What Every HIGH School Should Have

A Survey of Conditions and Resources at Neighbrohood High Schools in the School District of Philadelphia

PCCY
Philadelphia Citizens
for Children and Youth

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About PCCY

Founded in 1980, Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) serves as the region's leading child advocacy organization and works to improve the lives and life chances of its children. Through thoughtful and informed advocacy, community education, targeted service projects and budget analysis, PCCY seeks to watch out and speak out for children and families. PCCY undertakes specific and focused projects in areas affecting the healthy growth and development of children, including after-school, child care, public education, child health, juvenile justice and child welfare. PCCY is a committed advocate and an independent watchdog for the well-being of children.

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Introduction

What Every HIGH School Should Have

Introduction

In recent years, high schools have been targeted for reform, nationwide and in the School District of Philadelphia. The reforms have led to new options and exciting opportunities for many students. However, few of the District's 30 "neighborhood high schools" have benefited from efforts to reshape and change the high school experience. These comprehensive schools range in size from fewer than 225 students to more than 3,500. Some have diverse populations; others are homogenous. None posted federally mandated Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2005.

After an initial report on conditions and needs of elementary schools published last year, we turned to focus on high schools, to determine if they had basic resources – "***What Every (High) School Should Have.***"

With the cooperation of the CEO of the District, The Commonwealth Association of School Administrators (CASA) and volunteers from our Education Committee, Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth urged others to join with us to look inside our schools, talk with leaders to identify conditions and needs, and become a part of the school support network.

We know that great facilities and an abundance of resources do not guarantee great education. But we also know that schools that do not have decent facilities, qualified teachers, and an adequate number of supports for troubled students face near-insurmountable challenges. Our schools need at least 'the basics' to educate and operate effectively. The essentials include an adequate supply of current textbooks; teacher-staffed classrooms; computers and Internet access; Advanced Placement course availability; student counseling supports; timely psychological testing; behavioral supports; music teachers, art teachers, physical education/health teachers, librarians and school nurses; facilities that are clean, ventilated, and subject to timely maintenance; safe drinking water; clearly marked exits and entrances; and a safe and orderly learning environment.

For too long, our schools have had to bear the burden of difficult choices. No school should be unable to attract and keep good faculty. No school should be unable to conduct needed repairs to facilities. No school should be unable to connect students to needed support services. No school should be unable to keep its libraries up-to-date.

Yet all over this nation, state and city, schools exist that are unable to meet these minimal standards. We end up prioritizing necessities: Which facility repair is the most necessary? Which staff support can we absolutely not do without? Which initiative can we put off?

The answer, of course, should be "None." The high school years are extremely important times for adolescent development. Success or failure in those critical years typically casts a long shadow into adulthood – shaping the character and potential our young and growing citizens will carry into the world. Yet unfortunately, many of the schools they attend routinely are forced to choose between necessities.

A big part of the long term solution is action at all levels of government that results in our schools securing equitable and adequate funding support. The Pennsylvania Department of Education, reports school districts close to Philadelphia that spend twice as much as does the District per student. The Department placed the gap between the highest and lowest per-pupil spending at $10,259. Philadelphia spends about $10,800 per student, about $2,000 less than the average of its suburban counterparts, and about $10,000 less than its highest spending suburban counterpart.

In the short-term, PCCY believes there are things that we as citizens, the City and the School District can do to improve schools for our children.

During the winter we met with the principals of nearly all of the neighborhood high schools. We asked them about their schools' instructional needs, class size, student supports and services, personnel, facilities, and school climate. In addition to surveying them on whether their schools had various resources, we also asked them to describe some of their biggest needs and concerns and what they thought could help change things for the better.

Twenty-seven of the 30 schools responded, and we gained many insights from them. Schools that participated in the survey were Bartram, Carroll, Douglas, Edison, Fels, FitzSimons, Franklin, Furness, Germantown, Gratz, Kensington CAPA, Kensington Culinary, Kensington International Business, King, Lamberton, Lincoln, Northeast, Olney 704, Overbrook, William Penn, Rhodes, Roxborough, Sayre, South Philadelphia, Strawberry Mansion, Vaux, George Washington and West Philadelphia. Schools that declined to participate or did not respond to requests for participation were Frankford, Olney 705 and University City High Schools.

