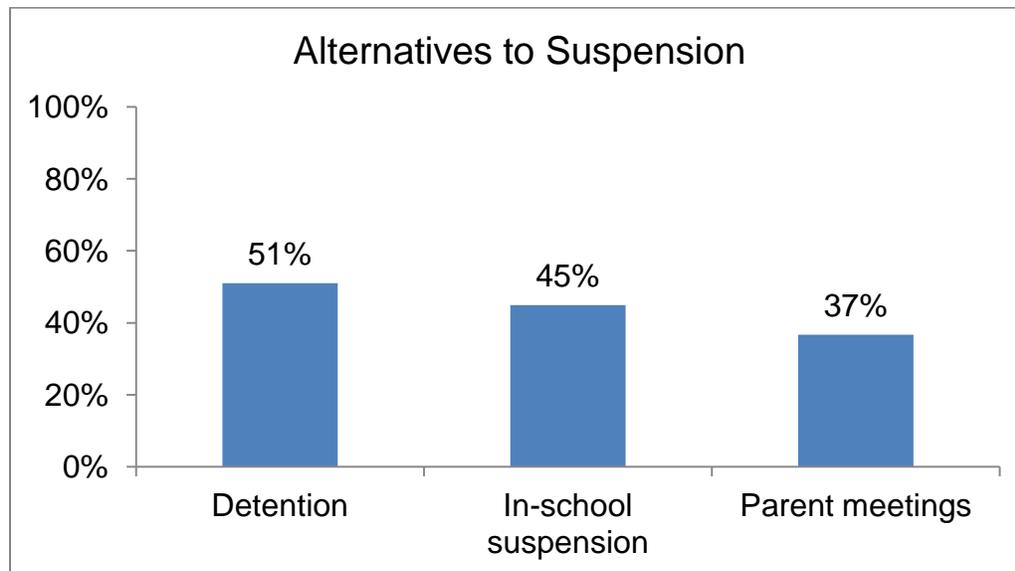


Figure 5 - Alternatives to Suspension

- Schools with higher vulnerability were less likely to have lunch detention and time out as alternatives.
- No middle school principals reported parent meetings as an alternative.
- Breakdown of suspension alternatives by grade configuration:
 - K-5: lunch detention (41%), parent meetings (36%), time out (32%)
 - K-8: in-school suspension (73%), lunch detention (45%), parent meetings (45%)
 - 6-8: in-school suspension (86%), Saturday school (43%), after school detention (43%), lunch detention (43%)
 - 6-12: Saturday school (80%), parent meetings (60%)
 - 9-12: in-school suspension (50%), parent meetings (50%), mediation (50%)

Only 10 schools reported having more than two alternatives to suspension other than detention or in-school suspension.

Increased access to music, art and languages in spite of budget cuts

👍 High school students have more access to advanced and CTE courses.

Principals confirm that more students are enrolling in these classes due to changes in the educational delivery model (EDM) and establishment of the talent development model. A+ Schools has advocated for these increased opportunities for student since 2009.

👍 Most Pittsburgh schools offer as much or more art and music as last year and more frequently than some suburban districts' schools serving students K-8.

This finding is especially significant given the massive budget cuts from the state last year.

👍 Average student caseloads for counselors and social workers have decreased, but are still high in lower grades

👎 Counselors and social workers responsible for more administrative tasks than suburban peers.

👎 More vulnerable students have less access to required texts.

Nearly 1 in 3 schools did not have all required textbooks by the start of school, and some middle and high schools do not permit students to bring books home for fear they will not be returned.

😐 Parent engagement resources exist in every school, but they are limited.

Students' Access to Textbooks

- Nearly one-third of schools (15) did not have all required textbooks by the start of school, a percentage similar to that of the suburban districts we interviewed. The reasons given were higher enrollment than expected, books arriving late, internal or unsure, and new courses. At the time of the interviews (February) 3 schools still did not have enough textbooks for their students in core subjects.
- Nearly half of principals (23) reported having classes where students are not permitted to take books home: the majority of schools were K-5s (10) and K-8s (9). Principals from 3 middle schools and one 6-12 school reported having classes where students are not permitted to take books home.
 - The main reasons were fear that students will not return books (20 schools, including the middle and 6-12 schools) and course curriculum does not require it.

Nearly 1 in 3 schools did not have all required textbooks by the start of school, and some schools do not permit students to bring books home for fear they will not be returned or because they do not have enough books.

