



Artisans and Inventors of a New and Brighter World: **Remaking Public Education in Pittsburgh**

A COLLABORATIVE REPORT FROM THE MEMBERS OF
THE VIVA PITTSBURGH IDEA EXCHANGE

Prepared for: Dr. Linda Lane, Superintendent

Prepared by: Members of the VIVA Pittsburgh Writing Collaborative

Delivered: Thursday, October 17, 2013

Abstract & Summation: Pittsburgh educators, parents, former students and community members spent hundreds of hours debating how best to prepare all Pittsburgh students to succeed, both inside and out of the classroom. Then, a small group of the participants distilled those ideas into four main areas for improvement.

Partner: Pittsburgh Public Schools



Introduction



The VIVA (Voices, Ideas, Vision, Action) Pittsburgh Idea Exchange invited educators, parents, and community members to share their ideas about how best to prepare all students for success, both inside and out of the classroom. This VIVA Idea Exchange™ occurred as Pittsburgh, along with the nation, is reborn and reshaped by changes in technology, resources and educational laws.

The online VIVA Idea Exchange™, which combines technology and collaboration to amplify the voices of key stakeholders in critical policy matters, is a program of New Voice Strategies. Facilitated by a professional moderator, the conversation is open to peers seeking a safe, productive and easily accessible avenue for joint problem-solving and action.

The VIVA Pittsburgh Idea Exchange occurred from July 29, 2013 – October 17, 2013.

The VIVA Pittsburgh Idea Exchange was conducted in three phases:

During **Phase I**, every educator and community member of Pittsburgh was invited to share ideas in response to these questions:

“What should Pittsburgh Public Schools do to ensure high quality schools that prepare ALL students—both academically and non-academically—to succeed in all aspects of life? What supports should the district provide to help school-based staff build positive teaching and learning environments? What changes need to be made at the school-building level for the district to accelerate academic achievement and eliminate racial disparities? How can the district improve the culture and sense of community in its schools so all students are Promise-ready? How can we combine these solutions to ensure that every student walks across the stage at graduation into a brighter future for themselves and the city of Pittsburgh?”

In response, 184 members added 78 ideas and shared 379 comments with one another.

During **Phase II**, 10 educators and community members, whose active participation in Phase 1 was clear in terms of both quantity and quality, were invited to join the VIVA Pittsburgh Writing Collaborative. Their assignment: Take the ideas presented during Phase I and summarize and synthesize them into discrete, workable recommendations for improving local public schools.

Phase III of the process will begin on October 17, 2013, when the members of the Writing Collaborative present their ideas to Dr. Linda Lane.

Continued on next page...

THE VIVA PITTSBURGH IDEA EXCHANGE



New Voice Strategies believes in the inspiration that grows from pragmatic experience and in the power of individual voices to make big change. The VIVA Idea Exchange™ is one example of that power in action. We are inspired by the participants and grateful for their positive contribution to the strength of our schools and America's democratic process. Many thanks to these VIVA Pittsburgh Educators and Community Members: **Tiffani Best, James Carter, Steve DeFlicht, Heather Harr, Elaine Liberati, Leanne Lisien, Eliza Littleton, Melissa Sasso, Judy Smizik** and **Shayna Willis**, whose profiles can be found at the end of this report. The innumerable hours these dedicated educators and community members spent grappling with big ideas and small details made this work possible.

We wish to thank our partner in this endeavor, **Pittsburgh Public Schools**.



THE VIVA PITTSBURGH IDEA EXCHANGE

Artisans and Inventors of a New and Brighter World: Remaking Public Education in Pittsburgh

Overview

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Throughout its history, Pittsburgh has been a city striving for the highest quality education for its citizens. Pittsburgh has been a leader in innovative public education. In the late 1950s, Pittsburgh schoolchildren served as research subjects for the Salk polio vaccine. During the late '50s to early '60s, Colfax School had one of the first enrichment programs for academically gifted students. Taylor Allderdice High School was recognized across the country in the late '60s as one of the best urban high schools, with some of the highest numbers of National Merit Finalists among its graduates. In the '70s, when courts mandated integration, Pittsburgh once again rose to the top with strategic plans to provide innovative ways to diversify our school system.

Over time, urban school districts nationwide faced complex problems: Drugs, gangs, poverty, loss of human services, and then municipal financial problems created serious challenges for urban districts. Pittsburgh was no different. With the closing of our steel mills, flight to the suburbs, and the changing demographics of the last four decades, our school population decreased. School leaders sought new ways to help overcome the challenges of urban education. In the late '80s and early '90s, Pittsburgh opened “Teacher Centers,” where all teachers had the opportunity to rejuvenate themselves. Participants studied educational research and learned new teaching strategies. Also during this time, some schools tried experimental programs and alternative forms of assessment. For example, Vision 21 was an open classroom concept that gave birth to the “whole language approach.”

While Pittsburgh marked its educational successes and failures over the years, teachers were chosen to help guide administrators in the decision-making processes. Shared decision making was part of the school district’s philosophy. Currently, however, this is not the case. Meanwhile, federal and state guidelines have added to the difficult task of educating our students. The district must comply with the mandates of No Child Left Behind and other laws and policies. We are here today to help find solutions to some of the problems the Pittsburgh Public Schools are facing. We commend all of the efforts of the administration, teaching faculties, and support personnel, as we know what a daunting task it is to provide a quality educational program where all students can maximize their potential. Now is the time to evaluate what our schools are doing and offer suggestions and possible solutions to help make Pittsburgh the best possible place to educate our children.

Pittsburgh is a city with passion. We are resilient and determined. Personnel within our school district have good intentions and are making visible efforts to engage and improve. Yet, we see and have heard from those who have participated in this discussion—including teachers—that despite those good intentions and efforts, public education in Pittsburgh falls short of our needs and hopes.

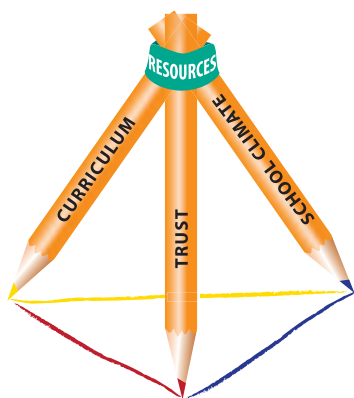
Funding from state and federal agencies has plateaued, and the local tax base is tapped out. Our situation reveals a new reality: We are on our own to carry out the business of educating our children. There is no cavalry coming from the Governor's Office to save the education of children. Pittsburghers, tax-paying or not, are the cavalry. The stark truth that we are on our own is the challenge of our democratic public education. At the same time, this is Pittsburgh. We like a challenge. We treasure our independence.

Challenge

We observe that our **curriculum** and methods are often scattered, narrow and confusing to teachers, parents and students. The backbone of a public school is its curriculum. Without it, our schools have no purpose. Yet, this backbone flexes with the needs of its people. It must be full of content that will engage our children to be citizens and artisans of a new and brighter world.

We have not achieved levels of basic communication to parents and families about what to expect for their children. The inadequacy of information and lack of transparency has led to a deep **distrust**. Perhaps more alarming, a corrosive distrust has spread among even our most expert and dedicated teachers. Teachers have lost control to monitor, adjust and supplement curricula to meet the needs of their students. Students are moved forward before they are ready to acquire new and more intricate skills, they are expected to all be at the same place at the same time. Their teachers fear being targeted and losing their jobs if they don't conform. Sadly, distrust in PPS is a distinguishing mark of our district.

The **climate** within our schools is not modeling the behaviors we expect our students to be learning. Schools should be environments that respect the dignity of all people and fuel curiosity and zeal for education. Students should have the freedom to move, play, communicate, and express themselves in a variety of ways. Respect should permeate the learning environment among teachers, parents, students, and administrators.



Curriculum, trust, and school climate are the necessary pillars of education and growth.

Curriculum, trust, and school climate are the necessary pillars of education and growth. To achieve quality education in PPS, we must support each of these pillars with necessary **resources**. The use and availability of resources are the foundation of a strong public education.

We see this report as the beginning of a larger discussion with the entire city. It is not all-inclusive in addressing issues of the Pittsburgh Public School district. It is only a beginning to document where we are, suggest where we may go, and then to continue down the path toward implementing a more collaborative endeavor of educating all of our children in Pittsburgh, each to their highest level.

Recommendations For High Quality Pittsburgh Public Schools That Prepare All Students To Succeed In All Aspects Of Life



RECOMMENDATION 1

Assure systemwide delivery of a relevant, coherent curriculum that makes learning a joy for students.

Statement of the Problem:

The curriculum must be relevant to students and developmentally appropriate. With a diversity of students and staff, public schools find exceptionally creative ways to teach and serve learners, and ultimately, our communities. There must not be two standards in the classroom. All children must be challenged to perform at the highest level possible for them. The curriculum must reach every student on every level. The curriculum programs for young children are the greatest task and surest test of a public education. The Pittsburgh Public Schools should start here.

Proposed Solutions:

1. Establish a curricular framework that is relevant to all students and our vision of a vibrant Pittsburgh. Foster culturally relevant curriculum and school climate.

The central core of Pittsburgh's kindergarten program concentrates on beginning literacy and math skills. The Macmillan program Treasures was adopted and implemented in 2006. Although it was by far the best of the programs reviewed, it has weaknesses in both phonics development and handwriting. Kindergarten children need systematic explicit phonic development with mass practice using a variety of visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic experiences.

To develop a strong academic foundation, the kindergarten program needs to accommodate the educational, social, emotional, and physical needs of all children. It should be a program that addresses the needs of the "whole" child. The current program fails to meet these needs, as it does not mandate play, provide for a variety of artistic expressive experiences, offer developmentally appropriate experiences, or meet the academic needs of the majority of students. Today, many kindergarten classrooms are void of music, movement, and artistic experiences such as painting and modeling with clay. The kindergarten program needs to be flexible enough to meet the needs of a diverse population. It should incorporate large, small and individualized instruction.

The curricula in the primary grades have been inconsistent. Each year, major changes are made to the curricula so that teachers have to constantly learn new programs. Change can be positive if it is done to improve the curricula and instruction, but too much of the reverse has been the case. Since much of the new curricula is written by teachers on their own time and finalized by professionals who do not work in the classroom, it is not well coordinated. According to several classroom teachers, the math program at the primary level is "all over the place." Students are not taught mastery. Consequently, the students are not receiving a strong mathematical foundation. A new math curriculum has been introduced into the school system, but we worry it has not been finalized or adequately piloted to see if it works.