We hope the information compiled here will inspire others who care about our schools to get involved. If all of us – parents, neighbors, community members, organizations, and "critical friends" – insist on and work for improvements and more resources, we can make dreary, run-down schools into centers of learning and hope for thousands of Philadelphia children.

Executive Summary
Highlights of Major Findings

Executive Summary: Highlights of Major Findings

Our schools are complex places, institutions in which things can be working well and badly at the same time. As well as problems, our survey reflected progress in several important areas:

- **BOOKS. Eighty-five percent of the school officials reported having enough textbooks** for every subject for all the students in their school. This is a major improvement from three years ago, when 68 percent of students in a Youth United for Change survey reported being unable to take books home. Textbooks were often reserved for in-class use only.

- **COMPUTERS**. **Seventy-four percent said nearly all their classes have computers**, and 70 percent reported that their students have regular (once a week or more) access to computer labs with Internet access. The District's capacity to utilize Internet technology has improved markedly in the four years since Philadelphia Schools CEO Paul Vallas noted in a speech to the Delaware Valley Grantmakers that all schools were wired for the Internet, but only one-third were "electrified" or wired for operation.

- **INTERNET ACCESS. Eighty-six percent of schools reported that nearly all their classes have Internet access.**

- **ART AND MUSIC INSTRUCTION. Three-quarters (76 percent) of the respondents said they have a full-time music teacher, and 84 percent noted having a full-time art teacher.** While this is a far cry from decades past when our large high schools had entire music and art departments, it restores some of the art and music teachers lost in recent years – a step in the right direction.[*]

This progress is great news. However, the survey also reflected serious problems in other critical areas that impede learning and jeopardize the quality of the school's overall atmosphere, commonly called "climate."

Several major trouble spots stood out in the surveys. In spite of a major new construction program, we found too many schools where **facilities were in disrepair** and where problems such as a lack of drinking water have persisted, though reported long ago.

Although the District recently hired librarians in its high schools, we found schools where **libraries were woefully inadequate** – lacking the resources and technology needed to teach students 21st century approaches to research.

Although the District has initiated many new successful programs to attract and retain teachers we found **critical staffing shortages**: schools without enough certified or permanent teachers – and schools without an adequate number of well-trained substitute teachers, capable of providing high-quality instruction.

And even with the addition of many new behavioral health programs we found schools where the **learning climate was poor,** and many school staff struggling to create a safe and secure atmosphere, and to address the needs of **students with serious mental and behavioral health issues**.

Here is a closer look at those five major issues, which were shared concerns among all the schools surveyed.

* The District has focused on increasing the number of high schools with arts teachers; the elementary schools continue to lose art and music instruction. Citywide, 66 schools have neither art nor music teachers.

Survey Findings

What Every HIGH School Should Have

Survey Findings

✓ TEACHER SUPPLY AND QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION

Undoubtedly, having a good teacher is the single most important factor in a school affecting a student's education.

The District has embarked on a major initiative, the Campaign for Human Capital, which has succeeded in decreasing vacancies and increasing the number of qualified teachers. Along with exploring other initiatives to attract and retain high-quality teachers, the District has supported school-based selection of teacher-hires, and has offered $2,400 in tuition reimbursement to teachers in 25 hard-to-staff "incentive schools." Education activists have urged the District to develop more programs and strategies, particularly in hard-to-staff schools.

However, **nearly two-thirds (62%) of the neighborhood high schools surveyed reported having at least one classroom without a permanent teacher.** The lack of a permanent teacher disrupts learning and reduces the opportunity for students to build relationships with consistently available adults. This lost opportunity impacts hundreds of students each year.

Nearly one-third (31%) of the schools have someone teaching out of certification (i.e. teaching a subject he/she is not certified to teach). When teachers are teaching subjects for which they are not certified, the quality of instruction is compromised.

Nearly half the schools (45%) do NOT have enough substitutes to cover teacher absences. One survey participant lamented, "I have two classes that have had almost no instruction for two months." Consistent lack of substitute availability impacts students and staff, hampering learning opportunities for the class and contributing to job dissatisfaction for teachers forced to cover classes for absent colleagues.

Several principals also commented about needing to improve the teaching skills of many substitutes. While a number of qualified and skillful people fill this difficult role, too often the principals find substitute teachers ill-prepared to provide meaningful instruction to their classes.