- Principals of the more highly vulnerable schools were more likely to give “not enough books” as a reason.

High School Students’ Participation in Advanced Courses

The majority of secondary school principals reported increased student participation in Advanced Placement courses and Career and Technology Education courses (see Figure 6).

Course	Schools with increases	Schools with decreases
Advanced Placement (AP)	5 (56%)	1 (11%)
AP Prep	3 (33%)	1 (11%)
Career Technology Education (CTE)	4 (44%)	0
Center for Advanced Studies (CAS)	5 (56%)	0
Art	2 (22%)	0
Language	2 (22%)	1 (11%)
Music	1 (11%)	1 (11%)

Figure 6 – High School Participation in Advanced and Related Arts Courses

- In the past, high schools offered Mainstream and Pittsburgh Scholars Program (PSP) courses, with PSP courses having a more rigorous curriculum. This year, PSP and Mainstream courses are supposed to have the same curriculum at the PSP level of rigor. Two out of 9 secondary schools reported that PSP and Mainstream courses still have different curricula at their schools.
- Principals at schools with higher vulnerability were more likely to report:
 - smaller percentages of students with gifted Individual Educational Plans (IEPs), 504 plans, or enrolled in AP or CAS classes, and
 - greater percentages of students with special education IEPs .

Access to Art, Music, Language, and Library

Given budget cuts and the changes in the educational delivery model made to ensure more equitable access to a well rounded curriculum, it was particularly important to verify course offerings in schools this year. We found that in grades K-8, PPS students are more likely to receive art, music, and library than some surrounding suburban districts (see Figure 7).

	PPS	Suburban Districts
Art	100% (of schools)	83%
Music	100%	67%
Library	90%	67%
Language	27%	67%

The majority of schools offer students in grades K-8 the same or more time in art, music, and language, but 47% of schools report that students have less time with a librarian this year compared to last (see Figure 8).

Figure 7 – Schools Offering Related Arts and Library

- The majority of schools offer more than 1 day of art (61% of schools) and music (66%) instruction per 6-day cycle, as required by the district’s new Educational Delivery Model.

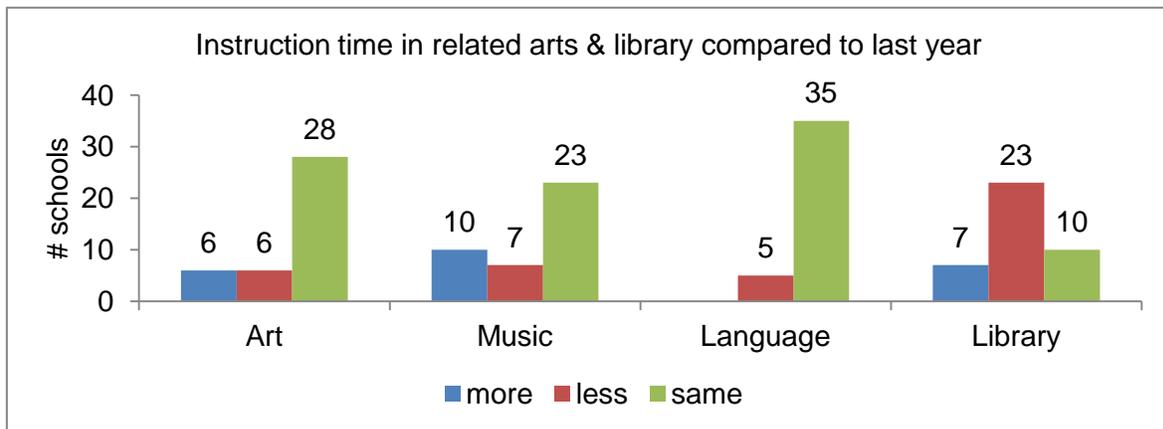


Figure 8 – Instruction Time in Related Arts & Library

- Last year, about 10 schools did not have an open library or librarian. This year, all schools have one.
- Every secondary school (grades 6-12 and 9-12) has a librarian 5 days a week, as required by the district’s Educational Delivery Model.
- Middle schools and K-5s with higher vulnerability were more likely to offer students more time in related arts and library this year compared with last year.

Supports for Social, Emotional, and Academic Counseling

Principals recognize counseling and social supports as an area of great need—when asked where they needed the most support overall, principals agreed the most on the need for student services (i.e., supports for students with high risk and social and mental health supports), with nearly 1 out of 3 principals identifying it as a need.