2. Make real-world connections between the written curriculum and the lives of students. Student interests should be used to enhance learning while meeting curriculum standards.

Student engagement in the classroom is achieved by rich curriculum content that provides connections with the student's world. This must minimize repetitive worksheets and maximize exposure to literature, science, math, history, and the arts in every grade and at every achievement level.

In almost all subjects taught in elementary and secondary education, student interests should be used to enhance the learning while meeting the base curriculum content. When students express their curiosity, we would like our schools to support teachers to use those ideas to inform the next lesson and allow students to engage more deeply through such activities as researching new information. We also recommend that PPS develop or buy assessment instruments for finding the special interests and talents of students and faculty and staff. Community members and parents can support teachers by connecting them with resources and content as new ideas develop.

Field trips, recess and enrichment activities should not be seen as privileges that can be taken away from students. These can be entry points to engage students and make positive behavior changes. That said, safety is paramount, and excessively disruptive behavior must be addressed consistently in both the school building and during out-of-school enrichment activities. Teachers at all schools must be supported by the administration in this effort.

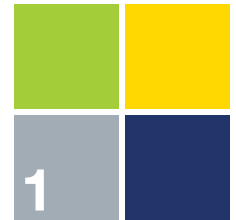
3. Make free play the main teaching tool with young students. Shorten periods of instruction in early grades to allow more time for free play. Incorporate play into the daily school routines. Look to community partners to augment opportunities for creative play.

Taking play out of schools is damaging to all students, particularly in the early grades. Some principals allow play, especially when they see children's positive outcomes. However, some have eliminated all the socio-dramatic play equipment and hands-on learning experiences from the kindergarten classrooms. Without play, children who need to develop visual and other perceptual motor skills have no props in their classrooms to do so. Research has shown the importance of play and exploration, as well as the need for children to develop their executive function (essential mental tasks, including reasoning, organizing, setting goals, and problem-solving, that are the highest predictors of school and life success).

Young children's work is play: movement, talk, dramatic play, imaginative play, constructive, musical and building play, and so many other kinds. Older children's work is also exploratory, inquisitive, and social. It is developmentally appropriate that older students freely collaborate, test and ask each other, "Why?" As a community, we have yet to see that school leverages play, playfulness, tinkering, making things up, spontaneity, humor, fleeting, and opportunistic ideas. Play and playfulness have a lot to do with how people invent and learn.

We recommend that PPS put educational toys back into the childhood classroom and provide enough comfortable places for everyone to curl up and read. Create spaces in unused areas of schools for free play for young children or exploration and daydreaming for older students.





At every opportunity, turn assignments into opportunities for playful thinking, inquiry and spontaneous discovery.

It distresses us that most kindergarten classrooms no longer allow free play, or have rest time. Since the entrance age has been reduced, educators must realize that some children still need a nap. Even more importantly, those children whose language skills are lagging can learn a great deal from one another in free play. Also, pretend play has been shown to be a precursor of abstract thinking.

It is not difficult to teach alphabet letters, sounds, and phonemic awareness when the program is structured well and easy to follow and implement, so it is feasible to shorten periods of instruction in early grades to allow more time for free play. A strong assessment component used on a weekly if not daily basis helps teachers guide their instruction. Kindergarten teachers are told to spend 90 minutes a day on reading instruction and 60 minutes on math. But many of our students are unable to stay focused on directed lessons for that period of time.

For young children, less is more. Students would benefit from more engaging child-centered activities. Many math and pre-reading concepts overlap. Children can develop beginning math, language, and literacy skills through puzzles, block building, and strengthening small and fine motor muscles through painting, clay, and other art activities. These activities could also be centered on core instruction. Shortening the amount of directed instruction would provide more time for students to have more developmentally appropriate activities that would help the development of the “whole” child. It would also give the teacher the ability to assess children and provide enrichment, remediation, or reinforcement as needed.

Recess is a physical and intellectual necessity for all of our students. Middle-schoolers complain they get no time during their day to run outside and get fresh air. High schoolers also need more activity than what they get by walking to and from a bus. No adult would accept as humane a job that demands sitting for hours at a time without any breaks to walk or exercise. Recess time should allow for physical activity and free play: freedom from the desks and structured times, an opportunity to move and talk, yell, sing, or play a sport. When weather is bad, indoor activities should be provided that allow for play for young children, and games and social interaction for older students. Nothing should substitute for this free time. Doing more academic work is not an acceptable recess activity for our students, nor is watching movies.



Recess, like the school bus and standing in lines, are places where bullying and bad behavior can occur. We should not take away recess, and cannot do away with buses, waiting or walking in line, field trips, or going to the washroom or water fountain. Therefore, we need to change our practices and culture dramatically to eliminate bullying and undesirable behavior.

The solution may be to change the environment and procedures in place altogether. We could give more students caring and important jobs to do while on the school bus, for example:

- Double-checking everyone is on the bus who should be.
- Making sure that younger ones have all their belongings.
- Calling out bus stops and the names of students who should be getting on or off (which might help avoid the kid-sleeping-in-the-bus problem).
- Leading and playing games.
- Clapping, singing, and stomping, jamming, rapping to songs composed especially for kids on the bus.

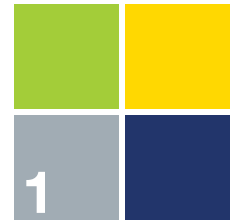
4. Provide students with a rich variety of opportunities and settings for learning to meet their individual interests and needs.

Happily, there are young people in Pittsburgh who study and design games and compose songs and rap. PPS could sponsor a competition and prize to make and test original games for students in PPS. The first contest should be things to do while waiting in lines. Other competitions could be designs for games that teach, promote exercise or calm, or simply amuse. Provided the offers were authentic and high profile, organizations like City of Play, Pittsburgh gaming experts, or education graduate students would jump at the opportunity. For prize money or an honorarium, music students at the nearby colleges and universities might create entire songbooks of jams, stomps, raps, and songs for kids. Music students in the high schools could turn their skills to compose for children and other classmates as well. Adults and children could learn about game design in an after-school or enrichment course, which is a great way to teach fundamentals in logic and other areas.

A time-tested strategy for growing children's good behavior is to give them alternatives and choices in place of the poor behaviors we want to curb. Parents learn to avoid saying, "Don't sit there" and instead offer a lap or a chair. This strategy of choices can be applied more broadly and generally. Instead of listing all the "don'ts" of the school dress code, for example, organize style boutiques at school where students can share ideas for stylishly meeting the dress code, sell clothing on consignment, or even just swap clothing.

We don't mean this facetiously. If we take some freedom away, like self-expression through style, we have to offer something in return. Creative, inexpensive solutions to what to wear in the morning—not to mention a chance to go "shopping"—could motivate and support students to follow the dress code. A prom-wear shop and design studio could also make it more affordable and fun for students to dress for the prom or other functions.





PPS should also explore the possibility of teachers providing a range of assignments with options for how to get them done, and giving children and parents some input into which are selected. When students devise their own ways to accomplish goals, provided they are considered appropriate, students learn initiative, self-advocacy, and creativity. They may even teach adults about them and the content.

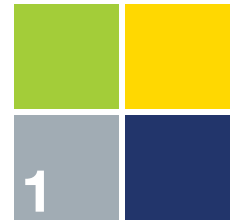
Community and parent experts (from the Parent Expert Bank in a school) could help teachers write optional activities into the lesson plans for a class. For example, they could teach about life without potable water by making students use pedometers all day to see what it takes to walk the number of steps and minutes it would take to get to the nearest water source in, say, Somalia. But the only way to do this well is for PPS to make a bridge to the experts.

Lessons that allow for interaction, debate and exploration are engaging and result in a love for learning and curiosity. Learning to productively interact with others in our society is a critical goal of our public education system. This goal is accomplished best by practicing those skills in school. These types of lessons can be created in many ways, including:

- Goal-based lessons, with activities that require students to reach a result however they can. This encourages creativity, focus on a task, and learning by doing.
- Reading first-person accounts in history. This could include books with first-person accounts of events excerpted from letters and newspapers. It would be interesting for students to read these in comparison to textbook summaries to see how different people see the same events.
- Working in teams to solve real world problems.
- Working with community experts and thinkers to create books or works of art, etc.
- Role-playing.
- Using data collected by the class to analyze a problem and then develop solutions.
- Re-thinking the “field trip.” Find ways to make the brick-and-mortar school a base camp for some courses that could be taught in museums and parks and studios across Pittsburgh. History is one example. Why not teach history standing in the places where battles were fought, the first paramedic ambulances were driven, and steel mills made people billionaires?
- Peer tutoring and interacting with younger and older students.

5. Use lesson planning to support the curricular framework, instructional differentiation, and diversity that students need.

For a variety of reasons, too much of what is taught in Pittsburgh Public Schools is “midway-to-mastery” or “one-size-fits-all.” Kindergartners who read fluently still have to participate in lessons on recognizing the alphabet. Children who don’t know the difference between the minute and hour hands are asked to tell time on a clock. Youth with exceptional musical skills do not build on them in music class. Youth give up after years of not mastering basic math. Learning can only build upon the knowledge a learner already has. A curriculum will work when it fits the student’s current understanding and acts like a scaffold for the student to add new knowledge (Palincsar, 1984).



Instruction tailored to fit each child is not a frill; it's what instruction is when it works. We agree part of the curriculum should be standardized, but do not agree with the way it is currently being taught. We do not believe teachers should be standardized. Teachers must teach to their interests and abilities.

Students diagnosed with special needs receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). We believe each child should have one. As teachers figure out how this works in their classroom, the school should hold a best practice seminar at the end of a semester to disseminate their successes. Teachers should not be assigned too many ability levels to teach within the same class.

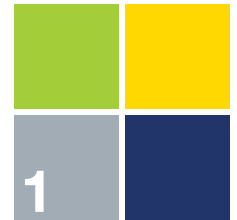
The students of the Pittsburgh Public Schools should be receiving a well-rounded education that includes creative experiences and awareness of cultural diversity, as well as adequate exposure to the arts and physical education. PPS could draw on successful enrichment models and incorporate them into the academic curriculum. (Summer Dreamers Academy, for example, offers great courses. It essentially leverages new worlds of ideas to teach fundamentals and offer enrichment.) We think the regular PPS curriculum should dazzle students with the possibilities of things to learn. Bring teachers, curriculum writers and great thinkers in Pittsburgh together to re-think the idea-content of the curriculum. Make families outside PPS wish they could take our classes.