✓ FACILITIES AND BUILDING CONDITIONS

After years of neglect, the capital needs of the District are large, and the need for repairs and reconstruction far outstrip the District's capacity to respond.

The District, acknowledging this problem, has initiated several programs and undertaken a $1.7 billion capital campaign. Still, conditions in some buildings remain unacceptable. "The roof leaks, bricks need pointing," said one respondent. "(There is) a back-up of sewage into the pipes and not enough electrical power." Another commented that there is "scaffolding holding up a wall so it doesn't crumble." **Most school buildings in the District are very old and in continuous need of repair. Many neighborhood high schools were built to last 50 or 60 years – in a district where the average age of schools is now over 70 years old.**

Eighty-five percent of the principals noted at least one *urgent* facility need in their school. One third (33 percent) of the schools reported concerns about the physical structure. The electrical system is "poor" or "very poor" at 40 percent of the neighborhood high schools; just under two-thirds (60 percent) of the schools deem their heating systems "poor." Sixty percent also described the ventilation as "poor" or "very poor."

Aside from obvious health and safety concerns, building conditions impact the learning environment. Reluctant learners become more reluctant in overheated or unventilated classrooms; teachers and students feel devalued. The concerns about ventilation are particularly troublesome. Students in some schools are not allowed to open windows because the windows are too heavy or are nailed shut. Several schools passionately cited a need for air conditioning. One school official reported, "Classrooms on the second floor, in warm weather, are 120 degrees!"

Many principals also expressed frustration that they were out of the loop on repairs and repair schedules and were powerless to make even small, temporary improvements in the condition of their buildings. One principal noted a year-and-a-half wait for window repairs! ""Something needs to be done to expedite orders within the District," said one respondent.

The facilities issue is a major concern and requires more investment – from all levels of government.

✓ SCHOOL CLIMATE

In spite of the installation of metal detectors, more school police, and redoubled efforts to staff entrances and exits, schools still experience threats and concerns about safety, particularly in the areas bordering the schools.

As concern grows in families and communities in the city about the safety and climate in their neighborhoods, faculty, students and parents express similar concerns about the atmosphere of safety in their schools. We asked principals to identify challenges to their schools' climate, as well as programs that work towards improving climate.

Principals expressed a number of challenges to creating a good learning environment: the outside community, lack of adequate security and support staff (including school police officers, noon-time aides, non-teaching assistants, etc.), overcrowded schools, difficult-to-monitor buildings, excessive student mobility, and the arduous procedure required for removing disruptive students.

Respondents particularly pointed to "community issues being brought into the school." Those issues ranged from local businesses engaged in "illegal activities" like accepting school transportation tokens for pizza, to "street violence…routine shootings." Establishing a good climate is a challenging task, the school leaders said, when they are confronted with a myriad of behavioral problems. "Kids are coming with really bad behavioral issues," one respondent observed. "Many kids are dumped (onto the public schools) by charter schools, private schools, prisons."

During its survey visit, one school that utilizes two school climate managers discussed targeted attempts to stabilize relations between sparring neighborhoods and such strategies as a student-driven campaign called the "Peace Room." Although the program was viewed as successful, the school could not protect against all incidents. The school, days after the visit was the scene of five student arrests, followed by the resignation of a teacher who reported she feared for her own safety.

Some principals stressed the depth of the behavioral problems they confront, and the extent to which their resources are stretched to handle them. "A child punched a police officer in the face, but is still in school awaiting a hearing," said one principal. "So the school needs staff to cover (the) student (in-house suspension room) until the hearing."

A particular challenge is handling disruptive kids with identified special needs. The laws which protect these students can make it very difficult for under-resourced schools to accommodate their needs for supervision, without undermining the functioning of the rest of the school.

Massive school buildings can present their own challenges to a safe and secure environment. As one principal noted the existence of "56 doors and stairwells that need to be monitored" is insurmountable, when security staff is very limited.

✓ SCHOOL CLIMATE (continued)

The size and mobility of student populations were cited as challenges as well. Principals stressed that a school's climate is strained when the facility is overcrowded. One large school, having enjoyed a positive school climate in the past, reported negative changes as the school's population grew beyond the building's capacity. In addition, in a school system with high mobility among students, principals took note of disruptions caused when new students enter classrooms in the middle of the term.