Average caseloads for counselors and social workers decreased since we interviewed principals and counselors in 2010, but they are still high in some schools (see Figure 9). The American Counselors Association recommends a maximum caseload of 250 students. Average caseloads meet that best practice in middle schools and high schools, but not in K-5s, K-8s, or 6-12s.

Principals reported administrative duties as being among the most important responsibilities of their counselors and social workers:

- (K-5s, K-8s, 6-8s): tracking attendance, providing social/emotional/behavioral supports
- (6-12s and 9-12s): tracking student data, scheduling, and college readiness
- By contrast, principals of suburban schools reported fewer administrative duties and more responsibilities for involving academic and career counseling and providing social and emotional supports.

According to principals, the barriers counselors and social workers face in fulfilling their responsibilities include having large caseloads, students with high degree of need, and a lack of time.

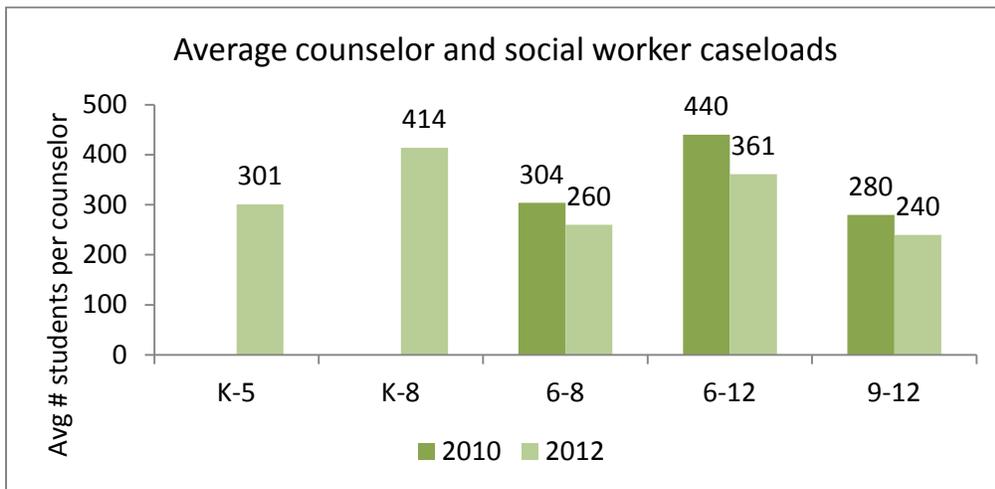


Figure 9 – Average Counselor and Social Worker Caseloads

Support for Family Engagement

This year, resources were provided to every school to have one Family and Community Engagement (FACE) coordinator. FACE coordinators are full-time teachers, counselors, or social workers who receive a stipend to dedicate an average of 42 minutes/day toward parent engagement.

- Although every principal reported having a FACE coordinator, general interest for this position seemed low, with 14 principals saying only one person expressed interest in the position.

- Selection occurred by staff volunteering, filling out an application, interviewing, and/or being selected by a committee of school personnel. Selection did not include parent input.
- The top FACE coordinator activities reported by principals were parent communication & information sharing, family engagement events, PTO/PTA or PSCC responsibilities.

Resource Allocation Based on Student Need A key equity strategy is to allocate resources based on student need not only across the commonwealth and within the district, but also within schools.

The majority of principals spent discretionary money on additional staff members (see Figure 10). Discretionary money includes (1) Title 1 funding, a federal allocation dependent on the number of students at a school who qualify for free or reduced price lunch, and (2) discretionary funding allotted by the district based on enrollment and number of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