Improve the Writing Curriculum

PPS should re-think how writing is taught in the curriculum. Writing and composing instruction in the Pittsburgh Public Schools risks misleading students into false beliefs about good writing and unsophisticated strategies. Some of the best research on the teaching of writing says that one piece of great writing can be vastly different from another. There is no recipe for them. There are no magic bullets. Research has shown that the five-paragraph theme—the intro, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion—is a rare occurrence in the world of great books. In fact, as Rorschach and others point out, it really only exists as a template for school writing (www.nwp.org). We've been using it since most of the members of this forum can remember, and the crisis of remedial writing remains with us.

The same can be said of the advice that introductions and conclusions are mere echoes of one another, and that topic sentences always come first in a paragraph, are always facts, and are generally stated, provable and summative (Richard Braddock, "The Frequency and Placement of Topic Sentences in Expository Prose," *Research in the Teaching of English*, Winter 1974). So, while all of these pieces of advice and prescription turn out to be pretty bad guidance, students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools practice these (however diligently) from the earliest grade to the last.

When International Baccalaureate students must write their Extended Essay, essentially a persuasive, scholarly essay, they must abandon all the training they've had since first grade and now write authentic text for a sophisticated audience. They have to draw new implications and predictions in the conclusion of a scholarly paper, not repeat the introduction. Topic sentences in first position are judged pedantic. There are far more than five paragraphs and far more than three main points or one per paragraph. Scholarly argument, it turns out, is complex—claims, evidence, rebuttals, counter-claims, warrants, "main," "faulty," and "return" paths through the logic of a claim, hypotheses, implications, paradox, humor, to name a few.



Our children need a full education from the very beginning about what the written word does. Not watered-down versions of it. Not easy, rigid rules and platitudes about it. None of this will turn out good writers. Rules and structure make it easy to teach, not to learn to write well.

Students are not fooled by PPS' easy structure for writing instruction, so we shouldn't try to fool them. Students do recognize that the writing they do in school is nothing like the writing and argumentation they encounter in blogs, zines and social media. They need to hear scholarly argument and see how it follows and breaks the rules. We recommend instruction in nuances and complexities of writing much earlier alongside the useful structure that is taught. Students must learn very early on to distrust rules of writing and writing quality, and to develop their own sense of good writing in addition to accepted models. As soon as lessons on the five-paragraph theme are begun, we recommend giving students many chances to "break the rules" and explore written language. Do this when students have shown that they can follow the rules; give them the reward of turning the rules on their head, exploring, and maybe finding out why the rules were good in the first place. Teach them the nuances and varieties of how texts can be organized and flow. Children are not unprepared to tolerate a little complexity. They are surrounded by complexity outside of school.

6. Change the culture of testing.

We are becoming a test nation, instead of one that prides itself on education. Preparing for tests narrows the subject matter, and we are seeing the results of this in the classroom. Students are skill drilled to the point of not knowing as much as they should about the world around them. Children are unaware of the difference between a continent, country and state. Since No Child Left Behind, we administer 20 times more tests, and yet only 15 percent of what a teacher does in the classroom is reflected in a test score.

We have to monitor children's progress and it cannot be done by tests. A strong assessment component used on a weekly if not daily basis helps teachers guide their instruction. Teachers should be provided an assessment tool such as a classroom profile chart to indicate the children's entering math abilities and monitor their monthly progress. This would eliminate the need for formalized testing throughout the year.



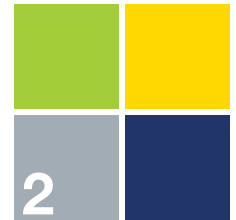


Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

While we realize that all learning is not meant to be fun, we also do not want to see our schools become institutions where boredom reigns. Education should pique the interest of learners and draw them in at any school level. The “learn through play” model has been the focus of most preschools for years, but students of all ages learn through play. Recess, rest time, and free play are important parts of the school day that allow for proper learning during the rest of the day. Again, we stress that this is true at all grade levels.

In addition, students learn through proper peer interactions, which should be supported by teachers. Group activities and projects are an easy way to draw students into the learning process. They feel as though they are socializing when really they are learning important life skills such as how to navigate a group and work in a team--both skills that bosses wish to see in their employees.





RECOMMENDATION 2

Provide educators with the tools and support they need to effectively use the curriculum.

Statement of the Problem:

PPS must select better-designed and credible curricula. Specifically, selected curricula should have been written by truly experienced curriculum writers and be published in usable, accepted media such as textbooks or web applications, not photocopied papers sent out a few at a time.

New curricula need to be user and error-tested, with inefficiencies and conflicts resolved before it is given to teachers. Errors in lesson and testing materials have been a source of great frustration for parents and teachers alike. For example, grades for handwriting and spelling should not be conflated with one another. Pick one thing to measure and measure it without bias or problems in reliability.

Proposed Solutions:

7. Train teachers to use new curricula until they are confident they can use it in the classroom. Create a repository that houses all curriculum that is easily accessible to teachers and families.

Train teachers weeks, not days, before handing them the curriculum. Then, afford teachers with time to plan further on their own with a full, well-understood curriculum before them. Kindergarten and early primary teachers need training to create the nurturing and warm environments that young children need. Professional development for teachers should be based on the teacher's professional needs and should be led by teachers or administrators who have demonstrated outstanding performance in the designated educational area.

Teachers need high-quality, research-based pedagogy responsive to the learning, emotional and social needs of ethnically and linguistically diverse students with and without disabilities. Teachers need to learn how to adapt content of instruction as well as teaching styles. In addition, there has to be a willingness to value and celebrate diversity in practice.

To keep students from being overwhelmed, we must ensure their teachers are not overwhelmed. Each curriculum must be flexible, adaptable, and developmentally appropriate. It should be well written and easily implemented by teachers. The assessment instruments should be teacher and student friendly, and evaluate the skills necessary for a successful academic experience. The instructional techniques should include a variety of strategies that accommodate all students' learning styles.





8. Provide teachers with high-quality professional development to support curricular effectiveness.

Professional development is a major component of school reform. The mandatory way it is delivered is not a best practice. It is not differentiated, individualized, or systematically thorough from beginning to end. True learning must be participatory—large group lectures that overlook the needs of individual schools and teachers will not achieve the intended outcomes. A collaboration with teachers, the principal and instructional teacher leaders would better address the needs of their particular school. Data should be used and intended outcomes announced. To streamline the work, technology could be adjusted to include an agreed upon format for monitoring student achievement within the grading pinnacle tab, and intervention strategies could be annotated in this software composite. This student progress monitoring would follow the student, so any future teacher will know exactly where this student is and needs to advance to reach his or her benchmarks. The RISE software, as it stands currently, cannot correlate data, which is also cumbersome to upload. Improving the technology would enhance instruction not only with the timely availability of data, but it would save teachers from wasting time on ineffective strategies.

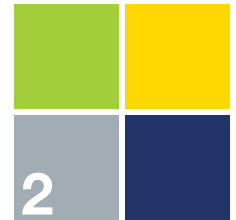
PPS should provide mentors to teachers who are new to a particular grade level or new to PPS. Teacher mentors can be valuable resources to help less experienced teachers get a jumpstart on how to organize and manage classrooms, and offer helpful suggestions to support a new teacher. The mentoring teacher would not evaluate, but provide his or her experience and expertise to others via suggestions. Many teachers have benefited greatly throughout their careers by listening and learning from others. There are excellent retired teachers who would be willing to serve in this capacity at the beginning of the school year, when support is critical.

9. Build strong communication practices and foster collaboration for and among teachers.

Parents of students at all ages complain regularly about the appalling quality of instruction by poor substitute teachers. Nothing turns families off quicker than knowing their child may waste days and weeks a year with an unqualified substitute teacher, who shows movies or hands out irrelevant busy-work. Substitute teachers need training and familiarization to work in a particular classroom and subject area.

Substitute teachers need training and familiarization to work in a particular classroom and subject area. Substitute teachers could begin by learning on the job as full-time paraprofessionals in a school. PPS should bring back the “base spare,” substitute teachers assigned to a particular school on an ongoing basis, so that we have substitutes who know both the culture of the school and the students they are teaching. These base spares would be more effective teachers, and days with substitutes would not be wasted days for learning. Teachers should be required to have “Substitute Folders” on their desks that include procedures for dismissal, the laboratory, and permission for early dismissal. Teachers should also share information about individual students, especially important medical needs, as well as a seating chart, alternative lesson plans, class lists, bell schedules, where special subjects are located, and lunch and recess procedures.





A teacher's lesson plans should be readable so that substitute teachers can follow them. They should be easy for the teachers to develop so they can spend the time wisely preparing for instruction. The former lesson plan requirements included source, page number, and aim. These criteria were agreed upon back in 1985, between the PFT and superintendent. This agreement was honored until 2006. A new committee needs to be formed to establish a workable lesson plan format for both the union and administration. Teachers need representation from all grade areas on the committee to work out an acceptable lesson plan format.

10. Make teacher evaluation a supportive process that focuses on growing a teachers' ability and improving student learning.

PPS should change the teacher evaluation policy from a punitive and intimidating system to one that is supportive and fosters inquiry into professional practice. Our discussions about strains we feel as parents in the Pittsburgh Public Schools—typically about what is taught and how—revealed to us the strains on teachers and their distrust of PPS leadership and administration. How can we expect teaching and learning to go well when seasoned teachers fear, for example, reprisals from leadership about participating in this forum? Even the appearance of fear and distrust, justifiable or not, will corrode our children's education. Metrics are driving many behaviors in our schools as teachers and principals are being judged on a narrow set of standardized test scores. Whatever the sources of distrust are, major changes to oversight and evaluation policies and procedures must be made to instill not simply trust, but pride in PPS leadership.

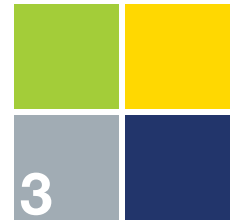
11. Engage teachers as partners in constant system evaluation and improvement.