Finally, the impact of increased high school options — meant to benefit individual students – can have a deleterious effect on the schools left behind. Neighborhood schools documented that the exodus of neighborhood students to special-admission schools leaves behind fewer highly motivated students, as well as larger concentrations of students in need of greater supports. The principals surveyed generally agreed that those supports are not forthcoming. 'There has been a brain drain of our students to magnet high schools without support to those schools that have been negatively affected (by their loss)," said one respondent.

When asked to name programs that address school climate, most school officials named the discipline office, school-wide committees, and professional development. Cited less often were school-wide behavior modification programs, organized parent efforts, and elective academic programs (e.g. conflict resolution, etc.). One school had a very impressive parent corps working in the school hallways, helping to provide a secure but caring atmosphere. But this was an exception, not the norm.

✓ BEHAVIORAL AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

The School District has been relatively successful in securing psychological testing within a professionally accepted time-period, but schools need more behavioral health resources to serve the students in their care.

Eighty-three percent of the schools said their students are generally tested within 30 days of a referral, and that seventy-eight percent of the schools said services were provided within 30 days of testing.

In the last several years, the City has worked with the School District, providing support for social workers and behavioral health and referral counselors, developing a variety of school-based behavioral health programs and improving partnerships between behavioral health organizations and schools. But still the programs serve only a fraction of schools and few high schools; and thus only a fraction of youth in the schools are benefiting from such programs.

The need for improving access to behavioral and mental health services was one of the loudest messages heard in our survey. More than half of the respondents volunteered detailed comments on this issue. Those who said they had supports in place – usually a part-time social worker – stressed that it wasn't enough. "Students need more psychological services," said one. Added another, we need "therapeutic counseling centers around health, grief, and violence."

Respondents also cited deficiencies in the required response to troubled students, the CSAP, or Comprehensive Student Assistance Program referral process. CSAP may lead to testing for special education, hearing or speech, or a referral for outside services. But principals stressed these assessments were not adequately connected to services for the students. "CSAP is completed, but then what?" asked one school official. "Service is not forthcoming."

The impact of troubled lives and unstable communities is felt profoundly in the neighborhood high schools. Many of these schools serve children who – along with their families and communities – have experienced serious and on-going trauma. These young people need help getting through emotional and psychological crises. Principals are asking that their schools be better equipped to respond to these troubles appropriately.

Of particular note was one high school's program that uses a social worker to review records of incoming ninth graders to flag potential problems before they show up in the school. Meetings often take place with these students and parents. Connections with adults to help the student out are offered before the school year begins.

✓ LIBRARIES

After many years of decreases in its number of high school librarians, the District has made progress in providing librarians in the high schools.

Eighty-four percent of the neighborhood high schools now have full-time librarians. The exceptions are a few new, small, or transitioning high schools. But 58 percent of the principals think their school's library is outdated, poorly stocked, and/or doesn't meet their students' needs. "The library is "really just a room, outdated from the 1970s."

One out of every five (20 percent) of the libraries are not accessible for the students and/ or staff.

Whether the 21st-century school library should be stocked with current books, periodicals, or electronic devices is a topic for debate. But nearly everyone can agree on the need for students to have a place to go to learn how to do research—as well as all the other things a good library and librarian can provide. Unfortunately, for many of these neighborhood high schools, the library is not an integrated part of the fabric of the schools.

We conclude our survey report noting progress that has been made and urging an aroused citizenry to demand more support for all our schools and all our students.

Conclusion

What Every HIGH School Should Have

Conclusion

As the survey findings reflect, some progress has been made in neighborhood high schools, but gaps and problems remain. In spite of improvements, too many of our schools do not have the basics - what every school should have.

We look forward to being able to report progress next year in many areas, particularly in facilities, behavioral health supports, permanent teachers and the availability of substitute teachers as well as adequacy of library services.

The youth of Philadelphia – particularly those in the neighborhood high schools – need more from us: they need us to care more about them. They need us to fight for what they need in school *right now*, so that they will be better prepared for work, for college, and for life in a future that promises to be challenging for all, and in a global economy where being well-prepared educationally is the key to being productive and competitive.

