



Schools

Pittsburgh's Community Alliance for Public Education



Schools that Work

What we Learned from Principals

March 10, 2015

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School Works Findings 2015

Schools that work can create positive, stable, and rigorous environments that foster student success.

The findings from A+ Schools' 2015 School Works community action research represent the views of the 50 principals in our schools.

We asked principals about best practices and conditions that support student engagement and success. Topics covered included academic rigor, restorative discipline, staff hiring and stability, and school resources.

The trends point to practices linked to student success and engagement. We also found that barriers to hiring and retaining effective teachers result in instability that unfairly disadvantages students in our most vulnerable schools.

Students in our most vulnerable schools deserve high expectations and to attend school in stable environments that foster positive relationships and rigorous engagement in learning.

We believe all schools must do the following in order to work for their students:

- **Demonstrate high expectations for students and provide targeted resources to support academic rigor.**
- **Replace zero tolerance policies with practices that address the cause of behavior and restore relationships.**
- **Be able to hire, keep, and support great teachers. Policies preventing schools from doing so should be eliminated.**
- **Spend money in smart ways that positively impact student success.**

Key Finding: Students in vulnerable schools are more likely to be suspended, have less experienced teachers, and have higher principal turnover than students at less vulnerable schools. Therefore internal practices and external policies prevent vulnerable schools from creating conditions for student success.

Additional Findings:

Mission Driven Schools

High expectations are linked to positive environments, better attendance, and achievement.

Schools report reducing use of zero tolerance policies due to TeenBloc supported changes to the Student Code of Conduct.

Academic rigor and restorative practices linked to lower suspension rates.

Great Teaching

Principals at vulnerable schools report greater challenges retaining effective teachers.

Most principals report policy barriers to hiring effective teachers.

Fair Funding, Smart Spending

Costs are high at small schools which have fewer practices linked to student success.

Principals report needing human resources; staffing rules barriers to community supports.

Mission Driven: Schools that Work are safe, respectful, and positive places where students are engaged

 **Schools that work teach social and emotional learning skills.** Schools with lower rates of chronic absenteeism develop students' social and emotional learning skills and create academically rigorous environments that keep students engaged.

 **High expectations are linked to lower rates of chronic absenteeism and lower suspension rates.** Principals who report higher percentages of teachers who have high expectations for all students also report implementing practices that positively impact attendance and behavior.

Chronic absenteeism can be reduced: keeping kids in school

School attendance is extremely important. “Chronic absence in middle school is one of the best indicators we have that a student will drop out later. A study in Utah found that students who were chronically absent in any year between eighth and 12th grades were 7.5 times more likely to drop out of high school.”¹ Even when students have excused absences from school, they still miss valuable time in class. Students who miss more than 10% of school days (unexcused) cannot receive Pittsburgh Promise scholarship money to attend postsecondary education in Pennsylvania.

Chronic absenteeism is defined by the district as missing at least 10% of school days, excused or unexcused. While **chronic absenteeism** may be related to personal factors in students' lives, it is also related to practices within the control of adults who work in schools.

In fact, principals whose schools have lower rates of chronic absenteeism in October and November of 2014 were significantly more likely to report implementing the following practices that reflect positive, respectful, and academically rigorous school climates:

- Having a system for developing students' social and emotional learning skills and being more effective at doing so
- More staff who have **high expectations** for **all** students, proactively work to create a positive school culture, and who **actively address students** when they make discriminatory comments toward one another
- More academically rigorous environments that challenge students at all levels and hold them to high standards:

¹ Balfanz & Chang. A Focus on Attendance is Key to Success. Retrieved from http://www.nassp.org/tabid/3788/default.aspx?topic=A_Focus_on_Attendance_Is_Key_to_Success

- Developing students' study skills
- More teachers who use **different methods** to help all students understand the subject matter
- In high schools, more teachers using their professional period to investigate instructional practices or new developments in the field
- In grades 9-12, assigning all students a staff person to help apply for advanced courses (Center for Advanced Studies and Advanced Placement)

Principals at more vulnerable schools report fewer of their staff members proactively working to create a positive school culture or actively addressing students when they make discriminatory comments toward one another.²

Monitoring chronic absenteeism

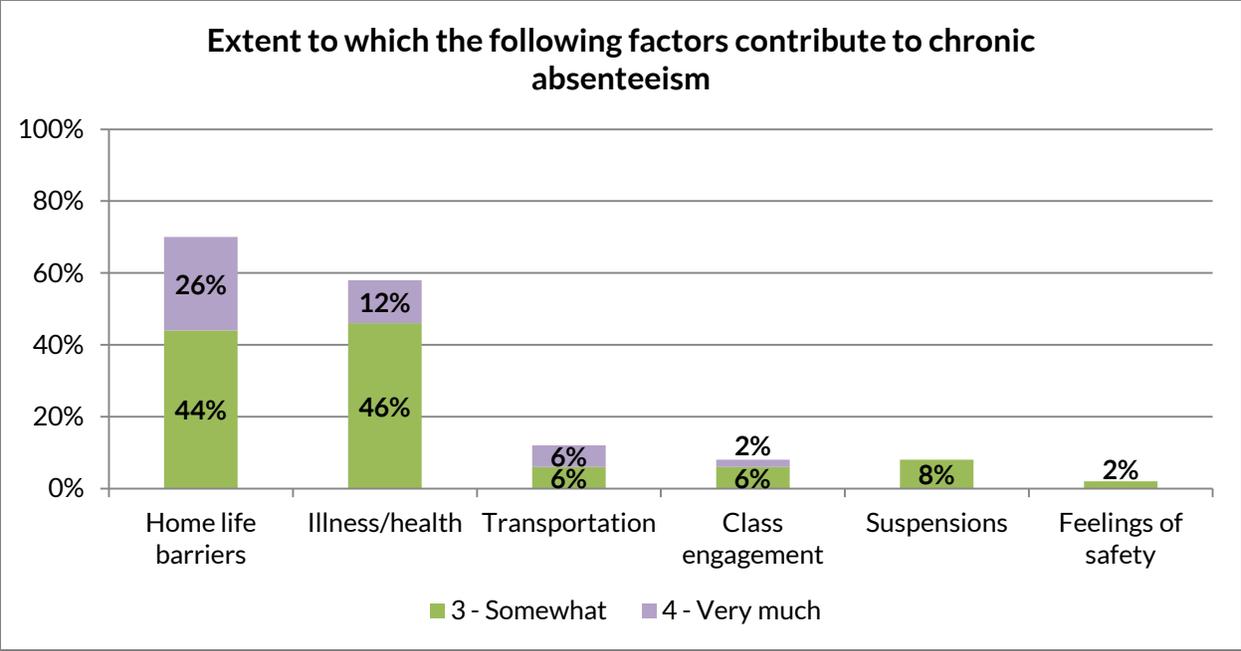
Ninety-eight percent of principals reported having a **system for monitoring absenteeism and intervening** before a student becomes chronically absent.

When asked to share the top two to three intervention strategies used to re-engage students once they become chronically absent, principals reported:

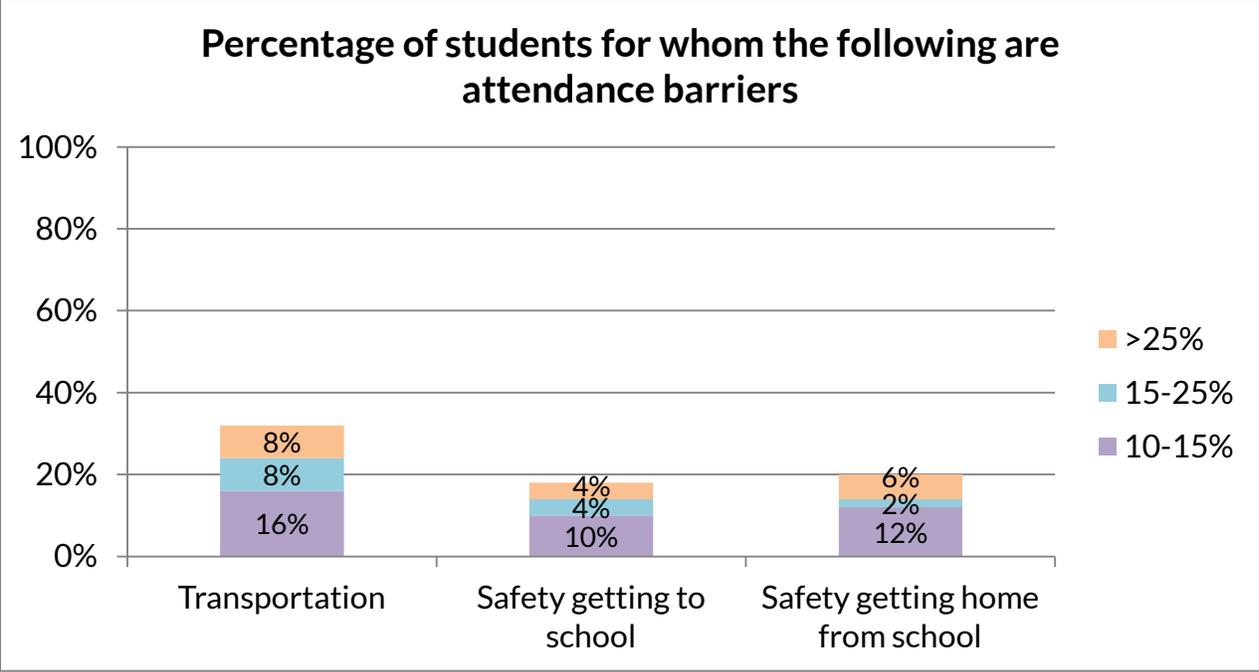
- Meetings with parents (32%)
- Positive rewards/incentives program (32%)
- Contact parents via phone/letter (30%)
- Outside partners (i.e., United Way, Reddy Freddy, Family Links, etc.) (24%)
- Create a plan with parents and student (18%)
- Meet with students individually (18%)
- Check in / check out system (18%)
- Home visits (10%)

Although, we found that school practices impact student attendance, principals report that student-based factors contribute more to chronic absenteeism than school-based factors:

² The terms “more vulnerable” and “less vulnerable” are used throughout this report – see page 32 for a complete explanation of how A+ Schools defines school vulnerability.