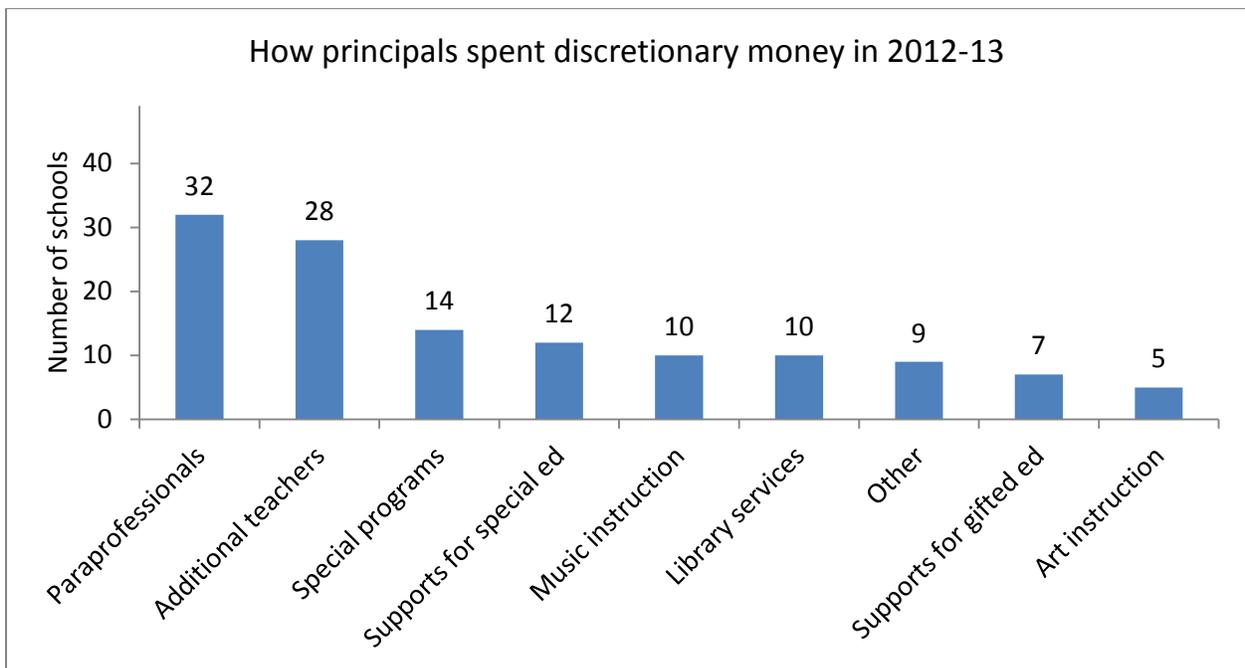


Figure 10 – How Principals Spent Discretionary Money

- Schools with higher vulnerability were more likely to spend discretionary funding for art, as well as both discretionary and Title 1 funding for teachers in subjects other than art, music, or library.
- Schools with higher vulnerability were less likely to raise money through a PTO or PTA. Schools that did raise money through PTOs or PTAs used it for student activities (76%), student supplies (24%), or at their discretion (15%).

PPS principals were only moderately confident they could allocate resources based on student need. Just 38% of principals said they were very or exceptionally able to do so, compared with 64% of principals interviewed from surrounding suburban districts.

- The principals of 6-12 schools were more likely to feel they could allocate resources based on student need. This is not surprising in light of A+ Schools' earlier finding that 6-12's have the highest average per pupil spending in PPS.
- When asked what resources they wanted to provide, 55% of principals said more staff and 22% said tutoring:
 - The staff that principals wanted to provide included social workers and counselors; paraprofessionals; full time art and music teachers, librarians, nurses and FACE coordinators; technology teachers; special education teachers; Instructional Teacher Leaders; behavioral specialists; monitors for arrival and dismissal, lunch, and playground; and more.
 - Principals listed many other resources they wanted to provide, including technology, larger course selection, language courses, literacy support, ESL resources, smaller class sizes, programming for conflict mediation, partnerships with outside organizations, transportation for students or parents, facilities improvement, and sports equipment.

How Families and Community Members Can Help – We Know Schools Can't Do it Alone

When asked how principals felt families could best support their efforts, the most frequent responses were for parents to communicate with the school, especially their questions or concerns (35%), to be involved with their children's lives (27%), to ensure their children have good attendance (25%), and to help children with their homework (18%). Other responses included visiting the school, teaching children specific skills, reading to children, teaching the value of education, working with schools as a partner, and holding schools accountable for success.

When asked how principals felt community members could best support their efforts, the most frequent responses were coming to the school to volunteer or attend events (41%), connect schools with resources (18%), and positively support and advocate for schools (14%). Other responses included being informed about what happens in the district, attending district-wide and parent meetings, and supporting families and students.



Parent Nation Call to Action

Voices United for Education

This year, A+ Schools Parent Nation came together as dedicated and concerned parents focused on our children's future and education. We want to make sure that parents, guardians and children are involved in the decisions made in our schools and that A+ Schools Parent Nation and collaborative organizations together carry out programs and policies at schools which can lead to a safer school climate and address the safety, health and welfare of the students and staff. We bring your attention to these matters here because School Works findings reinforce the needs identified in this call to action.