It is our hope that more and more people will come into our schools and look around and see that if they raise their voices for more funding, and raise their concerns for better schools, they will succeed in raising the hopes and realities of tens of thousands of kids.

We hope we have begun to engage more of the community and break down some of the barriers between people who work inside and the folks who live outside our schools. We encourage other people – community members, organizations, parents, neighbors, well-wishers, and "critical friends" – to go inside our schools. Talk to folks, see what's happening, and ultimately *get involved!*

**Join us as we get to work pushing to improve all our schools,
for the benefit of every Philadelphia child.**

For Our Readers

As you look at the findings, we ask you to consider these questions:

1. Can you suggest ways in which the facilities issues can be improved for the short term while waiting for more capital funds from higher levels of government?

2. In addition to the District's implementing a substitute teacher strategy, can you suggest other actions and resources that would help to alleviate staffing and teacher quality concerns?

3. Can you suggest other actions, collaborations and programs that can be made available to respond to the need for more mental and behavioral health supports for high school students?

Write to us. Call us. Let us know your ideas. Together, we can make a difference!!

Detailed Survey Responses and Comments

What Every HIGH School Should Have

Responses and Comments

The survey consisted of a checklist prepared by Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth. It was described as "a tool to help evaluate our public high schools and determine whether they have the basics required to provide children with an adequate education."

Respondents were asked, if applicable, to indicate whether they strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree with the question; or they were asked to provide specific comment.

For readability purposes, the formatting below varies slightly with the formatting of the survey, which can be obtained online at www.pccy.org or by contacting our office at 215-563-5848.

Section 1: Instruction Needs

A. Textbooks

Are there are enough text books for every subject for all of the students in this school? And are the students' textbooks current and in good condition?

Approximately 85% of the schools said they had enough text books. All of the high schools reported that students' textbooks were current and in good condition.

B. Libraries

Are the books and other materials in the school library current and in good condition? Is there a certified librarian at the school, and is she/he full-time or part-time? Is the school library accessible to teachers and students?

58% of respondents said their school's library was NOT current or was not in good condition. 73% of principals said that the school library is accessible to students and teachers. 84% have a full-time librarian.

* See Major Issues section for comments.

C. Technology

Do nearly all classrooms in the school have computers? Do nearly all the school's classrooms have Internet access? How many computer labs are in each school? How many computers are in each lab? Do students have regular access (once a week or more) to computer labs with Internet access?

86% of the respondents agreed that nearly all of their classrooms had Internet access. 74% of the school leaders said nearly all of their classrooms had computers. (One principal offered what could be a reason for the discrepancy: The District "wired all my classrooms to get on the Internet, but in many of my classes, the wire is just hanging from the ceiling because I don't have any computers to hook them up to.")

C. Technology (continued)

70% of the schools reported that their students had regular (once a week or more) access to computer labs with Internet access. All of the schools had at least one computer lab; the exact number of labs depended, for most the most part, on the size of the school. (Most of the schools we surveyed had six or more computer labs.) Each lab on average contained 26.6 computers.

D. Supplemental Materials

Do students and teachers have access to supplemental instructional materials in addition to their text books (For example, overhead projectors, science lab equipment, math manipulatives and calculators, posters, trade books, etc.)?

82% of principals reported their students and teachers had access to supplemental instructional materials in addition to their text books.

E. Advanced Placement Classes

How many Advanced Placement classes are offered at the school?

Two schools do not offer any Advanced Placement courses (one is a small school; the other is a new high school). Eighteen schools offer between one and three AP courses. The remaining schools offer four or more AP classes.

(AP implies certification and curriculum, not necessarily a facility that lends itself to advanced study. One principal complained he has an AP science class but no science lab.)

F. Comments on Instructional Needs

If you had one thing to change in instructional needs, what would it be?

Numerous respondents answered 'quality teachers.' Some wanted site selection (and de-selection!) and more accountability of teachers. Others wanted more professional development for teachers. Answers included:

"I would be able to hire all proficient teachers."

"Well planned professional development on strategies to teach resistant students."

"Principal authority to decide who stays and who leaves."

Several principals also wanted more/enhanced technology:

"A state-of-the-art IMC" (Instructional Materials Center; modern libraries are often transforming into IMCs)

F. Comments on Instructional Needs (continued)

"A computer 'SMART Board (interactive, electronic whiteboard)' in every classroom   and laptops for every student."