PPS should invite and protect teachers who raise issues and speak up for themselves and for students. It should also inventory the broken or dysfunctional relationships in schools and compassionately support people to right wrongs, make amends, build healthy relationships, and thrive together.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

Curriculum is the backbone of education. While there are many pieces to this backbone, they all must work together to become a unified and sturdy unit. With a cohesive, well-planned curriculum that engages and promotes learning in a variety of ways, Pittsburgh Public Schools will have a greater chance of producing graduates who have a passion for education and are prepared to enter the global community.





RECOMMENDATION 3

Establish practices and communication infrastructure that promote trust among parents, students, educators, and public officials.

Statement of the Problem:

We all need to know we can trust our leadership, our employers, our faculty, our students, and our families. We will have to give people tangible reason to trust that their school is the right place to be. To reach our ideal of a public education, we as a community will need a new way of doing business in and out of school. We will have to create some new procedures in the district and in our schools for improving relationships among administration, faculty, students, and families. Each of these groups of people has special talents and gifts to offer. Unfortunately, current procedures and policies do not sufficiently support the sharing of this collective capital, and too often actually discourage or block it, denying volunteers and teachers to contribute what they know best. By contrast, one quality of a truly excellent school is strong and confident investment in the unique strengths of its people. A truly excellent school also knows peoples' unique needs and meets them, often capitalizing on strengths within the school's community to do so.

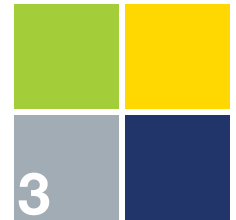
A vital part of building trust in our district is establishing clear, timely and correct communications. Parents in this forum expressed frustration at the lack of information that was available on the most basic of matters regarding what to expect for their child as they enter PPS. Particularly for families new to our district at any grade level, this information is necessary if we are going to keep people in the district, and engage them for other improvements.

Up until just a couple of days before school started this year, for example, students did not have information about which school they were attending, which classes they would take, or who their teachers were. Transportation information was also lacking and unavailable to many. Then, when information was provided, it was often incomplete and then was changed again on the first day. (Children were assigned to one homeroom class and by the end of the first day were re-assigned and sent to another homeroom class and teacher.) Youth see other students taking a test to get into an advanced class, but were never told of the opportunity.

In some suburban districts, students are provided with their school and teacher assignment information in the spring. Welcome events for new kindergarten families are also hosted in the spring. Kindergarten testing information is provided in time to explain what to expect to both the children and their parents, so they will be comfortable leaving their child in the care of PPS.

Only when we get this most basic of information and communication right, will we be able to establish enough trust in those families to meet us for the next steps in trust building and improving our district.





Proposed Solutions:

12. Create a systemwide communication and information structure that gives parents timely and comprehensive information.

Basic information about where to go, what to expect, who they will meet, and when all of that will happen is critical for all people, and especially for young children. The district, schools, principals, teachers, and clerical staff must all make it a priority to provide families with this information in a timely way. If there are any unexpected changes, those must be acknowledged immediately.

13. Empower all administrators to be responsive to families' requests and provide timely information.

PPS should reconfigure Grade Book to report separately the following (for the benefit of students, faculty and families) (1) when an assignment has been turned in and (2) when it has been received. Grade Book is excellent for posting grades, but it conflates the grade or score for an assignment--something that takes time for faculty to prepare and upload--with evidence for just whether or not an assignment has been turned in or received.

Students and families also need anytime access to assignment instructions, criteria for grading them, and materials such as assignment sheets. Students who have been sick should be able to quickly get back up to speed, either with digital resources or a paper system for teachers and students to use to communicate assignments. Grade Book does not provide this valuable information but it could, or Moodle could be used.

Families and administrators need evidence for when a student has (1) turned in an excused absence note from home and (2) when such a note has been received. Although it seems that the automated system for tracking student absences has improved, there is still no way for parents to show or for administrators to record excused absences.

14. Survey the community and provide opportunities for community members to share their unique knowledge in the schools.

Expedite and increase parent involvement so that parents can speak at their student's school or lead a learning activity in their special field or vocation. Students, parents and community members can inform PPS of emerging topics and technologies that can be used in the curriculum. Survey parents about their experiences augmenting or adapting homework (e.g., home science activities) to be more interesting for their children.

15. Structure partnerships with organizations that already engage children and families to access talent in a way that maximizes students' educational opportunities.

Partner or extend partnerships with organizations that already engage children and families from Pittsburgh's seemingly inexhaustible, renewing supply of talent. Some examples are the Carnegie Library, Tech Shop, Assemble, University of Pittsburgh's Technology Leadership Initiative, Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, home-school programs, and so many more.





PPS can build bridges to organizations performing work in various subjects. For example, science students can be introduced to businesses that apply science and engineering concepts in their labs in western Pennsylvania. One science teacher has taken a class to see open-heart surgery from an observation window. Other companies have outreach programs that can be tapped.

16. Create a districtwide Wiki for students, educators and families to document and share their learning experiences so that positive practices can be replicated.

Students, teachers and parents should have a place to document and share ideas about what has worked in their classes and maintain that knowledge. A wiki-based website that allows each member to contribute, with proper oversight, may be ideal for this purpose.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

When teachers trust that administrators exist to help students win, teachers will in turn be freed to be the best they can be. When collaborative efforts are undertaken to create useful policy, it helps to build trust among parents because they understand how the district operates and want to be a part of it. When trust exists between the taxpayer and the employee, there is more understanding of the fiscal limitations that exist in reaching a quality education. When policies and financial reports are transparent and clear, this fosters trust that money is being spent wisely or will quickly point to opportunities for improvement. When parents, students, teachers, and administrators trust each other, the learning environment will thrive.





RECOMMENDATION 4

Create a nurturing social-emotional climate in all schools to allow students to develop as productive members of a democratic society.

Statement of Problem:

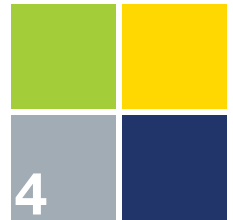
“ We spend the first 12 months of our childrens’ lives teaching them to walk and talk and the next 12 [years] telling them to sit down and shut up.” – Phyllis Diller

We are burning out our children because there is not any fun in the day. Teachers should not have to constantly tell children, “We are behind. We have to hurry up.” This is now normal practice in PPS, and it is not healthy mentally or physically for any of the parties involved. Teachers are stressed out and unintentionally stressing the children.

As humans, the environment within which we live affects us all. The climate of the places we go is established by the behaviors and norms of that place. Our schools must be places where all people are treated with dignity, respected for their diversity, and where freedom of expression—so vital to our democratic society—is modeled, learned and practiced. Teachers must be expected and allowed to teach; students to learn.

School should be a model of a community wellness program. But, in Pittsburgh Public Schools, there are twice as many security officers as counselors. Students and faculty are not allotted time for basics like using the restroom or eating lunch. Students spend too much time sitting, and do not get the hour of vigorous physical activity during the day that the Centers for Disease Control, American Academy of Pediatrics, and National Institutes of Health recommend. Adolescents should be supported to get a full nine and a half hours of sleep a night. Lunches are poor substitutes for a healthful, enjoyable meal. Discipline is punitive and simplistic, even in its rewards systems, which themselves often involve off-task incentives like sugary foods or a class party. Kindergartners who are disruptive or behind in their work lose recess and permission to go on field trips. There is far too much yelling in classrooms, punishments leveled at an entire group for the errors of a few people, and out-of-school instead of in-school suspensions. Going to school is stressful when it should be the exact opposite.





Proposed Solutions:

17. Help all schools become models of community wellness by developing comprehensive mental and physical health programs for students, faculty and staff.

PPS should develop a comprehensive mental and physical wellness program for students, faculty and staff in schools.

- Consider the stress-reducing features of yoga and tai chi.
- Encourage the parent community to donate healthful snacks for staff, students and faculty.
- Teach and lead students in calming activities and those that build their attention spans, such as visualization, following the breath, and educational kinesiology. These activities could be built into morning opening circles, and used as alternatives to punitive discipline when children lose focus and act out.
- Allow access to restrooms. Lack of access causes great stress to many students and has been a problem in our schools for decades, as some of the adults in this forum can recall restroom issues in our own school days.

Schools should provide hourly “brain breaks” for students, when they get five-minute intervals of vigorous physical activity or meditative, calming activity. Provide more of these during standardized high-stakes testing. Research shows that memory improves immediately after even a short break of vigorous physical exercise. Recent studies tie physical fitness to achievement, according to a post to Pittsburgh Kids and Creativity Network by Kathleen Costanza (posted to remakelearning.org on October 1, 2013).

Start high school days no earlier than 8:30 a.m. If necessary, switch high school start times with elementary and middle school start times and schedules, or make other adjustments to ensure that adolescents begin studies at an hour when they are awake and able to focus.

Revise the way current “Morning Meeting” is run to be more faithful to the original concept of engagement and conversation and less about talking at students. It is not supposed to be an opportunity to assemble the school for announcements and business. Make every morning a celebration of something. This is so easy to do. The National Poetry Foundation runs a free mobile phone app that broadcasts five minutes of anniversaries and birthdays each day of famous events and people, followed by a poem. Anyone in the school community can find anniversaries and birthdays, from some Internet research, an app, or their memory that the school could celebrate. A Morning Meeting Minute of Information about the person or event can be followed with a couple minutes of music and dancing. The school will have gotten some exercise, fun and inspiration before five minutes are out.





Teach students to identify feelings, communicate about them, and understand what to do about them. Help students practice ways to quiet their minds when they are distressed and other ways to manage emotions. Have students practice giving each other affirmations. Make well-monitored but free recess mandatory and fun, and encourage non-competitive movement-based play.

Students and parents should have opportunities each day to share their moods or any particular challenges with teachers. These could be things like the child did not sleep well or is upset that morning. Traditional and innovative solutions for sharing this information might be developed. Parents could send a slip of paper or text message to the teacher. Students could send their teachers a note about how they are feeling.

All adults in our schools need to understand their “clients.” Yelling, being sarcastic, talking over children’s heads so they cannot respond because they don’t understand, leading-the-witness type questions when trying to “find out” what happened in a disagreement between kids, exaggerated threats to keep children from misbehaving: all of these techniques frighten and anger children and youth, and are odious, meta-pathological forms of abuse. We have heard too many horror stories from parents who have pulled their children out of PPS because they felt shamed or frightened.