One out of three principals report that **transportation** presents barriers to attendance for more than 10% of their students. About one in five principals report that **safety getting to or from school** affects the attendance of more than 10% of their students.



When asked what **top two to three changes** could help students get to and from school **more efficiently or safely**, principals reported the following:

- Increase bus service (more buses, stops, or runs; eliminate 2-mile radius rule) (38%)

- Crossing guards (16%)
- Community/parent involvement (12%)
- Bus monitors (10%)
- Safe walking routes (lights, signs, etc.) (8%)
- Increased expectations for bus drivers (build positive relationships with students and enforce rules) (8%)

High expectations matter

More than any other teaching practice reported on, **having high expectations of all students** is linked to practices that affect student attendance and behavior.

Decades of research show that effort creates ability.³ Schools organized around supporting students' sustained and directed efforts can help students increase ability and achieve at higher levels. This involves setting high minimum standards and assessments for students, teaching all students a rigorous curriculum, and giving students as much time and expert instruction as they need to meet or exceed expectations.

When principals told us more of their teachers had high expectations for students, they were significantly more likely to report the following practices:

- More teachers proactively working to make the school **safe, positive, and academically rigorous**
- Fewer teachers disciplining students in ways that take them out of class
- Greater effectiveness at implementing **behavioral supports**:
 - Teaching students to replace inappropriate behaviors with appropriate ones
 - Consistently modeling behavior expectations
 - Staff members being consistent with discipline implementation
- Greater effectiveness at developing social and emotional learning skills

Schools where principals reported more teachers who have high expectations also experienced lower rates of suspension and chronic absenteeism (October and November, 2014).

³ University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Learning, *Principles of Learning*: http://ifl.pitt.edu/index.php/educator_resources/principles_of_learning

Mission Driven: Schools that Work emphasize accountability, building character, making amends, and keeping students in school

 **Some principals report increasing effectiveness of behavioral supports and social and emotional skills development.**

 **Zero tolerance policies reserved for more serious infractions.** A third of principals report positive changes based on revisions to the Student Code of Conduct championed by Teen Bloc students last year; these include reducing the number of minor infractions resulting automatic suspension and using restorative practices such as mediation with students and parents.

 **Two-thirds of principals report using restorative practices.** Restorative practices provide an alternative to exclusionary discipline by addressing the roots causes of the behavior and allowing students to make amends and repair relationships.

 **Zero tolerance policies still practiced in most schools and black students suspended at higher rates.** Thirty-nine out of fifty principals reported practicing zero tolerance policies, and black students are given out-of-school suspensions at three times the rate of white students.

 **Vulnerable schools have higher suspension rates and are less likely to implement effective behavioral supports.** Principals in more vulnerable schools report a higher percentage of teachers who discipline students based on race, sex, religion, or other characteristics and in ways that take them out of class, as well as fewer teachers who model the school's behavior expectations.

Part of creating positive learning environments for teachers and students requires schools to teach social and emotional learning skills (like learning how to share or express anger or frustration in a safe way) and putting in place a school wide system that recognizes models and reinforces positive behaviors rather than focusing in a punitive way on negative behaviors.⁴

Exclusionary discipline that takes students out of school (i.e., suspensions or expulsions) has negative impacts on students. Just one suspension in 9th grade doubles the chance of a student dropping out, and students in the criminal justice system are more likely to have been suspended at least once in school.⁵

⁴ Thapa, et al, pp: 4-7.

⁵ Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2012

One promising alternative to exclusionary discipline are so called “restorative practices.” These practices emphasize the importance of positive relationships as central to building community and providing opportunities to restore relationships when harm has occurred. Two key principles of restorative practices are as follows:

1. Everyone is valued and is responsible for holding one another accountable to the collective values and principles that define the community
2. Participation is achieved through cooperation rather than coercion. When those in positions of authority act with students rather than doing things to them or for them, all people will make positive changes⁶

A restorative approach to conflict confronts and disapproves of wrongdoing while simultaneously affirming the intrinsic worth of the offender. Restorative practices provide an opportunity for teachers and students to come together to share their feelings, describe how the misbehavior affected those involved, and develop a plan to repair the harm or prevent a reoccurrence. Restorative responses require a shift in a school’s view of conflict, aiming to make students and staff feel safe and included. They also afford educators the opportunity to model and instill positive behavior in their students.⁷

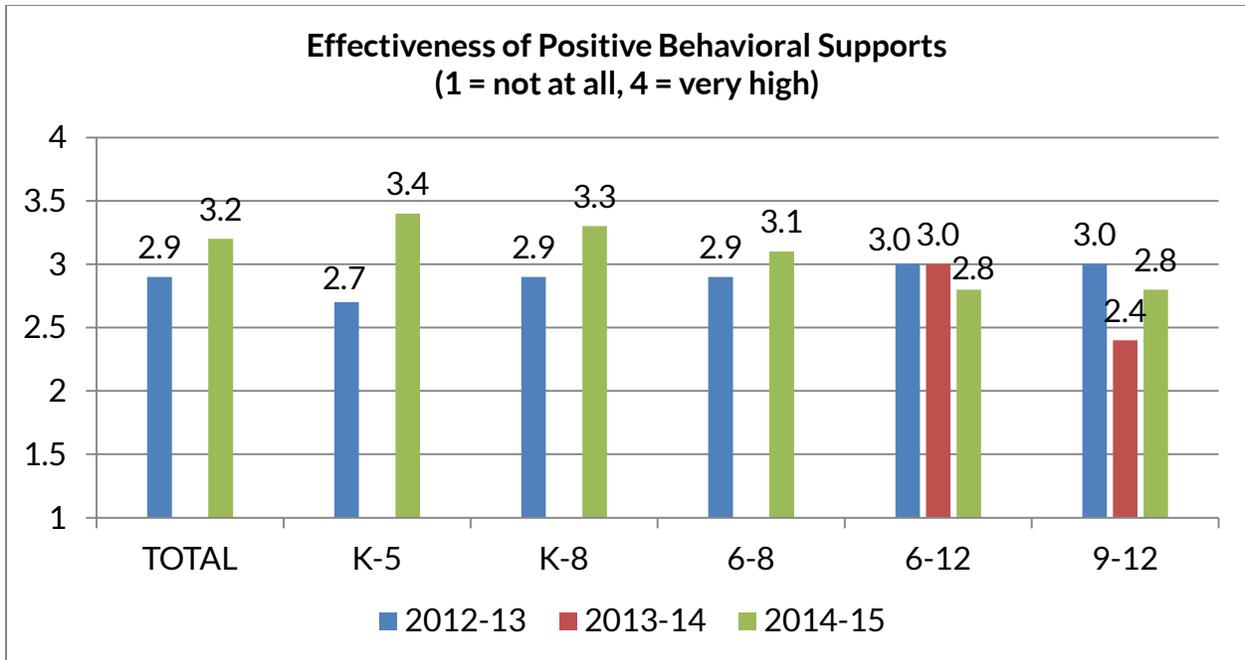
A majority of principals report increasing effectiveness in behavioral supports and social and emotional skills development

Over time, principals of K-5, K-8, and middle schools have reported more effective behavioral supports. Principals of secondary schools report less effective behavioral supports that have not gotten better over time.⁸

⁶ Wachtel & Costello (2009), The Restorative Practices Handbook, p. 50

⁷ See e.g. McCold and Wachtel.

⁸ A+ Schools, 2013 and A+ Schools, 2014



Eighty percent of principals reported effectively implementing practices to prevent and respond to student misbehavior:

Preventing Misbehavior	Responding to Misbehavior
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching students the behavior expectations • Teaching students how to replace inappropriate behaviors with appropriate ones • Staff members consistently modeling the school's behavior expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciplining students in private • Addressing the cause of the behavior • Providing opportunities for students to be held accountable to those they harm • Aiming to restore relationships between those who did harm and those who were harmed • Ensuring students catch up on any work missed as a result of discipline