"Computers in each classroom for research."

A few principals mentioned larger, structural issues:

"Restructure the high school day/rosters."

"The ability to offer half-year courses."

"(I am) not convinced of the need of a standardized curriculum. It takes away flexibility."

Section 2: Class Size

Please indicate the typical number of students per class in your school.

Leaders at 10 schools said their schools had an average class size of between 26 and 30 students. Ten schools had an average class size of 30-35 students. No schools had an average class size of more than 35 students. Seven principals said their schools averaged less than 25 students per class.

Would you change class size in your building to effect better student outcomes?
What strategies could you suggest to accomplish this?

The vast majority of principals commented they would like smaller class sizes but would need to hire more teachers to accomplish such:

"(I would want) smaller class size; 18-20 (students per class)."

"Lower class size; 15-20 per class."

"Smaller class size would be better—but there's no money for it."

"I need more teachers. When I rearrange staff in the building, something always suffers; impacts on another area."

"Reduction in class size and a guarantee of quality instructors (is needed)."

"Need quality instructors to use the reduction (in class size) to be more creative, etc."

A few admitted that lowering class size would only be effective if the teachers knew how to implement the advantaged opportunities that smaller class sizes present.

Section 3: Student Supports and Services

A. Post-Graduation Planning and Assistance

Do students in the neighborhood high schools get supports in preparing to apply for college?
Do they have access to vocational and/or school-to-career services?

Leaders of all of the schools with current senior classes said the schools provided supports for nearly all their students applying for college.

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of the schools said nearly all their students had access to vocational and/or school-to-career services.

(Which means, conversely, that at one-third of the neighborhood high schools, the students did not all have these services.)

B. Supports for Kids with Extra Needs

Do students get additional supports when English is not their first language?
Do students who have special needs receive additional supports?

Respondents from all of the schools said nearly all of the students in their schools with either special needs and/or that do not speak English as a first language were identified and received additional support.

C. After-School and Summer School Programs

What types of after-school programs does your school offer?
What types of summer programs? (Types of programs are: academic enrichment,
remediation, athletics, arts, community service, other, or none.)

Most of the schools (59%) had five or more different *types* of after-school programs operating in their buildings. Athletics, academic enrichment, and remediation were the most common programs. Arts programs were among the least common, identified by only about half of the respondents.

In most cases, the schools did not decide what summer programs would be offered at their schools; the District decided. Sixty-eight percent of the schools had only one *type* of summer program. Another 24% had two programs. Arts-related summer programs were the least common.

D. Mental & Behavioral Health Services

If a student is referred for psychological services, how long (on average) does it take for them to be tested? After testing, services are generally provided in how many days?

83% of the respondents said their students were generally tested within 30 days of a referral. And at 78% of the schools, services were provided within 30 days of testing.

* See Major Issues section for comments.

E. Specific Comments on Student Supports and Services

If you could add or provide other student support services, would you and what would they be?

We received more comments in this section than in any other section of the survey. The principals called for more in-school services, greater access to community resources, even a greater awareness of programs operating in other District schools that might help get a handle on behavior problems and mental health issues in their schools.

Recognizing kids' multifaceted needs, several principals listed numerous programs they would like to see in their school. They shunned one-size-fits-all solutions. Responses reflected the schools were overwhelmed by behavioral issues. With community and home as the source of so many of students' problems, respondents felt their schools were incapable of providing services by themselves. Coordination between the city government, schools, and community is needed. One principal sought ideas to help support and educate parents. Specific comments:

"Mental health and social service support."

"A social worker; more access to outside agencies in the city."

"(Many) parents are not following through after the initial intake."

"Family therapeutic services; character education; diversity sensitivity; peer mediation."

"Enrichment classes; art classes after school; summer enrichment."

"Programs to help parents when they need help with their kids: money for uniforms, senior dues, other fees some students cannot afford. Offer test-taking support for parents (so they can help kids). Also a family support program for family court."

"I need to know what's available for students (both in the community as well as programs at other high schools that would help this school)."

Section 4: Personnel / School Size

A. School Size

How many students are in the school? How many teachers?

The smallest neighborhood high school is about 200 students; the largest is around 3,600 students.