18. Provide comprehensive wraparound services for all students, particularly those who are isolated or have experienced trauma.

Who is owed a public education? Who is actually served a public education? If you survey the families who leave PPS, we suspect you will find many examples of students who wanted a PPS education but couldn’t get one. Children with special needs and gifts, children with chronic illness, children living in food and transportation deserts, children who are considered too disruptive. The pressure to conform is so punitive that families eventually find themselves leaving school just to save their sanity. We could almost accept that from a private school. But, not from a school devoted to the education of a populace.

We suspect that many PPS families are, through one circumstance or another, isolated from information about their child and the school. They may not be able to come to school or parent meetings, or find out when and where these are. PTA, PSSC, and PTO meetings are often very sparsely attended, but by many accounts it is not for lack of interest. Other families may not know strategies that will work for them for how to stay connected with school and support their student. Isolated in these ways, we feel sure there are families who are unrepresented and, in the sense of being understood, unknown. All the tools we use to help children develop their current abilities to a higher level will not work if we don’t know who and where the students are and what barriers they and their families experience in their attempts to secure a good education.

Some non-native English speakers may find themselves isolated in unique ways, as may families with chronically ill members or custodial grandparents. There are so many ways in which a family in the district could be isolated from education. Voices other than ours are only partially represented here, so PPS must reach out to them. Our recommendation is that PPS undertake a campaign to learn the ways in which Pittsburgh families are isolated from their school. We expect at least a year’s research will be needed to observe and document the needs, circumstances, and barriers that isolate families from school. Perhaps the United Way’s “Be There” campaign could be



studied or adopted. Without this information—without correct and faithful knowledge about actual families' actual circumstances—nothing that the schools do can be expected to work more often than a tossed coin lands on heads.

An overwhelming number of our students have experienced trauma. If we look at statistics regarding today's young people, we find children experiencing trauma are in the majority. According to the National Center for Victims of Crime, 60 percent of children experience victimization. Among this 60 percent:

- 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys experience sexual abuse
- 38% witness violence in their childhood
- 32% are victims of abuse or neglect
- 53% are victims of property victimization, which includes robbery
- Black youth are three times more likely to be victims of reported child abuse or neglect, three times more likely to be victims of robbery, and five times more likely to be victims of homicide
- 25% of low-income, urban youth have witnessed a murder

In one study of inner-city 7-year-old children, 75 percent had heard gunshots, 60 percent had seen drug deals, 18 percent had seen a dead body outside, and 10 percent had seen a shooting or stabbing at home.

PPS should also provide victim assistance. And while students may not be quick to report their victimization to an adult, we can see the trauma played out in increased depression, substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, and poor school performance.

Even though a majority of our students are victims of some sort of crime or neglect, David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center, estimates that only 2 to 15 percent of victims ever receive any victim assistance. When left alone, people suffering from trauma rarely seek help, and Pittsburgh community members report that a stigma against mental health care adds to this problem. One community member pointed out that after the tragedy in Sandy Hook, assistance was available in the form of counseling for students and staff. In Pittsburgh Public Schools, counselors are few and far between and cannot possibly care for the 60 percent of students who are suffering from trauma. Additionally, recent studies suggest that students who live in violent neighborhoods are experiencing PTSD. If our students go without care, they cannot achieve their full potential in or out of school.

If the Pittsburgh Public Schools complete a thorough campaign to get to know and understand the ways in which families are isolated from an education and who is isolated, it will become clear what basic resources need to be provided and to whom. We suspect the needs of students and families will be complex. For example, we know that for working families with children in multiple schools and daycare, transportation is not a simple matter.



But all isolation absolutely must be resolved. We suggest doing something creative like working with Pittsburgh's Port Authority or engineers in our universities to plan routes and transport for those families.

19. Create a building-by-building culture of celebrating diverse accomplishments of students and adults.

Our schools should place a stronger focus on “reciprocal expectations.” That is, what PPS asks of children and families, those children and families should be able to expect from PPS. We cannot talk at students all day and then expect them not to talk. We cannot expect assignments to be handed in when they are not handed back. When students do not meet our expectations, adults in our schools should consistently respond to students’ transgressions and mistakes the way we would expect ourselves to be responded to. This should include compassion.

PPS could develop a “Good Catch!” program to teach high expectations. Often there are minor errors in materials used in our schools; banners are misspelled, worksheets are missing information. This challenge could be turned into an opportunity for kids to point out errors that adults make as the school community strives for excellence. We recommend schools develop a “Good Catch!” award for students who identify errors and submit them. Once every few weeks a small group could review the submissions and then publicize the results. It would be great to empower the students and demonstrate that the adults are also willing to learn and improve.

PPS could also establish prominent halls of fame for each school, and celebrate the accomplishments of our schools and students in many activities and subjects. We should celebrate teachers’ and administrators’ achievements too.

20. Develop student leadership structures, with concrete decision-making power, in every school.

After-school clubs and activities provide students a way to develop their interests and make lasting relationships. These are the places where students can get to know and interact with their peers from across the city. However, students face barriers to these programs:

- After-school transportation is not available in all of our schools. This is a significant hurdle for bused students.
- Adult supervision for clubs and activities is not readily available. It is not always clear what the rules are for supervision of school clubs and the role that volunteers may play.
- Not every school has opportunities for dramatic productions, musical performances, learning an instrument, or other activities that allow students to enrich their experiences and love of learning.
- Informal opportunities for peer interactions are hindered by the lack of communication between parents. Privacy rules and distance severely challenge communications needed to invite a friend over to play. Also, these opportunities are less available as households often have all adults working outside of the home.





Students should be taught to advocate for themselves and others, and have good models of this behavior. Something that can support this is one-to-one conversation. Bring back programs that put police officers and students into positive, meaningful discussions so that these groups can build trust with each other one-to-one, name-by-name. Engage students, families, faculty and administration in weekly talks with one another as people with dignity and people of diverse points of view. Precious little conversation occurs among these groups and, consequently, we understand each other very little.

Help students form councils in every school to ensure that students' needs and perspectives are represented in the decision making by the faculty and administration. Student councils can also empower students to solve problems within their schools. Help schools set aside time, and train students and adults to have summit-like meetings about school climate, curriculum and other issues.

21. Implement restorative justice models in which older students take responsibility for their actions rather than receive punishment, with companion programs preparing elementary students for these approaches.

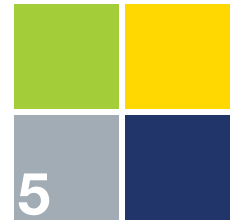
Outlaw suspensions or suspension-like punishments for young children. Adopt restorative justice techniques as part of the discipline protocol. These techniques help students understand the impact of their behavior on those around them. Turn out-of-school suspensions into in-school suspensions with excellent counselors to work with students face-to-face.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

School climate is integral to the success of our students. Students need to feel a sense of belonging or else they will find it somewhere else. We see this reflected in attendance and dropout rates in the district. To create a positive school climate, we need to find a way to involve students, families and the schools to promote academic achievement. We do this is by reaching out to isolated families and meeting them where they are. Schools need to be aware that language or technology barriers may keep families from becoming involved. This includes families who suffer from trauma. We encourage schools to look into providing victim assistance in an attempt to raise the community's ability to engage in the school day. Knowledge of the challenges that the community faces is an important part of cultural competence. Without full knowledge of the communities in which they teach, schools are missing an important part of the educational puzzle that allows them to connect to their learners and better meet the needs of the community.

Schools need to be a place where good modeling occurs. This happens in the classroom when teachers refuse to treat students disrespectfully. We wish to reiterate that yelling and sarcasm are never effective disciplinary strategies. Adults in the school should act in the way they wish their students to act. "Children who have parents, teachers, and other important individuals who display positive patterns of behavior have the opportunity to wire their own brains in a similar manner" (Deporter, 62). When we all work together to create a positive supportive school climate, our students benefit from our example and the climate is enriched for all.





RECOMMENDATION 5

Take innovative approaches to budget reporting and planning to build community trust and be transparent about the use and impact of public funds.

Statement of the Problem:

Our schools require resources to operate. No goal can be achieved without use of the right resource at the right time. We need buildings, materials, teachers, administrators, social services, and many other resources. We must balance the use of those resources to support the pillars of public education (curriculum, trust, school climate). Lack of balance can cause a pillar to fail, and with it, the whole structure will fall. Some resources are finite, but many, with creativity, can generate more resources.

Before PPS can solicit alternative funding or engage stakeholders, there must be trust in the administration. A hallmark of trust is to have visible processes in simple language. Far too often, a parent gets frustrated because she hears of something great going on in one school but not in her school. Many times the parent who knows the right person to call is the one who receives services for his child. While this may be good “customer service,” it is not the way to run an educational system. Shouldn’t all children be afforded the perks that a pesky parent is willing to demand?

We believe the same is true for teachers and principals. If they do not have true open and honest collaboration about what is working in the school and what isn’t, how are they to build trust? How do they know the district is evaluating them fairly? If the administration is not willing to stop and explain simply what is happening, why it is happening, and how it will help a child learn in a classroom, then the collaborations never happen and trust will not prevail.

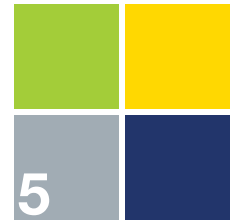
To foster a culture of transparency, we believe PPS needs simple policies that are clear to understand and have common sense as to why they are necessary, explain succinctly what are they trying to do, and, if relevant, can measure how they help a child learn in a classroom.

Proposed Solutions:

22. Create Learning Resource Centers in partnership with parents and community organizations.

We want to extend learning resources beyond the school day and into the neighborhoods where students study and work. Learning does not stop at 3:41 or as students walk off campus; quite the opposite. Students need more help from peers and tutors to do homework, practice a language, or apply fundamental skills in real intellectual-work settings. They need to learn alongside great Pittsburgh teachers, thinkers, artists, and inventors.





Consider first that enrichment at home is one element of how excellent, competitive students do well in school and in a career. Enrichment consists of extra learning about favorite subjects or from treasured mentors, receiving excellent help on homework and access to great books, excursions, and knowledge-building conversations with wise adults. Note that enrichment often refers to learning experiences outside of school. We believe every child needs enrichment and that it must be delivered to all students.

