



# Separate and Unequal:

## A Path Forward for Neighborhood High Schools

A Report on Philadelphia's  
Neighborhood High Schools

December 2015

This report was made possible with support from Project UTurn, a campaign of Philadelphia Youth Network, and The Philadelphia Foundation.

We acknowledge the cooperation of the School District of Philadelphia, the City of Philadelphia, Department of Human Services, and Policy Lab of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

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# Introduction

**In 2014, Pennsylvania elected a new Governor whose victory came on the heels of a strong campaign commitment to support public education. This year, Philadelphia elected a new Mayor and seven City Council members. In a city where education is front page news, and where the electorate has long demanded action to fix failing schools, our newly elected leaders will enter this term in office with a strong public mandate to support and improve public schools. In fact, they have more than a mandate; the electorate expects this new class of public officials to act on behalf of students.**

Clearly, the Philadelphia School District faces many challenges ranging from financial instability, to insufficient funds, to high staff turnover, a markedly at-risk student population and epidemically low levels of performance. But, there are bright spots too. The new guard of elected leaders can and should build on the Nutter Administration's impressive efforts to boost the City's high school graduation rate, which rose by about 23 percent since Mayor Nutter took office in 2008.<sup>1</sup>

In Philadelphia, nearly a third of city high school students are enrolled in charter schools; elected officials have limited influence over these private operators. Conversely, the new Governor, Mayor and City Council members have a tremendous opportunity to directly and positively impact District-run schools. There are 55,000 high school students attending Philadelphia School District traditional or charter high schools, of which approximately 36,000, almost two-thirds of all students, are enrolled in district-run high schools. Of the district-enrolled population, a majority are in 19 neighborhood high schools. Focusing on these schools offers a real opportunity for positive change for Philadelphia.

Based on the high graduation and academic performance levels being achieved in magnet schools, and to some extent, the other citywide admission schools, the best option for moving the needle dramatically on citywide outcomes of student achievement and graduation rates is to focus on the neighborhood high schools. Beyond an enrollment majority, neighborhood high schools also serve the majority of the District's most vulnerable students. Recent data released from the Rand Corporation shows that closing achievement gaps by class and race can have a dramatically positive impact on economic growth.<sup>2</sup> Thus focusing on improving neighborhood high schools could pave a positive path to reducing the disgraceful number of Philadelphians who live in poverty.

While the overall student body for the district is more than 80% poor, earlier PCCY research found that charter schools, like magnet schools, serve significantly fewer lower income, special education, and English language learners.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the citywide admission or magnet high school counterparts, neighborhood high schools also enroll the largest share of students who have been foster children or adjudicated delinquent.

Facing an already stacked deck, the neighborhood high schools were hardest hit by the 2010 education funding cuts. Over the last five years the neighborhood high schools had the highest rate of principal and teacher turnover and experienced the most significant reductions in staffing. Neighborhood high school students' access to academically challenging courses, such as Advanced Placement courses, was further limited. Remediation for struggling students is inadequate. And while the District's own data shows the efficacy of Career and Technical Education, the share of students who can enroll in these programs is far too limited.

Neighborhood high school students have disturbingly low academic performance, but the rising graduation rate and relatively surprising SAT results are hopeful indicators that with increased funding, access to resources they need to operate, and sharpened attention by district leaders and elected officials, these schools can graduate students prepared for post secondary success. For this reason, we urge new public officials and the District leaders to focus on where they can have the surest impact on graduation rates and post secondary success – in the neighborhood high schools.



To boost the performance of these schools and improve the lives of the students the District is charged with educating will unquestionably take new resources. To that end, as new state and local education funds become available PCCY's top recommendation is to restore funds to the neighborhood high schools first. Newly elected leaders should urge the District to use any new funds to restore the ranks of leadership, student

support staff and increase the number of teachers to reduce class size. Further gains can also be achieved by adopting the cost-neutral policies described in this report that are focused on creating the conditions for success in these high schools.

## Methodology

For this report Public Citizens for Children and Youth conducted a review of the literature on evidence-based models of high school reform, as well as on the district, school, and student-level factors that affect their chances of success. This review helped to develop a context to analyze the challenges and opportunities for Philadelphia's neighborhood high schools, as well as in their citywide and magnet district-run high schools.