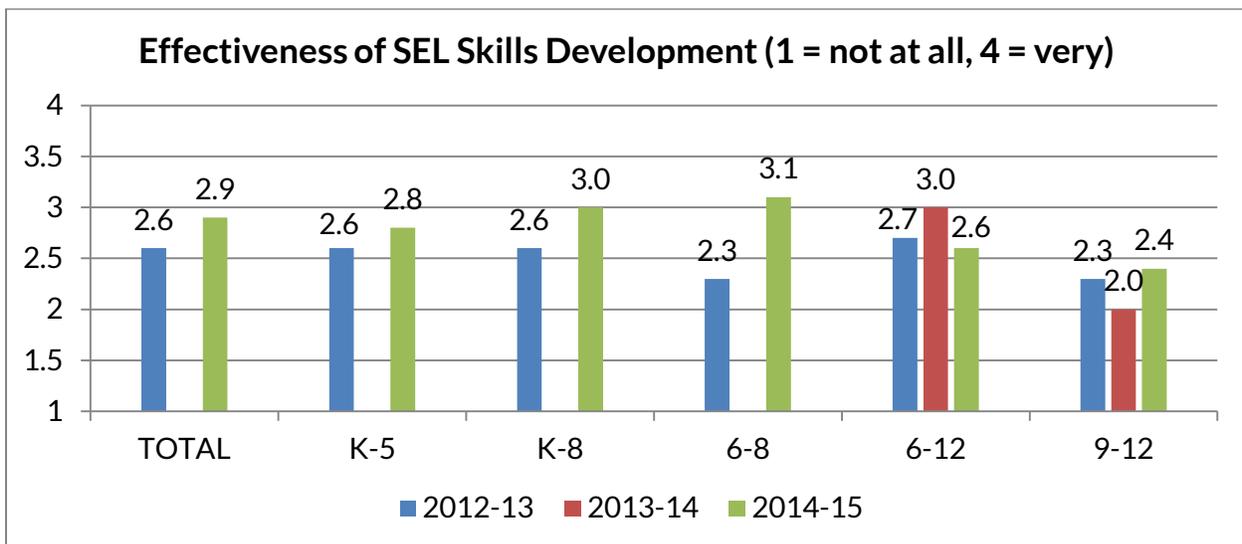
However, principals at more vulnerable schools reported that their staff less frequently implemented these practices:

- with consistency
- in ways that provide opportunities for **students to be held accountable to those they have impacted**
- in ways that **restore relationships** between those who have done harm and those who were impacted

Principals cite multiple needs for improving behavioral supports. When asked what top two to three actions they needed in order to increase their school’s effectiveness at implementing behavioral supports, they reported:

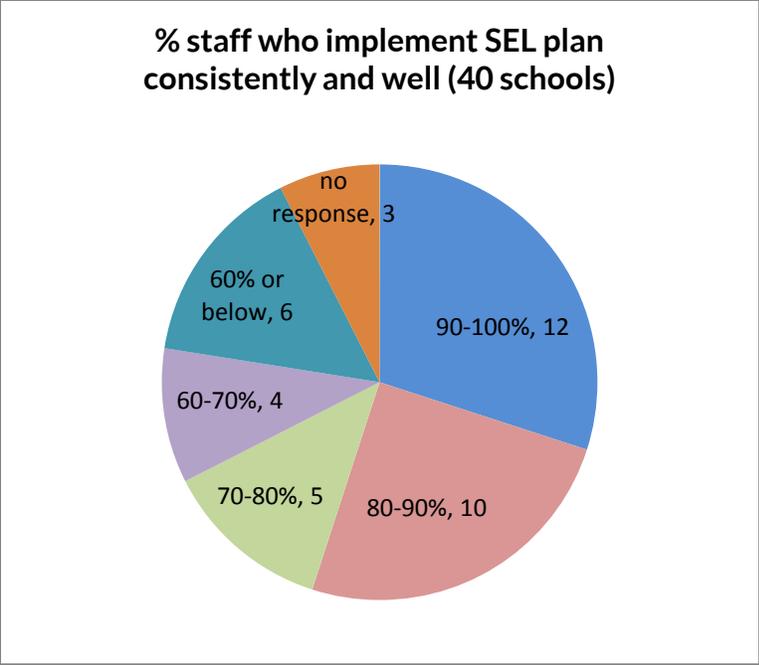
- Human resources (24%)
- More parental support (20%)
- Teacher consistency (16%)
- Training/Professional Development for teachers (16%)
- Time for meeting with students and for staff to meet with each other (16%)
- More external resources for mental health (14%)
- Money (12%)
- More strategies (i.e., student engagement, de-escalation) (8%)

Similarly to behavioral supports, principals in K-5s, K-8s, and middle schools report increases in effectiveness of social and emotional learning skills development over time, but principals of secondary schools reported mixed results over time.⁹



While 40 principals report having a school wide system for developing students’ social and emotional learning skills, how well and consistently the plans are implemented varied.

⁹ A+ Schools, 2013 and A+ Schools, 2014



Fewer minor infractions lead to suspension as a result of changes to the Student Code of Conduct

Last year, a third of schools reported changing how they discipline students in response to changes to the District’s Code of Student Conduct (changes advocated by A+ Schools’ TeenBloc program).

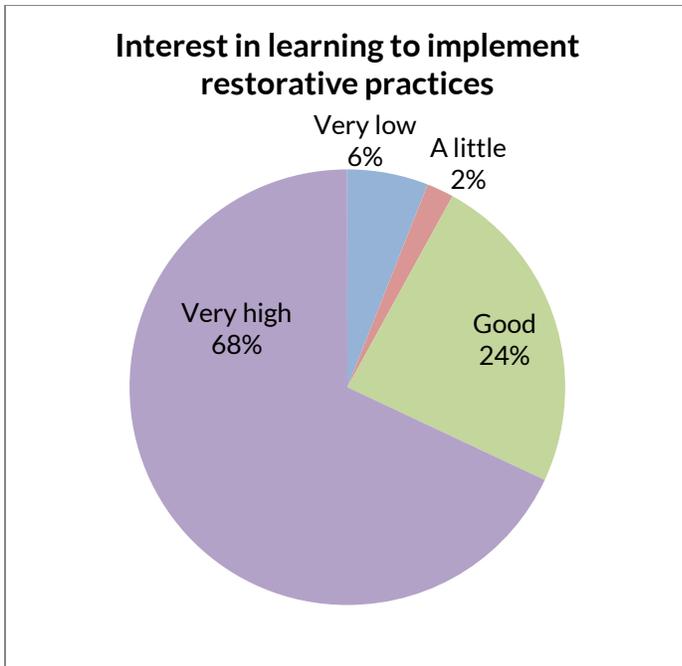
These changes included:

- More student mediation
- More parent meetings
- More staff modeling positive relationships to students
- More staff with higher expectations of students

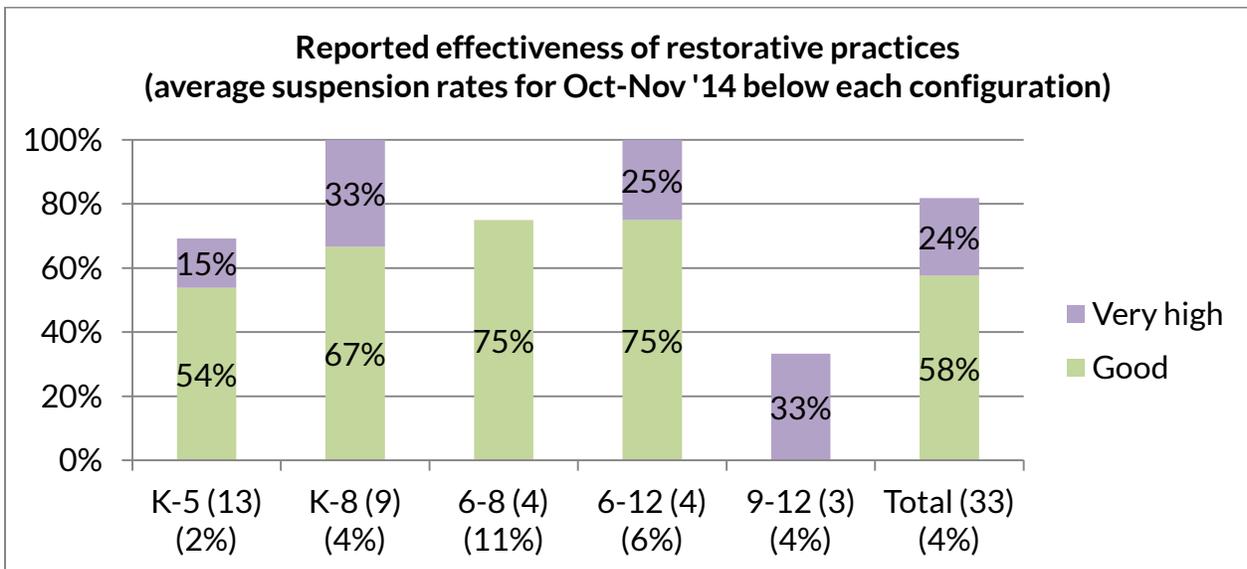
As a result of these changes, principals reported decreasing the number of suspensions and referrals given to students.

Principals report interest in restorative practices

Forty principals reported having a good or very high understanding of restorative practices, and 46 principals said they wanted to learn more about implementing restorative practices at their schools.



Thirty-three principals reported using restorative practices with mixed effectiveness depending on grade configuration. Of the 17 schools not using restorative practices, 11 principals very much believe they could be implemented successfully at their school, while six principals somewhat believe it.



For each grade configuration, the average suspension rate was lower or the same in schools reported to have more effective restorative practices than in schools reported to have less effective restorative practices or that do not use restorative practices (see table below).

Out-of-School Suspension Rates (Oct-Nov 2014)				
Configuration	Average	Range	Average (schools reporting effective restorative practices)	Average (schools reporting less effective or no restorative practices)
K-5	3%	0 - 16%	2%	4%
K-8	4%	1 - 9%	4%	5%
6-8	10%	2 - 13%	11%	9%
6-12	10%	3 - 24%	6%	24%
9-12	17%	4 - 29%	4%	21%

When asked about the top challenges to implementing restorative practices at their schools, principals reported the following:

- Staff buy-in and mindset (48%)
- Time (39%)
- Parent buy-in and support (24%)
- Capacity or ability of staff to implement (15%)
- Student willingness to engage (12%)
- Others: logistics, professional development for staff, none, language barriers, lack of programs to help, lack of money

Despite some changes, zero tolerance policies still practiced in most schools, and black students are suspended at higher rates

Thirty-nine principals identified zero tolerance behaviors that result in an automatic suspension for students. Although principals no longer report suspending students automatically for “disrespect” or “cell phones,” students can still be suspended for things like “profanity” and “recording fights.”