As parents, we know children benefit from long and short-term projects, new ideas, and technologies at the Gifted Center. We do not believe, as we have been told by PPS, that many or most students are too deficient to participate in exciting projects and ideas. The projects that make learning fun in the Gifted Individualized Education Program involve little advanced math or reading. Certainly the children who are assessed as “superior but not gifted” can benefit from this enrichment, but they do not receive any. Still more students are not receiving enrichment they could really use. We must not lose an opportunity to enrich the minds of every student in and outside the school walls.

We recommend that PPS dream big here. This is where schooling and public school connections can energize entire neighborhoods. We propose the after-school educational resource center and neighborhood school “satellite” center as ways of supporting the learning, both formal and informal, that excellent, competitive students do outside of school. Develop enrichment and educational support, and house it all in Learning Resource Centers that are on and off campus centers. The purpose of such centers would be to (1) extend the school’s resources into the neighborhood so that the close of the school day does not represent a close of the learning day, and (2) provide a setting for enrichment fostered by the communities of learning across Pittsburgh, from the universities to organizations like Assemble, to outreach programs of institutions like the PPG Zoo and Aquarium.

What might Learning Resource Centers become?

A location for essential school resources that isolated families typically lack such as:

- **A reference library of textbooks and schoolbooks that many schools cannot stock because they go missing.**
- **Computing and Internet access.**
 - logging onto Grade Book and Moodle
 - word processing and limited research
 - viewing assignment sheets and evaluation criteria
 - viewing school and activity calendars
- **A space for Homework Lounge, a concept developed by Obama Academy high school students.**
 - Cognitive science research has found repeatedly that context matters in memory so much that studying in the same place every day weakens memory for a subject. Instead, to remember well, a person must study in several different contexts and circumstances to inoculate them against miscues from the environment during test time.

- A space for tutors and mentors to meet.
- Supplies, donated by Staples or other office supply companies, to help students organize their work, including binders, milk-crates, file folders, and paper, as well as equipment that stays in the center such as printers, three-hole punchers, and markers.

On-campus centers could host expanded Summer Dreamers Academy programs during school holidays and after-school hours. Learning Resource Centers could leverage PPS programs, staff and partnerships to distribute the learning model, venues and vehicles of Summer Dreamers to regular courses inside schools as well.

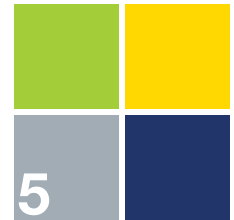
A location for enrichment, such as:

- Foreign language conversation clubs, presentations by students for students, poetry readings, tutorials, and workshops for students and families.
- Weekly rotating visits by the Art Institutes, The Labs at the Carnegie Library, Western PA Writing Workshop, artists, scientists, and experts in other areas.
- Mini learning museums and infant play nooks developed by museum researchers at Pitt or other institutions for students and their siblings. These can be staffed during convenient hours by graduate students who study child development and museum learning.
- Computing area in a secure computer lab in a school for programming classes and Hacker Maker clubs.

The possibilities for enrichment alone would make PPS a real choice over private and charter schools. Engage museum or informal-learning experts from the Children’s Museum and UPCLOSE and ventures like Sprout Fund and Hive to create stand-alone, student-led activities in everything from what to do while waiting in lines to the academic subjects. Remake the “Science Activity Calendar” significantly to include irresistible ideas to try. Think about art installations in the corridors and learning spaces of school buildings, like mini Children’s Museums or art museums in small, unused spaces of schools. These could carry over to activities parents can do with their students outside of school, such as walking or driving tours throughout Pittsburgh to learn about science and art.

Together, with the gifts and talents of our teachers and our communities, we can develop every child’s gifts and interests. Offer learning experiences in as wide an array as possible. Check the summer camp offerings in Pittsburgh for class descriptions of hacking, biochemistry, gaming, global action and service, economics of poverty and discrimination, mobile app development, medical device engineering, energy, the art of costuming, LEGO robotics, choreography, and so much more.

Create “Conversation Clubs” like the ones that our amazing Carnegie Libraries host. Assemble students learning a new language (English speaking and ESL) with other students and match up learners by their language interests. Find a spot in every school or community where these learners can easily come together, either to do homework together or play a game. Invite the community to share their languages with learners. Help this grow into centers where whole families can practice or share a new language.



23. Lower student-teacher ratios to foster effective instruction.

Classroom size, well-trained paraprofessionals and substitutes, and services for special needs children directly impact learning of all students.

One member of our forum teaches in a multi-age classroom of 22 students, ages 3 to 6 years old, in an urban Montessori magnet school. The 6- to 9-year-old classes have 26 students. The school times are from 9:05 to 3:51, and tutors are in those classes from 9:00 to 2:00. It would be impossible to obtain a license if one were opening a school or daycare with those adult-to-student ratios. (The Corbett funding prevented the school from keeping their trained paraprofessional for the duration of the day.)

Even with those full-time workers in the younger age groups, the students' academic, social, emotional, and safety needs were not met. Literacy skills are developed in the 3- to 6-year-old classrooms. Over years of teaching, 10 to 15 percent of early childhood students have been seen having severe learning disabilities. These students have had the interventions offered by the district and moved up through the grades and they still cannot read, write, comprehend, or do math. They needed dynamic, systematic, individualized, one-on-one instruction for the duration of at least 90 minutes in the age 3 to 6 classroom.

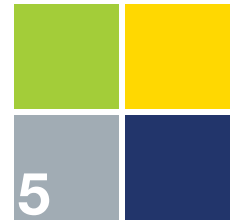
One teacher cannot adequately or successfully meet the needs of a diverse class (10 percent being gifted) no matter how trained in differential and individualized instruction—not when there are 22 to 26 students. And, this is a lower class size than most schools. Parents of children who are academically focused leave PPS and go elsewhere to provide their child a viable education rich in the arts, humanities, math, science, foreign language, and safe after-school activities.

24. Be more creative in attracting new public and private resources to support public schools.

Pittsburgh is on the verge of reclaiming its spot as a first-tier city. However, to do so, we need to have a public school system with high-performing students. Good teachers are critically necessary, but are not the only factor in academic achievement. If we want to attract more employers to set up their headquarters in the city, we need high-quality public schools that will prepare a highly skilled labor force, and be attractive to executives wishing to relocate here. If we want to alleviate the social problems caused by poverty, we need to uplift our students by engaging the whole community.

Research shows poverty accounts for a large amount of the variance in U.S. academic achievement. Pittsburgh's African-American population is one of the most disadvantaged in the United States. Disadvantaged students have fewer learning resources to draw upon. If we implement any or all of the funding ideas described here, we can help provide essential resources and address the out-of-school factors that may account for a large portion of the "achievement gap."





PPS is working on improving classroom teaching, but we'll need to develop new sources of funding to address out-of-school and other enrichment factors.

Fundraising Strategies

1. Engage businesses and professionals in providing funding, in-kind, or people power to provide resources and opportunities for our students, especially for lower-income students who do not have access to all the support and experiences that contribute to higher academic achievement.

- Engage specific businesses, professionals and organizations in selecting or creating specific programs and projects of interest to them. Some of this is already happening, but business engagement can be expanded. Perhaps PNC Grow Up Great would fund a summer dreamers program for elementary school students so that those without access to enriching day camps do not experience learning loss over the summer. Maybe BNY Mellon could sponsor a financial literacy class in our high schools. The energy companies now investing in our region could sponsor better science labs in our schools. Businesses could sponsor field trips to their offices or cultural attractions (e.g. BNY Mellon-funded trips to jazz concerts). Restaurants and clothing and technology stores could provide reward cards to students who improve their grades.
- Smaller businesses could participate, too. Witness what the young entrepreneur-chefs involved in Food Revolution Pittsburgh did last year, raising \$11,000 through gourmet dinner events to support a cooking club at Pittsburgh Obama, and bringing water tanks to our school cafeterias. (Well-hydrated students learn better.)
- Businesses could be encouraged to take advantage of Pennsylvania's Education Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) to donate to "Educational Improvement Organizations" that provide "innovative educational programs" that are "not part of the regular academic program of a public school but that enhance the curriculum or academic program of a public school." This may include "reconfiguring, renovating or equipping" a public school facility to create a specialized environment "necessary to the operation of an innovative educational program."

2. Solicit donations from alumni to fund specific projects and programs at their alma maters. We could give students after-school jobs making phone calls soliciting donations from alumni (as universities do).

- Recruit alumni as mentors. Expand the sixth grade mentor program with the goal that every PPS student has a mentor. Alumni could mentor students from the schools they attended.

3. Add a small surcharge on Steelers (or other professional sports teams) gear to fund sports programs, exercise programs, and activities that build mental focus (tai chi, martial arts, meditation, visualization, dance, music, etc.)

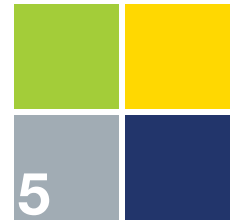
4. Enact a sugary drinks tax. Proceeds from this tax could go toward the general fund, especially to help keep class sizes down so students can get more individual attention.

5. Maximize “excess capacity” in schools by renting out space to small companies and organizations willing to provide experiential learning to students. For example, a high-tech start-up could offer a computer science class after school. A career counseling center for parents (and students) could help bring parents to school more often, as well as address the poverty that plagues many PPS families. A beauty salon could set up shop in a wing of a high school and train students in cosmetology, a field that interests many of our students. College counseling services and test prep businesses could offer SAT prep. A culinary school could offer students cooking classes. An arts organization could provide art experiences. PCTV-21 would likely be interested in setting up satellite TV studio sites. This would allow PPS students to produce morning announcements TV shows, like their suburban peers.