The schools can be arranged into four types — Small (1-500 students); Medium (500-1,100); Large (1,100-2,000); Extra-Large (2,000+). There are six small neighborhood high schools; seven medium schools; nine large schools; and five extra-large neighborhood high schools.

The District has embarked on an ambitious effort to create new, small high schools. Staff size varies as widely as school size. Twelve is the smallest number of teachers; and 169 is the largest.

B. Teacher Certifications

Are there classes without permanent teachers? Are there enough substitute teachers to cover teacher absences? Are the permanent teachers certified in the subject areas to which they have been assigned?

Sixty-two percent of the principals said their school had at least one class without a permanent teacher. Slightly less than half (45%) said they did NOT have enough substitutes to cover teacher absences. About one-third (31%) of the schools had someone teaching out of assignment. I.e. at least one teacher in each of these schools is teaching a subject he or she is not certified to teach.

C. Teacher/Staff Positions

Which of the following positions do you have in your school? And are they full-time or part-time?

1. Certified music teacher — 76% reported having a full-time music teacher, and one school had a part-time teacher.

2. Certified art teacher — 84% had a full-time art teacher.

3. Certified physical education/health teacher — One had neither a part-time nor a full-time teacher; one school had a part-time teacher; the remaining schools had a full-time teacher.

4. Certified librarian — 84% had a full-time librarian. The remaining schools did not have a librarian.

5. Certified reading/literacy specialist — Half the schools (50%) had a reading specialist (45% were full-time; 5% were part-time).

6. Certified speech therapist — 91% of schools had an available speech therapist. However, only 17% were full-time; the remaining 74% were part-time.

7. Guidance counselor — All but one of the schools (96%) had at least one guidance counselor.

8. Certified nurse — 85% of the neighborhood schools had a full-time nurse; the remaining 15% had a part-time nurse.

9. Technology coordinator — All of the schools had a technology coordinator. The position was full-time at 85% of the schools.

More teachers and support staff were common requests in this section. Other suggestions were:

"Hire more teachers!"

"Full-time school psychologist, plus social workers and another counselor. Also add a second nurse…no one replaces her when she's out."

"Instructional coaches stationed on-site (for new and inexperienced teachers)."*

* In this small school, 85% of the teachers have fewer than 3 years experience!

Section 5: Facilities

A. Building Conditions

Please describe the condition of your building in the following areas using the following scale: Very Poor = Major problems throughout the building; Poor = Major problems in parts of the building; Good = Minor problems throughout the building; Very Good = No or minor problems in parts of the building.

1. Ceilings, floors, walls — Slightly more than two-thirds (67%) of the responding schools cited their ceilings, floors, and/or walls as good or very good.

2. Heating system — The heating system was poor or very poor at nearly two-thirds (60%) of the schools.

3. Ventilation — Poor or very poor at nearly two-thirds (62%) of the schools.

4. Electrical system — 36% of school leaders said their schools' electrical system was poor; another 4% called it very poor (40% total).

5. Plumbing — 64% feel their plumbing is good or very good.

A. Building Conditions (continued)

6. Roof — 69% feel their roof is good or very good; however, 26% (over a quarter of schools) said their roof is very poor.

7. Windows — The condition of the windows was nearly split in half with 56% saying good or very good and 44% saying poor or very poor.

* See Major Issues section for comments.

B. Drinking Water

Is drinking water available throughout the building?

58% said they disagreed or strongly disagreed that drinking water was available throughout the building.

C. Cleaning

Are the classrooms cleaned every day?
Are the common areas of the building cleaned every day?

Classrooms are cleaned daily in 65% of the schools. The common areas appear to be cleaned more consistently than the classrooms; 85% of respondents reported that the common areas were cleaned each day.

D. Teacher's Lounge

The teacher's lounge is comfortable and used frequently. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of the principals agreed.

E. Building Access

Does the school have clearly marked entrances? Is access to the building limited
to the marked entrances? Are visitors greeted by a staff member upon entry?

92% of the respondents said their schools had clearly marked front entrances. Principals reported that access was limited to marked entrances at 82% of the schools. (However, doors propped open by students, etc. often presented challenges to controlling access.) Nearly all (96%) of the schools said they made sure that visitors were greeted by a staff member.

F. Separate Gymnasium, Auditorium, and Cafeteria?

Does the school have a separate gymnasium, auditorium, and cafeteria?