Reported zero tolerance behaviors:

- Fighting (32 schools)
- Profanity or swearing at teacher (8)
- Others: bullying (3), aggression (3), safety violations (3), touching inappropriately (2), leaving school (2), vandalism (2), hitting teacher, severe disrespect, recording fights, throwing objects, theft, skipping Saturday suspension

Suspensions rates are still high in some schools:

- 10 schools gave at least one out-of-school suspension to 10% or more of their students in October and November 2014
- 12 schools gave suspensions to 5–10% of their students

Black students are disproportionately affected by suspensions; although they comprise 53% of students in the district, they make up 76% of students who were given out-of-school suspensions in October and November 2014. This number went down from 83% in 2012-13 but is still very high. In Oct-Nov 2014, 10% of all African American students were suspended, compared with 6% American Indian, 5% Multi-Racial, 4% Hispanic, 3% White, and 3% Asian (non-Pacific Islander). These numbers reflect national data from the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights that black and brown students are three times as likely to be suspended as white students.¹⁰

Vulnerable schools give more out-of-school suspensions. Principals in these schools report:

- less effectively developing social and emotional learning skills
- staff members less frequently modeling the behavior expectations for students
- higher percentage of teachers who discipline students based on race, sex, religion, or other characteristics

¹⁰ Civil Rights Data Collection Data Snapshot: School Discipline, March 2014. Retrieved from <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf>.

Great Teaching: Schools that Work hire, keep, and support great teachers

 **Observation and other strategies are being used to support teacher improvement.** Principals use different strategies and information to help teachers improve, including the current observation system (RISE), observation and coaching by teacher leaders, and data around student discipline and grades.

 **Four out of five principals report policy barriers preventing them from staffing classes with highly effective teachers.** These barriers include forced placements, the hiring timeline, and the state-mandated eligibility list.

 **Principals at vulnerable schools have more difficulty retaining effective teachers.** One out of four teachers are new to their building each year in our most vulnerable schools, compared to one out of thirteen in the least vulnerable schools.

 **Students in vulnerable schools experience less academic rigor.** Principals in vulnerable schools reported fewer staff proactively working to make the school academically rigorous or who have high expectations of students.

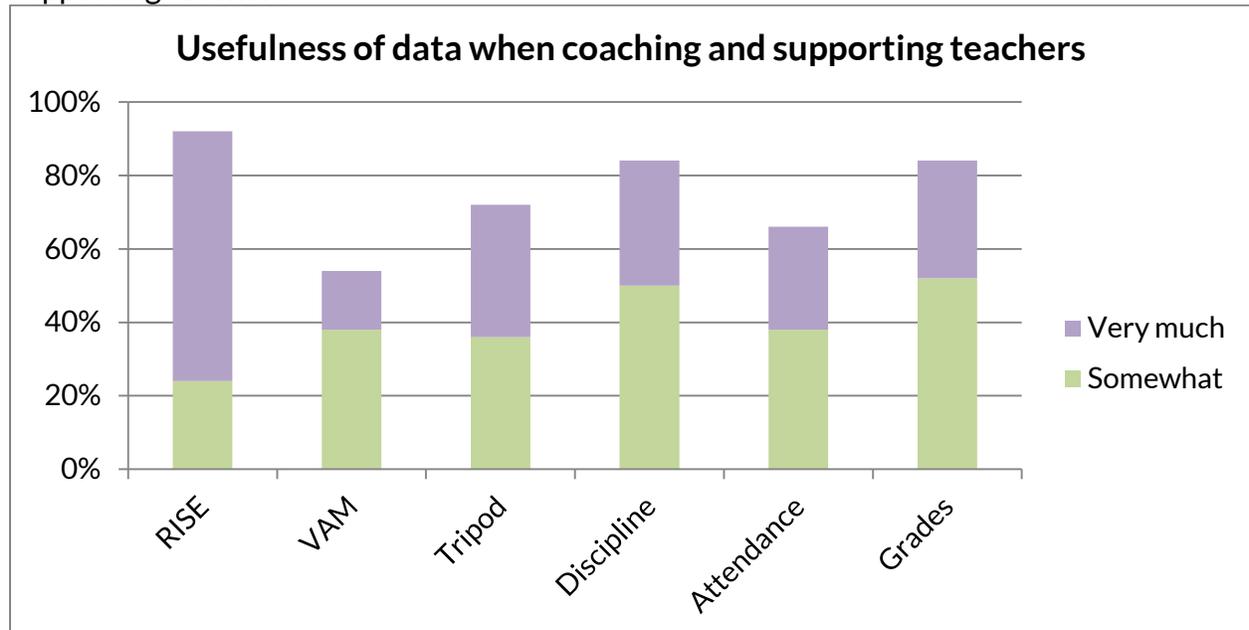
Effective teaching is the most significant school-based contribution to student learning, and it is a core equity issue. A+ Schools advocates for defining and measuring effective teaching, ensuring our most vulnerable students have effective teachers, and creating positive teaching and learning environments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

PPS defines an effective teacher as someone who “is a professional, who knows his or her subject, and teaches it well, inspiring and engaging all students as individuals to fulfill their personal and career goals, and accelerating learning so that all students are Promise-Ready.”¹¹

In order to help teachers improve their practice, principals conduct formal classroom observations and evaluations through a system called RISE, or Research-based Inclusive System of Evaluation. They also provide feedback to teachers and, if needed, help them develop plans for improvement.

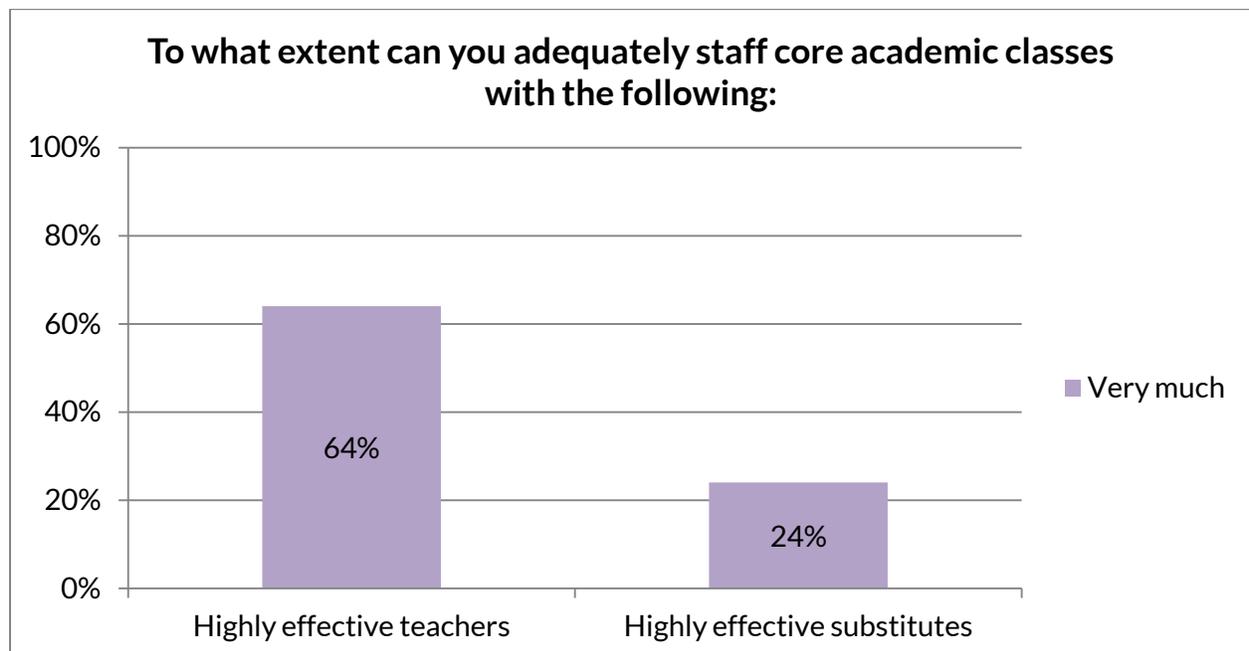
¹¹ Empowering Effective Teachers Update. Pittsburgh Public Schools Education Committee Meeting, January 3, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/Page/1305>.