Many parents have already been working with the district to update the parent and family engagement policy to more clearly outline the rights of parents and families to be present and involved in decisions at schools. That process has exemplified how parents can work with the district to change policy.

As Parent Nation, we ask that by September 1st, the school district:

1. Create roles and term limits for parents and students on every district policy making committee.
2. Make sure every school has an active Parent School Community Council with an informed group of parents to work with principals.
3. Work with us to create a training program and check list for parents, families and staff to see how the school partnerships are working.
4. Commit funds to support a parent volunteer stipend position in schools with parents and principals that are willing to work together.
5. Make sure parents are involved in making the parent-family compacts We also want these compacts to be posted on the district's website.

By January of 2014, we want to be here celebrating additional progress towards a new approach to discipline that prioritizes education over incarceration.

As Parent Nation, we ask that the district:

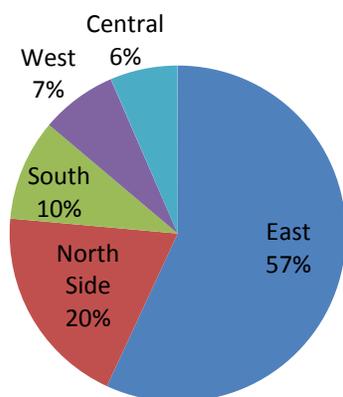
1. Post monthly discipline data on in-school and out-of-school suspensions by school on the district website broken down by race, grade level and infraction.
2. Form a school climate task force that has representation of Parents and Students to work with the district and the Education Law Center to update the entire current code of conduct and build a school climate policy.
3. Re-evaluate and remove unnecessary zero tolerance policies from the current code of conduct, and remove and all language that makes it ok for schools to create their own zero tolerance policies.
4. Identify experts and partnerships to support schools in implementing school wide behavior management plans with more effective protocols and practices- And incorporate restorative justice programs as alternatives to suspensions.
5. Form a hiring committee with representation of parents, students with established term limits to vet candidates for any administrative position related to school discipline, such as School Police Chief, Director of Student Services and any others.

Community members prioritized teacher quality, parent involvement, and supports for positive behavior and social and emotional learning

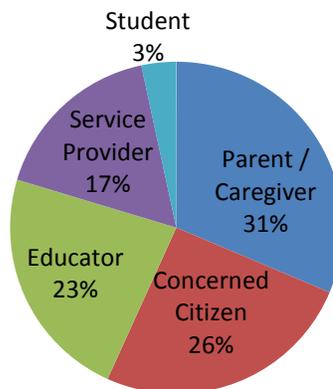
On May 29 and June 4, A+ Schools held public meetings to brief community members on the School Works results and to share perspectives from members of A+ Schools Parent Nation. Parent Nation made a Call to Action to Dr. Linda Lane and the Pittsburgh Public School District to involve parents in decision-making at their schools and to improve school climates (see page 21). Dr. Lane and Viola Burgess, Executive Director of the PPS Equity Office, attended the meetings and committed to responding to each point in the Call to Action.

About 130 community members came to the meetings, which were held at Ebenezer Baptist Church and Pittsburgh King preK-8 school. The following charts summarize the diversity of people who filled the rooms—meeting participants chose the responses below using electronic polling devices:

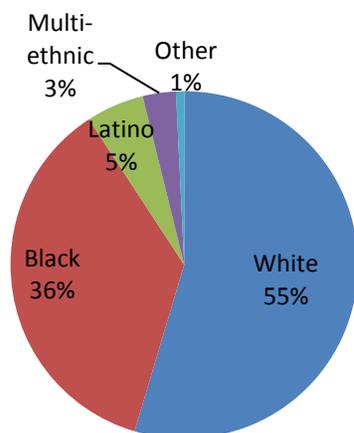
In what part of the city do you live?



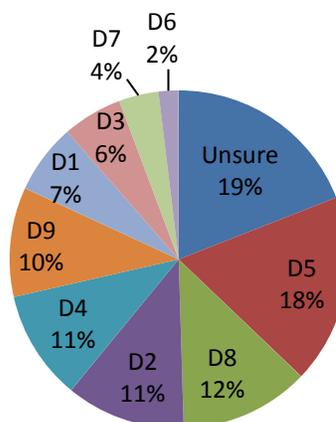
How do you describe your role in the community (choose one)?