All data for this report was derived from the School District of Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Philadelphia Department of Human Services and Policy Lab of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. These data elements include student demographics, school factors like course offerings, and metrics such as teacher retention, principal turnover, academic data and outcomes such as four-year graduation rates and post-secondary enrollment and student attendance.

The PCCY team conducted interviews with 15 of the 19 neighborhood high school principals in order to complement our data with the perspectives of the leaders who work inside these buildings every day. PCCY did not interview any central staff for this report because no single person or team is charged with oversight of the neighborhood high schools.

We also consulted with students who attend neighborhood high schools in an informal focus group. Finally, we convened diverse stakeholders and content experts from across the city to garner feedback and help us refine the policy recommendations.

All data reported to compare high school types relies on the District's definition of high schools, i.e. neighborhood, citywide admission or magnet. The data for neighborhood high schools is presented only for schools that were operating in SY 2010 and continued to operate in SY 2016.

## The Context

Across the nation traditional neighborhood high schools have been labeled as “drop out factories” or the big faucets in the “school to prison” pipeline. With the exception of Superintendent Arlene Ackerman’s Imagine 2014 plan and its accompanying high school turnaround model, District leaders have focused on creating options that invest outside the neighborhood schools as a way to “solve” the neighborhood high school problem. As a result there are now 90 traditional public and charter public high schools in Philadelphia and neighborhood schools are hanging on by a thread. (see Table 1 for listing of all District-run high schools)

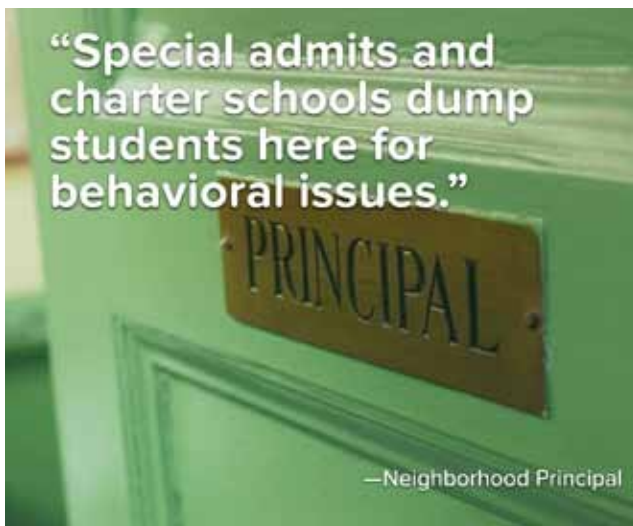
Unfortunately, after years of spawning new school models and expanding school choice by way of charter expansion, magnet schools and the creation of specialized high schools, it is clear that the strategy of creating new options has not proven to be a panacea to the overall high school achievement challenge in the city.

While the creation of small, specialized high schools, magnets, and charter schools has created opportunity for some students, the effort to create these schools has diverted resources, time, and attention away from the hard and necessary work of improving the high schools where a majority of the district’s students are enrolled.

Across all types of high schools, the research shows that to achieve strong outcomes for all students a set of complex and integrated strategies that weave together student supports, proven instructional methods and new ways of operating schools are necessary. The National High School Center, a federally funded center housed at the internationally respected non-partisan American Institutes for Research, released exhaustive research by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation on four promising high school instructional models that if adopted with fidelity show a strong positive impact.<sup>4</sup> The researchers point out that each of these models is complicated with several moving parts and substantial instructional changes. This research persuasively makes the case that these models require the redirection of current resources and new resources—both of which are highly dependent on quality school

leadership and stability for success.

Against the backdrop of the Philadelphia experience and this research, this report examines the composition, resources, opportunities and challenges facing Philadelphia’s neighborhood high schools and offers recommendations that will begin to put in place the conditions for higher levels of performance in these schools.



To begin to understand the dynamic in neighborhood high schools it is important to recognize that these schools are unique in that they must serve every student who walks through their doors. Further, unlike any other school in the City, they must accommodate students on a rolling basis throughout the year.

As students leave or are pushed out of charters, magnets, or citywide admission high schools or return from residential placement, they can enroll in a neighborhood high school. In addition to the challenges associated with late transfers into a school, school leaders are typically unable to place students in appropriate courses because of persistent problems accessing their academic records.