Principals shared with us which data they found most useful when coaching and supporting teachers:

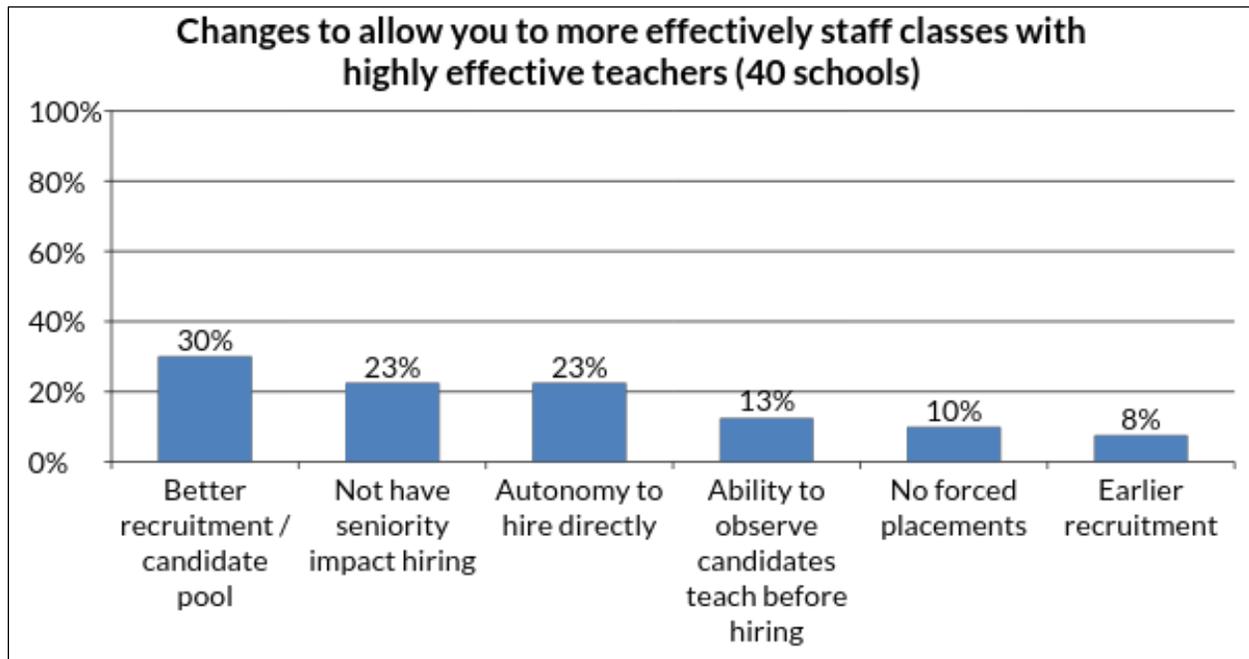


Principals report policy barriers preventing them from staffing classes with highly effective teachers

We asked principals to share the extent to which they could adequately staff their core classes with highly effective substitutes and teachers, and while a majority reported being very much able to staff classes with effective teachers, a quarter of principals reported being very much able to do so with effective substitutes.



When asked what changes would allow them to more effectively staff classes with highly effective teachers, forty principals reported wanting to change current hiring and staffing policies:

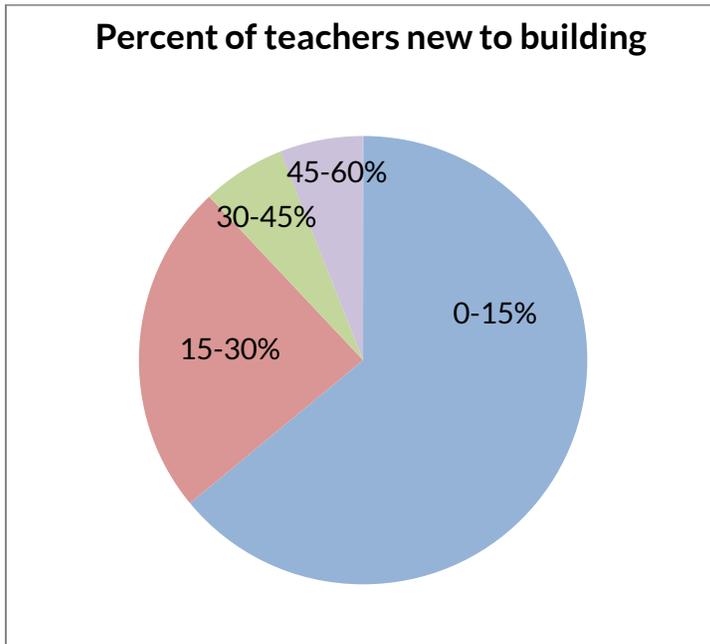


To further explain some of these suggestions:

- **Forced placements** – teachers displaced by budget cuts, position restructurings, or school closings are guaranteed a new assignment. If they do not find a match during the first two rounds of transfers, they will be placed at a school by the District. This placement occurs without an interview and regardless of performance, or fit for both the teacher and the school.
- **Not having seniority impact hiring** – currently, when positions are cut at a school, teachers with more building seniority are protected over teachers with less seniority within the same certification area, regardless of performance. Further, Pennsylvania is one of just six states in the country requiring that seniority be the only factor in determining which teachers are furloughed when school districts make staff reductions. Performance ratings are not currently allowed to be considered.
- **Autonomy to hire directly** – currently, principals must hire from an eligibility list required by state law, and they must also go through a matching process through the Human Resources Department of Pittsburgh Public Schools (this matching process can be time consuming and limit the pool of candidates principals can interview).
- **Ability to observe candidates teach before hiring** – many new hires are interviewed in the summer when there are often no students available
- **Earlier recruitment** – teachers new to the district do not start being interviewed and hired typically until late June. Principals reported losing candidates to districts that hire earlier.

Principals at vulnerable schools have more difficulty retaining effective teachers

The majority of principals reported less than 15% teacher turnover between 2013-14 and 2014-15, meaning fewer than 15% of their teachers were new to the school this year.



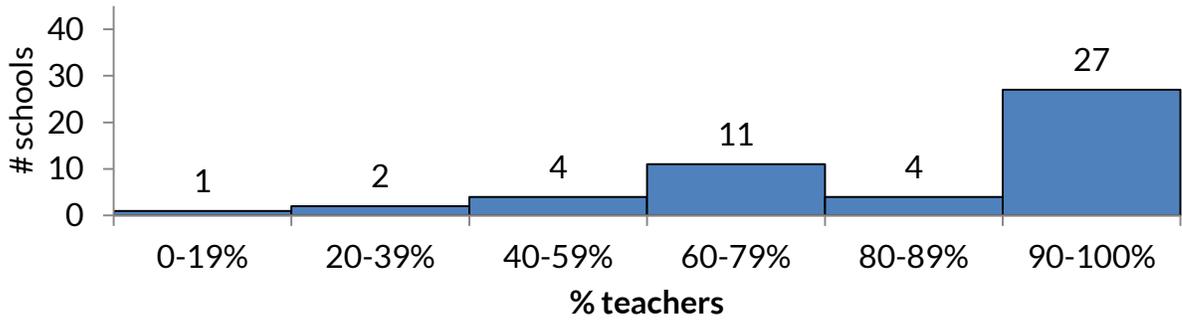
Principals of more vulnerable schools were significantly more likely to report having challenges retaining effective teachers from year to year. Pittsburgh's most vulnerable schools average 25% teachers new to their building each year, compared with only 8% in its least vulnerable schools.

Students in vulnerable schools experience less academic rigor

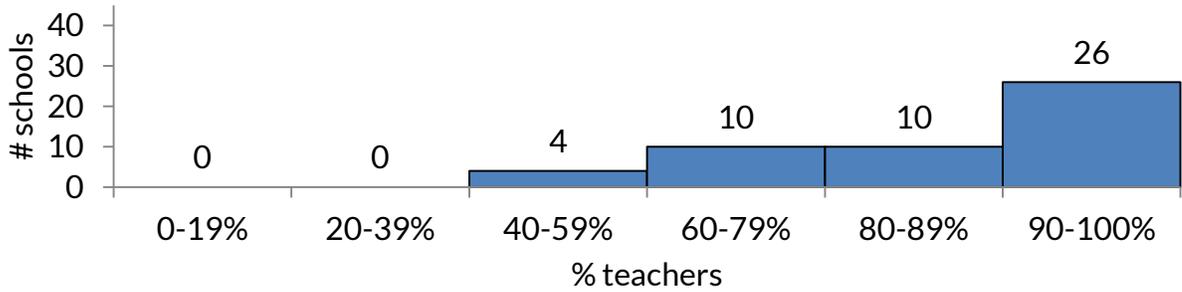
We asked principals to estimate the percentage of teachers who demonstrate effective practices:

- Making themselves available if students need extra help (average: 81%)
- Having high expectations of all students (average: 84%)
- Knowledgeable about their subject area (average: 87%)
- Use different methods to help all students understand the subject matter (average: 78%)
- Care about their students' lives outside of school (average: 84%)
- Meet regularly with peers to discuss instruction (average: 96%)

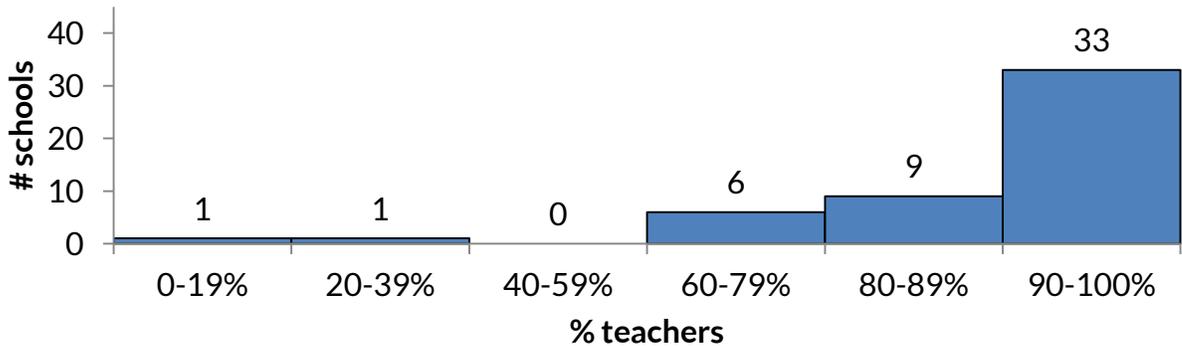
Percent of teachers available if students need extra help