- Inadequate medical care has been demonstrated to hinder academic achievement. Public schools in Orange County, Calif., and elsewhere have addressed this by having on-site clinics, often staffed in collaboration with local universities. In Pittsburgh, UPMC, Highmark or other health providers could lease wings of school buildings and offer “minute clinics,” vision services, dental services, diabetes counseling, etc. Funding to support these clinics may also be available through the new health care law.
- Obviously, security considerations in renting out space in a working school building to an outside organization or business would need to be factored in, with separate entrances, clearances for employees, etc.
- The benefits of having companies and organizations co-located in schools include attracting additional financial resources, providing greater access to experiential learning, bringing in extra “hands on deck,” and engaging the community with the school. Parents who are intimidated by coming to school may be more likely to engage with the school if it offered them additional resources. The school-as-community-resource model has been used in the Cincinnati Public Schools’ “Community Learning Centers,” where school “campuses serve as community hubs.” Having schools serve as “centers of neighborhood life” demystifies the schools and makes them more relatable. By strengthening neighborhood schools as a center of the community, we could preserve neighborhood schools, help keep families within the Pittsburgh Public Schools system, and attract more families to choose PPS schools.

The five proposed strategies could generate additional revenue for PPS, averting the downward funding spiral that currently haunts our school district. Some of these strategies may be relatively easy to implement; others will take more time and planning, but could yield substantial funding.

As described above, these five alternative funding strategies are targeted to funding specific initiatives and programs rather than going into the general fund to supplant the normal sources of funding that provide for the basics of education. Donors may also be more willing to support specific initiatives rather than contributing to the general fund. One reason may be that there is a currently a lot of mystery and mistrust surrounding the allocation of dollars in the district, a concern that can be addressed by greater transparency in funding.



25. Adopt a participatory budgeting process so that school-level allocations are clear.

Under the forms and resources tab on the front page of the Pittsburgh Public School website, all of the district's policies are available to download. These policies are categorized into 11 sections in a total of 842 pages. Running a school district the size of Pittsburgh is not a small task and policy is required to ensure compliance with state law. Likewise, it is convenient that these policies are easy to access on the website. However, there are several characteristics of transparency that these policies are lacking.

The policies are not reviewed frequently enough to know whether they are helping or hindering the district reach its goals. Therefore, it is our recommendation that all 842 pages of policy be reviewed by the administration in the next two years. The timeframe for each policy review should be made public, with meetings open to any community member who alerts the district of their interest in a particular policy. Each policy review should have a team of people appropriate for each section. The names of every member of the policy review team must be made public. Each policy must have a public comment period. A thorough review of the policies that includes appropriate members and a public comment period for all taxpayers, community members and stakeholders will begin the process of restoring transparency to the process.

After the review, PPS must eliminate policies that are not helping the growth of children in the classroom. Likewise, each policy should have a subsequent review date to ensure content is still relevant and new teaching methods are incorporated.

PPS should adopt a standard format for all reports, with a short summary of each section at the beginning of the report, a publication date, and the names and positions of those responsible for any actions in the policy. Any item that has a date for annual publication must be placed on the school calendar.

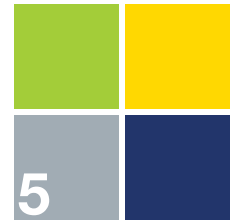
Because money is always at the root of what can or cannot be done, financial transparency must be addressed. The district does a fair job of publishing a timely report of its annual financial situation. However, the 438-page report is not easy to understand. These are areas missing in the financial reports that would help build trust and transparency in the district.

Parents and community members for years have had the notion that the reason some schools do better than others is because those schools have more money to spend. For example, teachers in those schools are given \$1,000 to spend on supplies, while the low-performing schools do not even have enough books to pass out to all of their children.

As part of its financial package, the district should add a breakdown by each individual school and report, like G-1 through G-7 in the 2013-2014 Preliminary General Fund Budget (PDE-2028). The district should clarify how much of the overall budget is not appropriated to schools, what funds are held back from classrooms, and why. Likewise, any funds appropriated to the administration should be distinguished from school budgets.

Private funds that are brought in are usually earmarked for a special project. If they cannot be used directly in the classroom, these types of funds should have their own reports that show how





they are being used. The Gates Project and Summer Dreamers are two examples of how the use of money is not clear in the district's financial picture. Although these projects are part of the supplemental budget, many programs are parts of schools and should be a part of the school-based budget.

The category "other" should rarely be used and never used to describe anything that is more than 5 percent of the overall budget. As an example, for the Gates Project, 30.5 percent of the budget is linked under Other Objects. A quick drill down says this is Budgetary Reserve. What is that? Likewise, the line item 934 for indirect cost is not explained, yet it is everywhere in the special projects. When there are high cost items with obscure titles, it contributes to the lack of trust. All budgetary line items need to be clear and unambiguous.

In addition, PPS should consider going to a school year budget. With a calendar year budget, it is difficult for taxpayers to understand that a budget passed for 2013 is actually for two different school years. It adds an unnecessary level of confusion.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

For Pittsburgh Public Schools students to have a truly enriching learning environment, and for our students to be better prepared for entering the "real world" of career and college, our students need resources. We need to reconsider the traditional model of school as a silo, separate from the society around it, and instead embrace a new model that encourages resource collaboration between the schools and the community. We can draw upon Pittsburgh's wealth of cultural organizations, community organizations, engines of innovation in our universities and businesses, and civic-minded professionals, to bring enriching curricular options, mentors and experts, activities, and extracurricular experiences to all our Pittsburgh Public Schools students.

Faced with the challenges of reductions in the usual sources of revenue, we can think outside the box and develop innovative collaborative strategies to provide the Pittsburgh Public Schools additional talent, materials and funding. We can pursue the community schools model that has been adopted successfully by the Cincinnati Public Schools, offering within our school buildings an array of wraparound services that address the needs of students and their families, helping them to succeed. We can turn sections of our neighborhood elementary schools into Satellite Learning Centers, which offer homework materials, books, and other services to students in their home neighborhoods in the evening and on weekends.

We may be able to offer these services without further straining the district budget. The New York City Community School Coalition's 2013 Policy Framework for creating Community Learning Schools strives to offer wraparound services at school sites "at little or no cost to the district, through public/private partnerships and partnerships between different government agencies." We can also raise additional revenue through non-traditional means, such as soliciting alumni donations, instituting a sugary drinks tax, or adding a surcharge to the gear of Pittsburgh's sports teams. This revenue can be designated to go to specific programs and projects that directly benefit our students, for example, school sports and physical activities, adding classroom aides in lower grades to provide more individualized attention, providing all our students with access to iPads and 21st Century technology in the classroom, and to implement other ideas described in this document.





THE VIVA PITTSBURGH IDEA EXCHANGE

Conclusion: A Call to Action

*“Some men look at things the way they are and ask why?
I dream of things that are not and ask why not?”— Robert Kennedy*

We believe the pillars of a public education—curriculum, trust, and school climate—are also what Pittsburgh Public Schools must strengthen dramatically if our children, our families and our neighborhoods are to thrive.

Our recommendations have been discussed in this document. Now we call on our district leaders to guide us into the next phase of this change.

Center on curriculum

We know there is more to education than reading and math. We believe a substantive curriculum and measures that reflect the breadth of that substance are necessary. To achieve student engagement we must keep the role of high stakes tests in perspective and ensure we meet the needs of our students and teachers.

We ask that PPS make broad, challenging, content filled, engaging curriculum and delivery the center of our schools.

Recycle ideas that worked

Experts at Pittsburgh Public Schools already know many of the ways to improve student outcomes; they’ve just moved away from some of them. That is, veteran PPS teachers with decades of experience can list and describe programs, courses and policies that once supported students, but no longer exist. We gave examples of these in this document. Sometimes new is not better.

We ask that PPS work, with veteran teachers leading, to review and revive ideas that worked.

Follow through on current ideas

Pittsburghers have sacrificed personal time to listen at Board meetings, build connections within the community, volunteer in schools, and contribute ideas for improving student outcomes. Sadly, many remark that the ideas, even when solicited by PPS, stop short of becoming actions. They say nothing ever happens with their contributions. Ideas get tweaked and revised until they are unrecognizable. Offers to help in a school go unanswered or are simply declined.

We ask that PPS work with volunteers to review current ideas and offers of help and follow through on them. We ask that PPS make this process transparent.





Remake public school

We have seen classrooms that operate like real science labs, arts studios, museums, and parks where students move as freely among spaces for learning as their ideas do. We have seen schools that engage and intrigue each student, that make students eager to come back to school the next day. We have seen a diversity of students working together for a common cause and learning together and from each other. We have seen community spaces, services and resources become extensions of schools. We have seen schools become places for providing community services and resources. Expensive equipment is not required.

We ask that PPS remake our schools, not just re-envision them, in line with the best research and development insights.

Realign our pillars

Curriculum, trust, and school climate are the essential pillars of our public education. They are held together with a proper balance of resources. We have discussed each individually, but they cannot really be separated. Our recommendations have often spanned each and, together, they make the whole.

We ask that PPS focus attention on all three pillars of public education and on proper balance of the resources supporting them.

In creating this report, a few members of our community have represented the ideas of many. We have attempted to articulate a vision in keeping with those ideas. We have shouted, listened, shared our pain, reflected, and come out on the other side to offer these recommendations.

Now, we urge you to gather more of the PPS community to join us. We ask that you consider these ideas and recommendations thoughtfully. We ask that you be willing to discuss the taboo or the “wholly impossible,” and work through the changes with an open mind. Life is an ongoing education and creation. We want to teach by this example how great things can happen when we work and live together.

We will be a remade Pittsburgh Public Schools—still passionate, still resilient—a beacon for our community and for defining a true public education.

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The Writers



Tiffani Best, who runs the nonprofit Strong Family, Strong Community, firmly believes the adage “it takes a village to raise a child.” That is what motivates her to work to unify families and make them stronger, in turn leading to better communities. Her inspiration is her now fifth grade daughter’s early childhood educator. She says, “Thanks to Ms. Pat, I understand the importance of parent and community involvement.” Besides her daughter, Tiffani has a seventh grade son enrolled in PPS.



James Carter provides vocational support and help with outside employment skills for those with special needs. He has two children, ages 6 and 11, who transferred out of PPS. He is an outgoing, patient leader, who inherited his heart and charisma from his uncle.

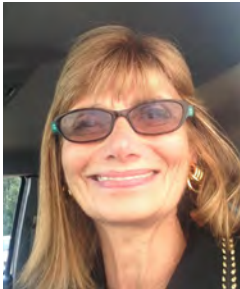


Steve DeFlich, a mechanical engineer, is currently a quality control manager for a small local manufacturing firm. He is in charge of setting policy, processes and procedures to ensure timely delivery of quality products. When he’s not working, he is busy helping his 14-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son with homework, communicating with his wife about how to juggle life activities, attending school meetings at both the local and district level, and relaxing by watching sports or reality TV. A fan of robust debate about political issues from all sides, Steve equally enjoys watching Bill O’Reilly and reading the Huffington Post.