What is your race?



In what school board district do you live?



A+ Schools presented School Works data in three sections: great teaching, opportunities and resources, and positive school climate supports. Following each section, parent leaders from A+ Schools Parent Nation gave testimonies related to the information presented and their experience as parents of children who attend public schools in Pittsburgh. For each section we polled meeting attendees on the three issues they felt most urgent about, and attendees held discussions at their tables where they shared concerns and what they were glad to hear. Polling data from both meetings is combined into weighted averages in the tables below.

On teaching-related issues, community members were most concerned with teacher quality and evaluation.

Regardless of race or role in the community, people felt the greatest urgency around teacher quality and evaluation. The next greatest concern was school staff stability, followed by course rigor, class size, teacher absenteeism, and long-term substitutes (see Figure 1).

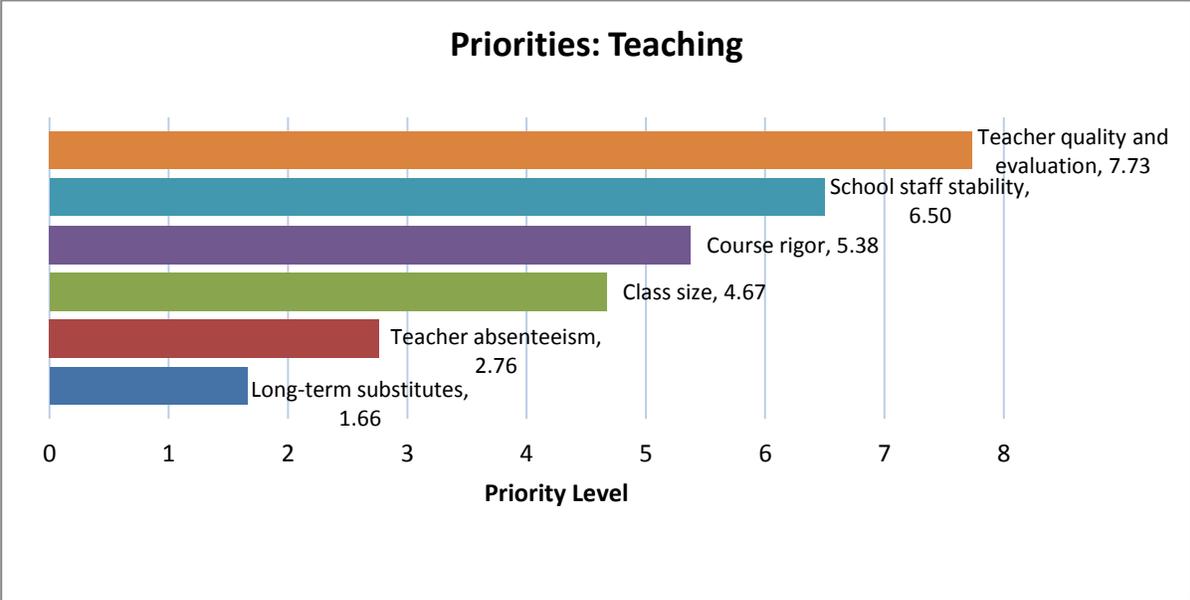


Figure 1

On issues related to course opportunities and resources, community members were highly concerned about parent involvement, counselors and social workers, and students' access to textbooks.

Meeting attendees were less united in which issues related to opportunities and resources they felt were most urgent. As a whole, attendees were most concerned with parent and family involvement, counselors and social workers, and students' access to textbooks and course materials (see Figure 2). Parents felt the most urgency about students' access to textbooks, and they were more concerned about access to arts, music, and language than other groups. Educators felt the most urgency about parent involvement, and service providers were most concerned with counselors and social workers.