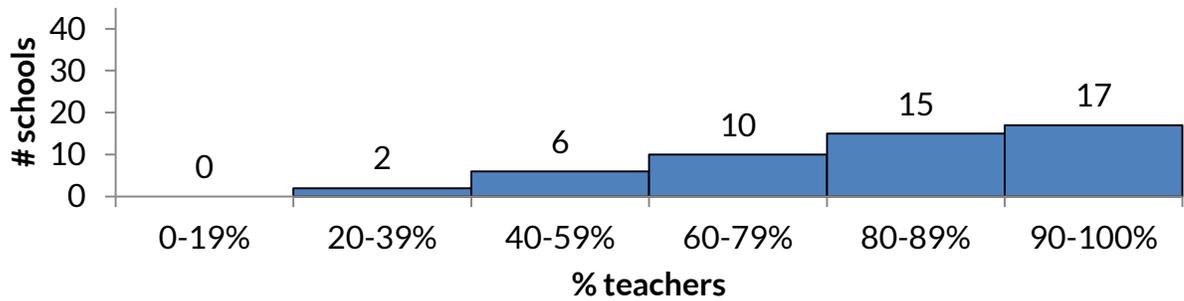
Percent of teachers with high expectations for all students



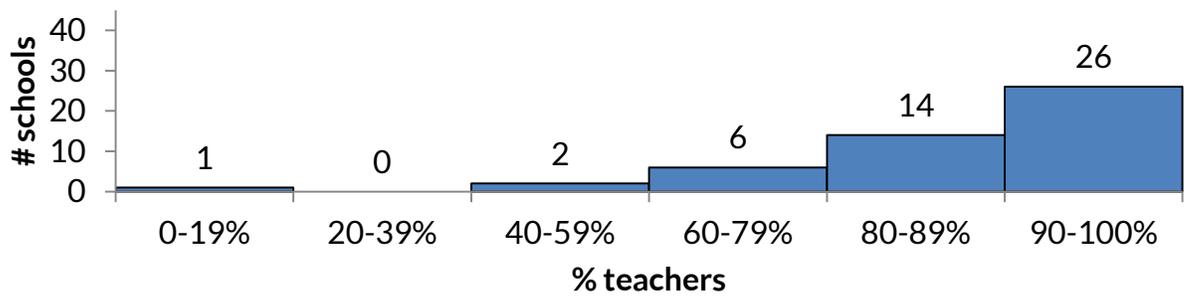
Percent of teachers knowledgeable about their subject



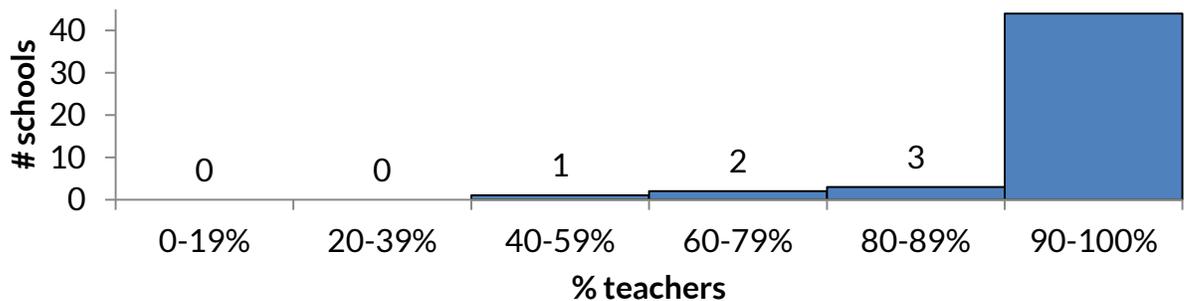
Percent of teachers who use different methods to help all students understand



Percent of teachers who care about their students' lives outside of school



Percent of teachers who meet regularly with peers to discuss instruction



Principals at more vulnerable schools were significantly more likely than their colleagues at less vulnerable schools to report the following challenges related to academic rigor:

- Fewer adults proactively working to make school academically rigorous

- Fewer teachers with high expectations for all students (74% in the most vulnerable schools vs. 91% on average in the least vulnerable schools)
- School less likely to develop students' study skills
- Lack of engagement in coursework a greater factor in chronic absenteeism

Fair Funding & Smart Spending: Schools that Work focus resources on students' success

 Students from low-income families attend schools with less stability and rigor, yet more money is spent per student at these schools.

 Vulnerable schools offer fewer resources reflecting academic rigor. Vulnerable K-5, K-8, and middle schools are less likely to offer Algebra, and they offered less art, music, and library this year. Vulnerable secondary schools are less likely to assign every high school student someone to help them apply to college or career training programs.

 The majority of schools have Instructional Teacher Leader 2 teachers who help support teacher growth, but middle and secondary schools less likely to have them.

 Principals report needing more people at school who can support students. Principals are constrained by budgets and policies which create barriers to community supports in schools.

Students from low-income families attend schools with less stability and rigor, yet more money is spent per student at these schools

With Pittsburgh Public Schools projecting to become insolvent by 2018, it is imperative that schools and the school district spend every dollar wisely. Sixty percent of parents choose to send their child to a school other than their assigned neighborhood feeder.¹²

In neighborhood schools with high percentages of assigned students attending (high capture rates) principals are more likely to report having the following:¹³

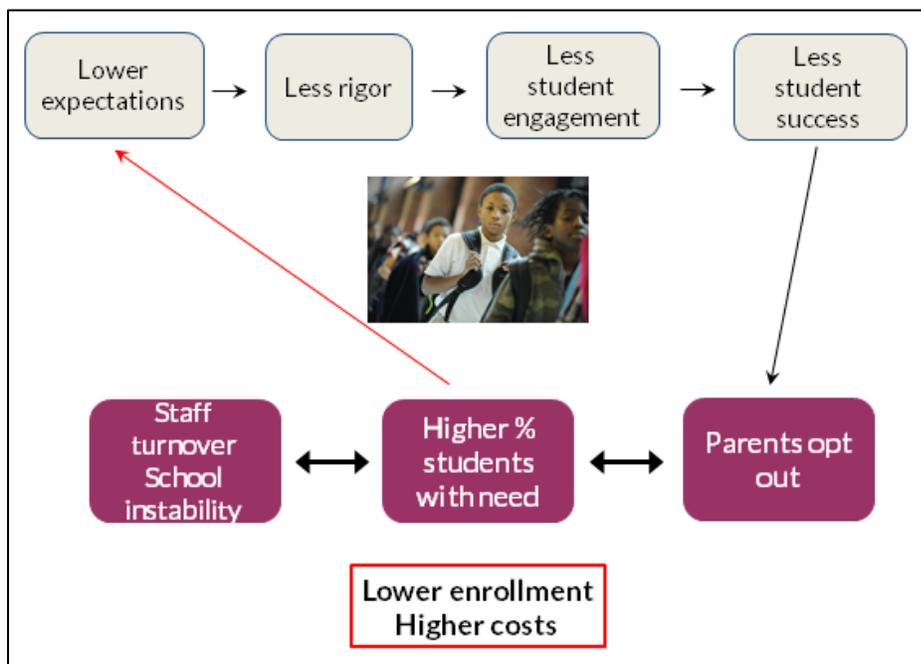
- More staff reported to have high expectations for all students
- More staff reported to work proactively to make the school academically rigorous
- Fewer students being given out-of-school suspensions
- Higher student achievement and growth

¹² Envisioning Educational Excellence: A Plan for All of Pittsburgh's Children. Retrieved from: http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/cms/lib07/PA01000449/Centricity/domain/19/business_and_finance/2013/05/PPS%20Envisioning_Board%20Workshop_5.6.13.pdf. p. 7.

¹³ Capture rate is defined as the percentage of students living within the boundaries of a school's feeder pattern that elect to go to their neighborhood school.

Students attending small, neighborhood schools with high percentages of low-income students can be disproportionately affected by a cycle of decline, however. These include lower achievement and less stability, as the capture rate is lower at these schools. These schools also have smaller enrollment per grade level and higher overall cost per pupil. Small schools with low achievement and high costs are not working for students. We need to invest in schools that work and end the cycle of declining enrollment, higher percentages of students with high needs, lower expectations and rigor, and parents and school staff leaving.

Consider this example. A hypothetical elementary school is located in a low income neighborhood and serves majority low-income and African American students. Many of the students need significant help and support in order to learn. The school is smaller than most district schools of the same type and classes are smaller than average. As a result the per pupil investment is larger than average. While this additional investment in students may sound promising, the performance of the school is stubbornly low in terms of achievement and growth. The majority of students assigned to the school attend school elsewhere in the District or other schools. The tough environment and continuing enrollment decline makes it hard to recruit and retain teachers, so turnover is higher than average. Principal turnover is high as well. School practices slip – expectations lower, positive behavior supports decrease in effectiveness, suspensions increase, and the school community loses its sense of efficacy. As a result, families continue to opt out and the cycle of decline continues. The result is a costly, but failing enterprise. The graphic below explains the relationship between these variables.