96% had separate gyms, auditoriums, and cafeterias.

G. Urgent Facilities Needs?

Are there any urgent facility needs?

85% of the Principals said they had at least one urgent facility need in their school. Their responses demonstrated how widespread and varied their needs are:

"Three rooms leak and are unable to be used."

"Scaffolding (is) holding up a wall so it doesn't crumble."

"Cafeteria needs updating (and) water fountains made usable."

"Auditorium is condemned."

"Air conditioning!"

"One side of the building is challenged electrically; computers, etc. frequently are   unavailable due to electricity shorting out."

"Windows won't go up and down."

"Roof leaks, bricks need pointing, back-up of sewage into pipes, not enough electrical power."

"Lavatories for staff and students; four stalls for all the girls in the building; three stalls for all the boys; one for all the adults."

We were pleased at reports that major repairs and overhauls were scheduled for some schools:
"Getting $15 Million renovation over the summer."

"We are in line for major upgrades."

"Supposed to be getting a new building."

"Under renovation."

"In the midst of a $15 Million renovation." *

* This school is getting new boilers, updating science labs, getting all new windows, a new roof, a state of the art culinary arts facility, some new classrooms, and more.

H. Comments on Facilities

Are there any strategies that you would recommend to better respond to facility needs?

The principals offered recommendations primarily involving two areas: accountability and the process of getting work done.

1. Accountability issues

   "Maintenance staff currently doesn't report to the principal—a problem; unresponsive."

   "Presently, the building engineer reports to the cluster leader; should report to and be evaluated by the principal."

   "Meet with engineer, crew, and subcontractor (cleaning) to hold (them) accountable."

2. Process issues

   "Less red tape."

   "Too much lag time to get materials."

   "Revamp the entire system."

   "Ongoing cuts in maintenance have compromised the facility."

   "Something needs to be done to expedite orders within the District."

In the face of all their needs, one principal commented:

"People here (are) doing the best they can with what they have."

Section 6: School Climate

What are some of the challenges to the school's climate?
What programs exist in your school that work toward improving school climate?

* See Major Issues section for comments.

Are there any strategies that you would recommend to improve school climate?

Along with *Student Supports and Services*, this section generated the largest number of principal comments. Their comments fell into two general categories: suggestions for the District and advice for peers and staff:

A. Suggestions for the District:

"Develop a 'mobility plan'. (for example) students can't transfer until February or the following September."

"Limitation on students returning from (residential placement/delinquent settings) schools."

A. Suggestions for the District (continued):

"Reconfigure the feeder pattern (to deal with overcrowding)."

"Block scheduling."

"Become a focused, small school."

"A place for special needs kids when they get in trouble."

"More sharing of ideas among school leaders."

"Improved maintenance response (1 ½ years to get windows fixed)."

"Assistance with kids that have repeated failures, cuts, and poor attendance."

"Need more cameras…(and) ID scanners."

B. Advice for their Peers and Staff:

"Build healthy relationships with students and families."

*Be consistent; (provide) effective discipline
and consequences; give positive support to the kids when they do well."*

"Hold teachers accountable."

"Set expectations, be consistent."

"Set the boundaries, be consistent, be fair, be available, be firm."

"Remain consistent in working together as a team."

*"Improve accountability of students. i.e. if caught doing something wrong, they must be
dealt with immediately. Can't respond a day later-not taken seriously."*

*"You can sense (feel, smell, taste) the environment of a school…they (kids) are just
looking for attention."*

For Our Readers:

1. Can you suggest steps that can be taken to insure that all new, small schools receive adequate planning, support and such resources as librarians, effective libraries, science labs, available electives and AP classes?

2. Can you suggest any supports that can address the unique challenges posed by both large and small staff sizes, such as coverage when teachers are absent, the ability to arrange staff meetings, opportunities to make changes in the buildings' "culture," and flexibility in the event of emergencies or budget cuts?

3. Because small schools or schools undergoing a transition (for example, going from a middle school to a high school) were the schools most likely to cite the absence of positions – such as art and music instructors, guidance counselors, nurses, librarians, etc. Are there planning ideas and supports in this area that you can suggest?

<div align="center">

Write to us.

Call us.

Let us know your ideas.

Together, we can make a difference!!

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Acknowledgments

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