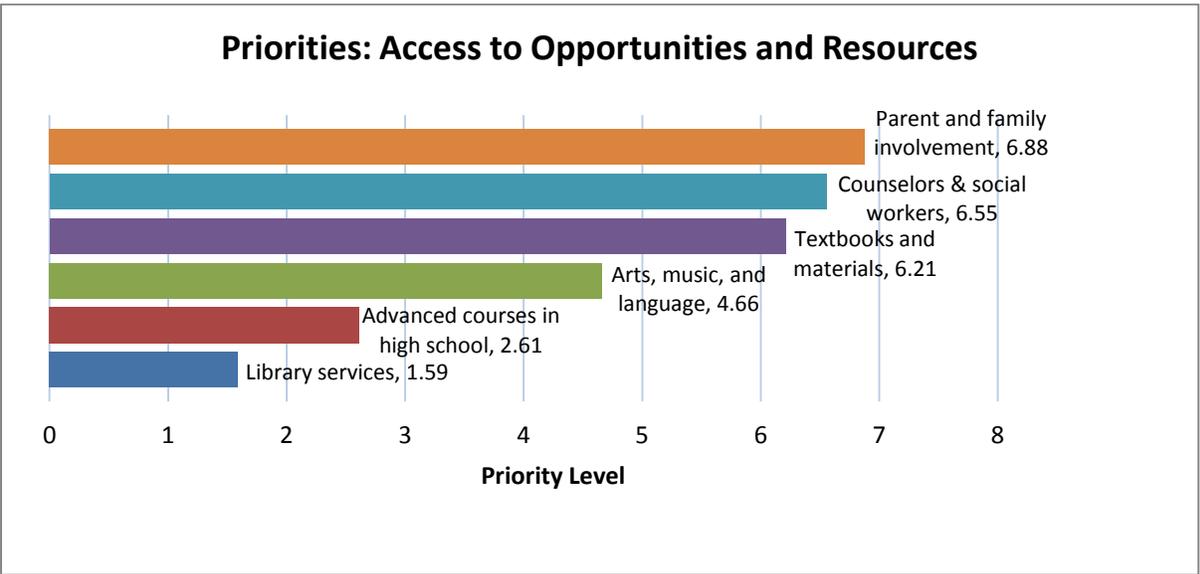


Figure 2

On issues related to supports, community members agreed that school wide supports for positive behavior and social and emotional learning skills deserved urgent attention.

Overall, meeting attendees felt the most urgency around positive behavioral supports, social and emotional learning skills development, and alternatives to suspension (see Figure 3). Parents and service providers reported feeling more urgency around alternatives to suspension than educators or concerned citizens. Service providers gave top priority to social and emotional learning skills, and students felt the most urgency about positive behavioral supports and zero tolerance policies.

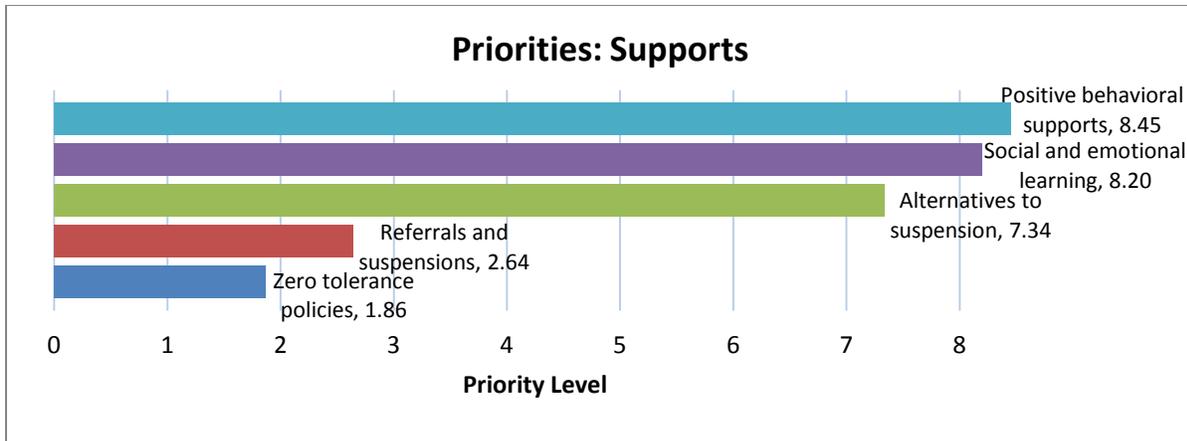


Figure 3

What do you think?

Thanks for joining A+ Schools to learn more about how our schools are working. Please take the opportunity going forward to engage with other parents, policy makers, and community members about what we've learned and what priorities for action should be. Stay posted as we work over the summer to engage more parents and community members in discussions and consensus building for what great schools in Pittsburgh should look like.

Stay engaged: Volunteer with Board Watch, School Works or Parent Nation

Join our email list: Sign up at our website (www.aplusschools.org)

Like us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/aplusschoolsfan)

Follow us on twitter (@aplusschools)

Read our Blog

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