For the sake of our most vulnerable students, we can ill-afford to allow this cycle of decline to continue. We need Pittsburgh Public Schools to make bold choices that invest in success and provide our neediest students with schools that work. Reasonable people

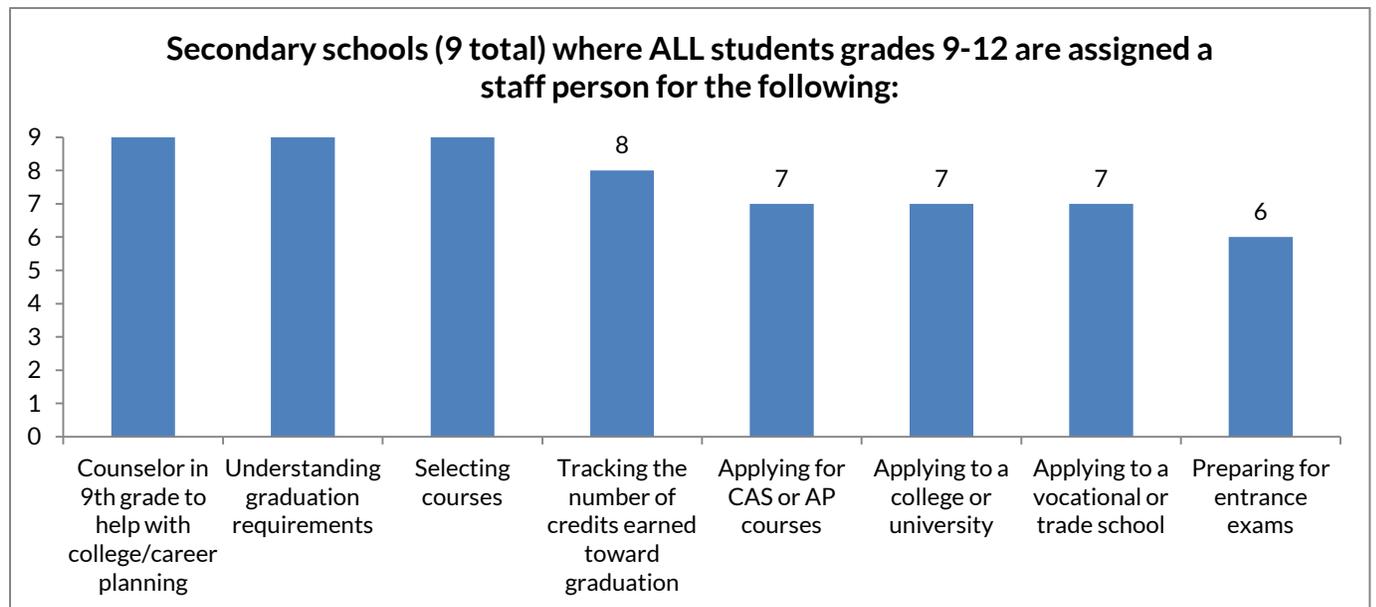
can disagree about the appropriate place to intervene in the cycle of decline – but intervening is essential. We cannot afford to continue to ignore this problem. The district should ensure that resources are being invested in ways that positively impact student outcomes.

Vulnerable schools offer fewer resources reflecting academic rigor

Vulnerable schools had less rigorous course offerings and fewer resources for students to apply to college or career training:

- Four schools do not offer Algebra 1 to students in grades 6-8
- The vast majority of K-5s, K-8s, and middle schools offered the same—if not more—instruction time in art, library, and language as they did last year. However, the several schools that offered less time in these courses were more vulnerable.
- Students at more vulnerable schools were less likely to have a staff person assigned to help them apply to college or career training.

In general, secondary schools place more priority on helping students select courses and understand graduation credits than applying to advanced courses or applying to college or career training.



Last year, counselor caseloads were large and averaged 360 students. This is a reduction of 80 students per counselor since 2010, though the American School Counselor Association recommended ratio is no more than 250 students per counselor.¹⁴

¹⁴ American School Counselor Association, 2005.

This year two-thirds of counselors receive regular training related to college preparation, an increase from one-third last year. In most schools, students receive college support during a specific class or period, but we do not know how well instructors are trained to support students in this way.

The majority of schools have Instructional Teacher Leader 2 teachers who help support teacher growth, but middle and secondary schools less likely to have them

Instructional Teacher Leaders and Promise Readiness Corps

Pittsburgh Public Schools has a special career ladder position for teachers called the Instructional Teacher Leader 2 (ITL2). ITL2 teachers are responsible for supporting their peers to grow in their teaching practice and have been reported by principals and teachers to be very effective. They receive a higher salary and must have a strong record of teaching effectiveness.

Thirty-six principals reported having at least one ITL2, with higher percentages of the K-5 (83%) and K-8 (82%) schools having them than the 6-8 (57%), 6-12 (40%), or 9-12 (50%) schools.

Principals shared the top two to three supports provided by ITL2s that help develop teachers' instructional capacity:

- Observation and feedback (75%)
- Professional development (56%)
- Coaching (25%)
- Modeling lessons (17%)
- Co-planning (17%)
- Co-teaching (8%)
- Others: facilitate content area meetings (2), data analysis (2), school wide professional development, in-classroom training, mentoring

Another career ladder position is the Promise Readiness Corps, a team of effective teachers that works with the same group of students in 9th and 10th grade. These teachers meet regularly to discuss their students' growth and success, and they receive bonuses if their students improve on academic indicators over time. This year, only three of the nine secondary schools have a Promise Readiness Corps. These teams could be effective in some of our more vulnerable schools which do not currently have one.

Principals report needing more people at school who can support students

When asked multiple times about what top supports principals need in order to make things better (i.e., transportation, supporting teachers, supporting students' behavioral

and emotional challenges, and helping with academics), time and again principals mentioned having more human resources:

- Bus monitors
- Mental health providers
- Classroom volunteers
- Tutors
- More engaged parents

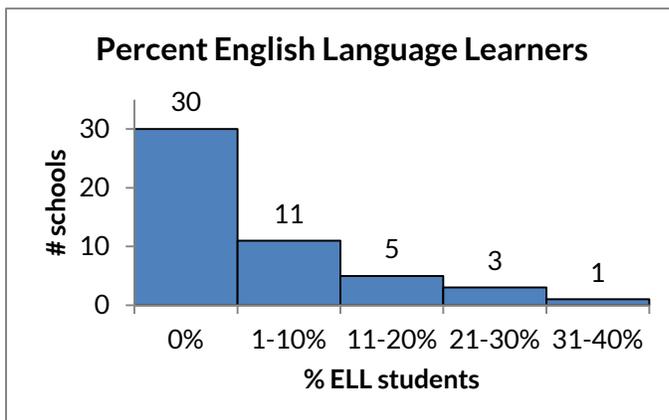
Other resources

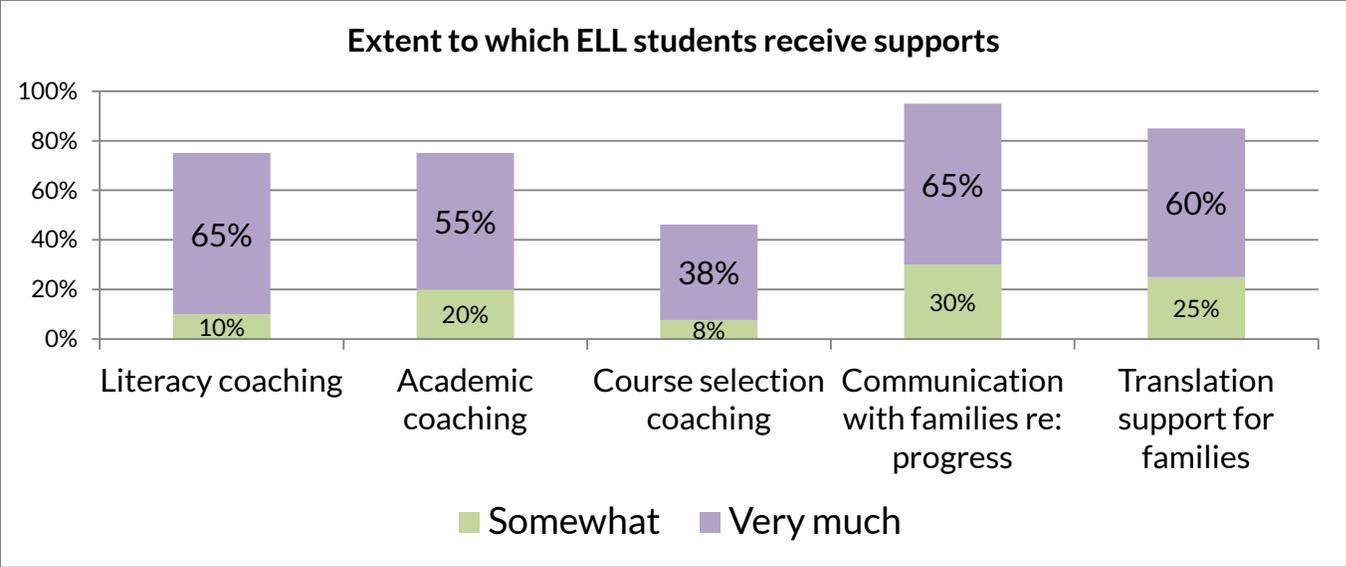
Textbooks

Principals of seven schools reported not having enough books for students to take home in core academic classes. All of these schools were K-5s, K-8s, or middle schools.

English Language Learners

Forty percent of schools have students who are English Language Learners (ELL), and the majority of those principals reported that their ELL students are very much supported regarding communication to families on academic progress, literacy coaching, translation support for families, and academic coaching.