Heather Harr is a director of Greater Pittsburgh Student Voices and co-founder of the Youth Media Advocacy Project (YMAP). On those rare occasions when she’s not working, she likes to eat out, take advantage of Pittsburgh’s local parks and riverfront trails, and follow politics. She has a background in research, including focus group moderation, and worked for a major corporation before entering the nonprofit sector. Through her current projects that help students advocate for change, she has had the opportunity to hear from high school students across the Pittsburgh system, as well as those in suburban, rural and private schools, about what they need and how they would tackle education reform. “Visiting all these different schools has given me perspective to see what we have—and don’t have—in our PPS schools,” she says. Heather’s son is a graduate of Pittsburgh Public Schools, and her father is a retired PPS teacher.

The Writers



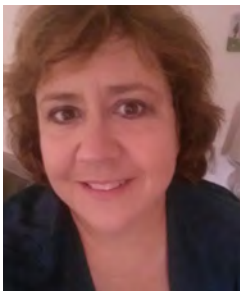
Elaine Liberati has been a teacher for 30 years because she enjoys the company of children and possesses abilities to engage them. She is currently teaching 3 to 6 year olds, but has taught high school and college. Elaine says she enjoys debate, and the person she would have most wanted as a student is Abel Meerapal, who, she says, “so quietly led such a heroic life.”



Leanne Lisien is a mechanical engineer for Westinghouse. She is a graduate of Pittsburgh Public Schools (Minadeo, Reizenstein, and Allderdice), and the mother of two sons, one of whom is in first grade at her elementary school alma mater. In her free time, Leanne enjoys playing with her boys—building Legos, making art projects, and taking things apart—or working on the house with her husband. The family also enjoys going to museums and having picnics. When she can squeeze it in, she makes pottery to feed her artistic side. She is also becoming increasingly involved with her son’s school.



Eliza “Beth” Littleton conducts studies of medical and surgical learning and teaching, medical school policy, and the history of medicine. When she’s not working, she’s helping her own children study and develop their interests. She has third, seventh and 11th graders in PPS. Eliza is never without a notebook or other device to record ideas and lines for poems and stories, or, she says, “I’ll forget them a couple of seconds after having them.” She is thankful for her colleagues at the medical school, whom she describes as fiercely intelligent and flexible thinkers. “While they easily question an idea and dig for flaws,” she says, “they teach like humanists.”



Melissa Sasso began her career in the NICU at Magee Women’s Hospital, after earning a three-year nursing diploma in two years. Convinced that a solid education was imperative to become a leader in her field, she decided to pursue a bachelor’s degree from Carlow College while working full time. Inspired by her professors to reach even higher, she earned two master’s in nursing and taught at several colleges and universities throughout the area. Fourteen years ago, Melissa moved to her current job as a school nurse in PPS, which she describes as “by far the best job I have had.” She says she has grown and changed over the years, but never lost her belief in the good of mankind or hope for our youth. “I want every child to know that they are worthwhile and capable of being loved,” she says.

The Writers



Judy Smizik became a teacher more than 35 years ago to instill a love of learning in her students. She chose to teach in an urban school district because she believes education is the path out of poverty for many of our lower socio-economic students. Kindergarten has been her main area of expertise, although she has helped children at all primary ages develop a strong foundation in reading and mathematics. “Teaching is a challenging profession,” she says, “but a most rewarding career.” Judy is a member of several organizations, including the Pittsburgh Association of Kindergarten Teachers, National Kindergarten Alliance, International Dyslexia Association, and Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers. She has been recognized as an outstanding teacher during her career and has led numerous professional development workshops and curriculum writing projects for the Pittsburgh Public Schools.



Shayna Willis is an educational consultant and math professor. She works for a local nonprofit that provides after-school programming to PPS. She says the person she would most liked to have had as a student was Albert Einstein, because, “I would have liked the opportunity to help him love math class.” When not engaging the minds of her students or trying to find a new culinary treat, Shayna can be found with her husband and two daughters.

Index of Recommendations and Proposed Solutions

Index

RECOMMENDATION ONE

Assure systemwide delivery of a relevant, coherent curriculum that makes learning a joy for students.

Proposed Solutions

1. Establish a curricular framework that is relevant to all students and our vision of a vibrant Pittsburgh. Foster culturally relevant curriculum and school climate.
2. Make real-world connections between the written curriculum and the lives of students. Student interests should be used to enhance learning while meeting curriculum standards.
3. Make free play the main teaching tool with young students. Shorten periods of instruction in early grades to allow more time for free play. Incorporate play into the daily school routines. Look to community partners to augment opportunities for creative play.
4. Provide students with a rich variety of opportunities and settings for learning to meet their individual interests and needs.
5. Use lesson planning to support the curricular framework, instructional differentiation, and diversity that students need.
6. Change the culture of testing.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

Provide educators with the tools and support they need to effectively use the curriculum.

Proposed Solutions

7. Train teachers to use new curricula until they are confident they can use it in the classroom. Create a repository that houses all curriculum that is easily accessible to teachers and families.
8. Provide teachers with high quality professional development to support curricular effectiveness.
9. Build strong communication practices and foster collaboration for and among teachers.
10. Make teacher evaluation a supportive process that focuses on growing a teachers' ability and improving student learning.
11. Engage teachers as partners in constant system evaluation and improvement.

Continued on next page...



RECOMMENDATION THREE

Establish practices and communication infrastructure that promote trust among parents, students, educators, and public officials.

Proposed Solutions

12. Create a systemwide communication and information structure that gives parents timely and comprehensive information.
13. Empower all administrators to be responsive to families' requests and provide timely information.
14. Survey the community and provide opportunities for community members to share their unique knowledge in the schools.
15. Structure partnerships with organizations that already engage children and families to access talent in a way that maximizes students' educational opportunities.
16. Create a districtwide Wiki for students, educators and families to document and share their learning experiences so that positive practices can be replicated.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

Create a nurturing social-emotional climate in all schools to allow students to develop as productive members of a democratic society.

Proposed Solutions

17. Help all schools become models of community wellness by developing comprehensive mental and physical health programs for students, faculty and staff.
18. Provide comprehensive wraparound services for all students, particularly those who are isolated or have experienced trauma.
19. Create a building-by-building culture of celebrating diverse accomplishments of students and adults.
20. Develop student leadership structures, with concrete decision-making power, in every school.
21. Implement restorative justice models in which older students take responsibility for their actions rather than receive punishment, with companion programs that prepare elementary students for these approaches.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

Take innovative approaches to budget reporting and planning to build community trust and be transparent about the use and impact of public funds.

Proposed Solutions

22. Create Learning Resource Centers in partnership with parents and community organizations.
23. Lower student-teacher ratios to foster effective instruction.
24. Be more creative in attracting new public and private resources to support public schools.
25. Adopt participatory budgeting process so that school-level allocations are clear.

New Voice Strategies

Action

New Voice Strategies is a nonprofit corporation founded by a group of seasoned professionals who believe in an individual's ability to make our world better, fairer and more productive. New Voice Strategies created the VIVA Idea Exchange™ to offer leaders a new way to communicate with their stakeholders. The VIVA Idea Exchange™ is an online peer collaboration platform that plumbs the wisdom of committed people with front-line experience to create consensus on a variety of actionable recommendations. We believe in the power of authentic experience and provide committed people with an avenue to make a difference.

Our passion is to make their voices heard. Since 2010, New Voice Strategies has engaged more than 5,000 committed classroom teachers in peer-to-peer collaborations. Through them, New Voice Strategies offers unvarnished insights into professional visions and priorities for strengthening America's public schools from coast to coast.

Board of Directors

JILL BASS taught in the Chicago and New York City public schools for 14 years. She has a master's in instructional leadership from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and has been a professional developer, curriculum writer, educational consultant, and instructional coach. She is currently director of the Mikva Challenge's National Center for Action Civics, overseeing curriculum development and teacher training.

JEAN-CLAUDE BRIZARD is currently a senior advisor at the College Board, focusing on developing the organization's career readiness initiative. He is the former chief executive of Chicago Public Schools. Prior to his appointment in Chicago, he was superintendent of schools for the Rochester City School District in New York.

ANNA BURGER is long-time strategist who was an advanced leadership fellow at Harvard University and served on President Obama's Economic Recovery Board. She was chair of Change to Win and the first woman to head an American labor federation. In 2010, Burger retired as secretary-treasurer of SEIU, the nation's fastest growing union, where she had served since 2001. Burger was named one of Washingtonian magazine's 100 Most Powerful Women in 2006 and 2009.

TOM COSGROVE (Ex officio), co-founder of New Voice Strategies, brings strong experience as a message and communications strategist to our work. He has designed and implemented successful communications and grassroots campaigns for more than three decades, as an environmental activist, campaign manager, political media consultant, and advisor to businesses and nonprofits.

ELIZABETH EVANS (Ex Officio) is the founding CEO of New Voice Strategies. She has more than 25 years of professional experience in community-based organizing and policy advocacy, strategic communications, law, and policy. She is a recognized

national leader for building unconventional alliances and bringing innovative approaches to solving difficult policy problems. For the last 12 years, she has focused on education policy. Previously, she spent 10 years as a courtroom litigator for the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

JOHN HUSSEY is chief strategy officer at Battelle for Kids. He provides organizational and strategic oversight for the organization's clients in the areas of innovation, technology, communications, development, and strategic planning. Prior to joining Battelle for Kids, John enjoyed a 30-year career in education and technology. He previously served as the regional manager for SchoolNet, Inc., helping create web-based products to help teachers access student data and curricular standards via the Internet for use in instructional planning. He was also a middle school science teacher and technology coordinator in several Ohio school districts.

KIPLUND "KIP" KOLKMEIER is of counsel to the Political Law and Government Relations practice groups of Perkins, Coie, LLC & Kolkmeier Consulting. His legal practice focuses on state legislative lobbying in Illinois, corporate and governmental ethics issues, administrative rulemaking and executive agency lobbying, PAC management, state and federal campaign finance issues, and association management. He previously was a partner at the law firms of Sidley & Austin, Altheimer & Gray, and Wildman, Harrold, Allen & Dixon.

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