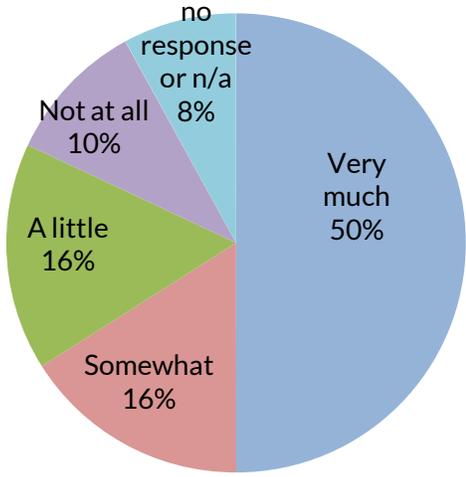
Additional information

Principal Information

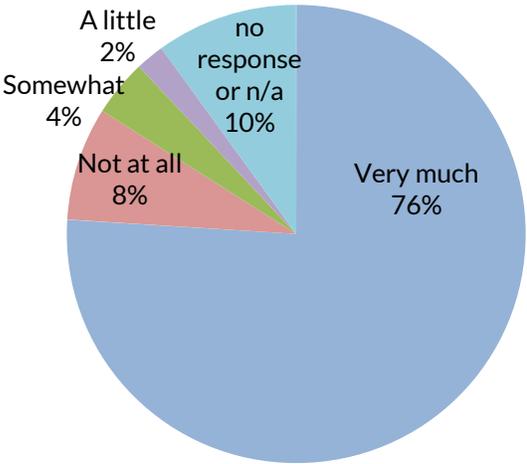
Principal turnover from last year was high, with 18 principals (36%) reporting being new or at their school for just one year. Just nine principals (18%) reported having worked at their school for seven or more years.

This year Pittsburgh Public Schools provided universal free lunch because of the high percentage of students living in poverty in the District with the support of the federal Community Eligibility Provision. Universal lunch has increased meal participation and decreased paperwork in the majority of schools.

Extent to which universal free lunch has increased meal participation overall



Extent to which universal free lunch has minimized paperwork related to applications and payments



Bathrooms

The cleanliness of student bathrooms can be an indicator of the overall physical, social, and emotional climate in a school. When bathrooms are well-stocked and clean, it can be a reflection of mutual respect among students and school staff.

We asked about bathrooms for the first time in last year's School Works action research in PPS' secondary schools: just one third of adults and even fewer students reported that students' bathrooms were always kept clean and well stocked in secondary schools. On average, adults reported that students often have access to bathrooms when needed, but students reported having access only sometimes. This year, bathrooms were reported by principals to be somewhat or very clean and well-stocked, very accessible at all times of day, and very well equipped with doors and locks on the stalls.

Every principal reported inspecting the student bathrooms for cleanliness and general upkeep. When asked how frequently this happens, they reported:

- 3x/day or more (42%)
- 2x/day (12%)
- 1x/day (32%)
- Twice a week (8%)
- Once a week or fewer (6%)

"No Idling" bus signs

According to Pennsylvania Act 124, buses cannot idle for more than five minutes per 60 minute period, or 15 minutes if there are passengers aboard. The Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP) asked us to inquire about bus idling because of the negative health effects resulting from inhalation of emissions. GASP representatives delivered a "No Idling" sign to all schools in the district to help bus drivers comply with the law.

When asked whether they had a sign posted warning bus drivers not to idle during student pick-up or drop-off, only nine principals said they did. An additional 32 said they did not have the sign posted, and another nine were unsure. Of the 41 principals without a sign posted, none of them were aware of whether the sign been delivered to the school.

When asked to share the extent to which school bus idling is a problem at drop off and pick up, principals reported:

- A little (60%)
- Not at all (24%)
- Somewhat (6%)
- Very much (6%)
- No response (4%)

Recommendations

Ensure every school works for students:

- Mission Driven
- Great Teaching
- Fair Funding Smart Spending

1. Mission Driven Schools: Demonstrate High Expectations for Students

- Teachers and other school staff should model the school's behavior expectations and teach students how to replace inappropriate behaviors with appropriate ones
- All schools should increase academic rigor by holding students to high standards and encouraging effort
- All schools should implement a plan for developing students' social and emotional learning skills (i.e., managing emotions, conflict mediation, etc.)

2. Mission Driven Schools: Emphasize Accountability, Building Character, Making Amends, and Keeping Students in School

- Remove students from school only when there is a real and immediate safety threat to the school community
- Eliminate zero tolerance policies and replace them with restorative practices
- Provide training, support, and time for schools to implement restorative practices that reduce the number of disciplinary actions taking students out of class
- Provide support for parents and students to understand and use restorative practices

3. Great Teaching: Hire, Keep, and Support Great Teachers

- Hire new teachers earlier and provide them with mentors
- Eliminate forced placements
- Develop a position for distinguished teachers at high needs schools
- Keep our best teachers across the district, especially in our most vulnerable schools

4. Fair Funding and Smart Spending: Spend Money in Ways that Help All Students Succeed

- Offer Algebra in every school with 6th-8th graders
- Assign all high school students an adult to help them apply to college/training
- Allow parents and community partners to play key roles in schools
- Spend money in ways that positively impact students' success

Community Action Research - Background

Background on School Works

School Works is community action research. It helps the public understand what resources and opportunities exist for students in Pittsburgh Public Schools. We then use this information to drive community action that will help improve our school system in Pittsburgh.

A+ Schools' mission is to create an excellent and equitable education system. An equitable education system **provides each student with the individual support s/he needs 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, we focus on making sure that students have:

- great teachers in every classroom;
- differentiated supports that can unlock the potential of individual students;
- opportunities to boost student learning; and
- 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 six years: middle and high school principals (2009); middle and high school principals and counselors (2010); middle and high school teachers (2011); K-12 principals (2012-13); secondary school principals, counselors, and learning environment specialists (2013-14); and K-12 principals (2014-15)

School Works 2014-15: Schools that Work

The 2014-15 School Works community action research focused on discovering the extent to which schools are supporting students to reach their highest potential through demonstrating the following:

- Mission Driven – meaning they have safe and positive environments and set high academic standards and provide behavioral supports that keep students engaged
- Great Teaching – meaning they can hire and keep effective teachers, as well as support their growth and success
- Fair Funding and Smart Spending – meaning they are funded in a way that is fair, where money is spent on resources that are directly linked to their success

Interview questions focused on issues in the student bill of rights created by Teen Bloc students in 2013, including the right to effective teachers, positive behavioral practices, and access to accelerated classes and academic counseling.

In October and November 2014, ninety-one community volunteers interviewed the 50 principals in Pittsburgh’s public schools grades K-12. This pool did not include special or charter schools. 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 60-minute confidential interviews conducted by volunteer teams, principals responded to 68 questions in yes/no, rating scale, and short answer format.

Schools where interviews and surveys were conducted:

Grade Configuration:

- K-5: 23 schools
- K-8: 11 schools
- 6-8: 7 schools
- 6-12: 5 schools
- 9-12: 4 schools

School type:

- Magnets: 11
- Partial Magnets: 4 schools
- Neighborhood/Feeder: 35 schools

Volunteer demographics

- 107 volunteers trained, 91 conducted interviews
- Volunteers reside across the city and were parents, educators, and concerned citizens who live in all regions of the city

How to Read the Data

Because School Works action research aims to address issues on a system-wide level, we only report results as an average or based on trends we see along school-level characteristics. We promise school staff members that their responses will be kept confidential and will not be publicly reported on an individual or school-by-school basis. Although reporting data in this way has limitations, we do so because our research is aimed at addressing how to improve school and district practices and policies rather than y evaluating individual people or schools.

In this report, we will share trends based on three school factors when they are linked to certain school practices. We only report a trend if it has statistical significance of $p \leq 0.01$, meaning that the trend is unlikely to have occurred by chance alone.

1. **Chronic absenteeism:** the percent of students at a school who missed at least 10% of the school days—excused or unexcused—in October and November, 2014.

2. **Suspension rate:** the percent of students at a school, who received at least one out-of-school suspension during the months of October and November, 2014.
3. **School vulnerability,** A+ Schools uses a measure of vulnerability which is based off of student need and achievement. We believe schools are vulnerable as a result of factors outside of their control as well as factors within their control. The following factors determine a school's vulnerability. Schools that are more vulnerable have higher percentages of students with need, lower achievement, lower growth, and larger achievement gaps
 - i. **Student need:** percent of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch and percent of students who have non-gifted individual education plans (IEPs)
 - ii. **Achievement:** percent of students scoring proficient or advanced on PSSAs (math and reading) and/or Keystone (math and reading), weighted by percent of black and white students
 - iii. **Growth** as defined by Pittsburgh's value-added model for schools (math and reading)
 - iv. **Achievement gaps:** average of within-school gap (percentage difference between achievement [as defined above] of black and white students in the school) and district gap (percentage difference between achievement of black students at the school and white students across the district)

Please note that schools with higher percentages of students with need will be identified as less vulnerable if their student achievement outcomes are higher. We believe the practices at these schools are contributing to better student outcomes, so we consider these schools less vulnerable than schools with similar student demographics that have lower student achievement outcomes.

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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: Attend an upcoming event or 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

Save the Dates!

April 23, 2014: Report to the Community: Cover Art Competition (*Boom Concepts Art Gallery, 5139 Penn Avenue*)

May 6, 2014: City Wide School Board Candidate Forum (7-9pm, *Kaufmann Center, 1825 Centre Avenue*)

May 19, 2014: Primary Election –vote for School Board! (*visit www.votespa.com for your polling location*)

June 18, 2014: Change Maker Event to honor parents, students, and volunteers who work hard to improve educational equity for students

For more information on these and all upcoming events go to www.aplusschools.org or call 412.697.1298.