While the bulk of the students enrolled in each neighborhood high school live in the school's neighborhood catchment area, a large percentage of students enroll in these schools from other neighborhoods as a result seeking an alternative to their own neighborhood high school but failing to be accepted at a charter, citywide admission or magnet high school.

## The Schools

In addition to neighborhood high schools, which are also known as comprehensive high schools, the District has three other types of high schools:

**Citywide Admission High Schools:** These are high schools without specific geographic enrollment boundaries which offer specialized academic, career or technical programs. Admission is based on elements of competitive entrance requirements, space availability and selection by computerized lottery. These schools enroll approximately 4,264 Philadelphia students. (See Table1)

**Magnet Schools:** Otherwise known as special admission schools — like citywide admission schools, magnet schools have no neighborhood enrollment boundaries. These schools have competitive entrance requirements related to attendance, punctuality, behavior, grades and standardized test scores. Students are selected by highest ranking rather than a lottery. These schools enroll 12,437 students across the city. (See Table 1)

**Charter High Schools:** These are public schools operated by non-profit entities that are required to offer admission to any student based on the availability of seats and results of an enrollment lottery. Charter high schools serve 18,963<sup>5</sup> students in Philadelphia.



## Principals Tell Us:

*“I get funding in the beginning of the year, I’m not funded for the kids that come in partway through the school year.”*



<b>TABLE 1: LIST OF DISTRICT RUN HIGH SCHOOLS AND TOTAL ENROLLMENT- SY 2014-15</b>		
<b>Neighborhood Schools</b>	<b>Citywide Schools</b>	<b>Magnet Schools</b>
1. Bartram, John	1. Constitution	1. Academy at Palumbo
2. Edison, Thomas Alva	2. Dobbins, Murrell CTE	2. The Arts Academy at Benjamin Rush
3. Fels, Samuel S	3. High School of the Future	3. Bodine, William High School for International Affairs
4. Frankford	4. Mastbaum, Jules E Area Vocational Technical School	4. CAPA (Philadelphia High School for Creative and Performing Arts)
5. Franklin, Benjamin	5. Philadelphia Military Academy	5. Carver High School of Engineering and Science
6. Furness, Horace	6. Randolph, A. Phillip	6. Central
7. Kensington Creative and Performing Arts	7. Robeson, Paul High School for Human Services	7. Franklin Learning Center
8. Kensington Health Sciences Academy	8. Swenson Arts and Technology	8. GAMP (Girard Academic Music Program)
9. Kensington International Business		9. Lankenau Environmental Science Magnet
10. King, Martin Luther		10. Masterman, Julia R. Laboratory and Demonstration School
11. Lincoln, Abraham		11. Motivation
12. Overbrook		12. Parkway Center City
13. Northeast		13. Parkway Northwest
14. Roxborough		14. Parkway West
15. Sayre, William L		15. Philadelphia High School for Girls
16. South Philadelphia		16. Saul, W.B. High School for Agricultural Sciences
17. Strawberry Mansion		17. Science Leadership Academy
18. Washington, George		
19. West Philadelphia		
<b>Total Students Enrolled: 19,459</b>	<b>Total Students Enrolled: 4,264</b>	<b>Total Students Enrolled: 12,437</b>
<b>Percentage of District Run High School Students 54.3%</b>	<b>Percentage of District Run High School Students 11.8%</b>	<b>Percentage of District Run High School Students 34.4%</b>

For this report, PCCY examined the data only for high schools that were continuously open from SY 2011 through SY 2015 and not slated for reconfiguration, closure or turnaround. As a result, this report does not include data from the District's newest high schools or schools that serve middle and high school students.

## The Students

A central tenet of the Pennsylvania state constitution is that all students are entitled to a thorough and efficient education. By any metric, Philadelphia's demographics make it more difficult to deliver this mandate. Philadelphia School District has a significantly high percentage of low-income students, special education students, English language learners, and students who were either in foster care or adjudicated delinquent at some point in their lives.

**TABLE 2: DISTRICT-RUN HIGH SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS - SY 2014-15**

	English Language Learner <sup>6</sup>	Special Education <sup>6</sup>	DHS (Percent ever involved in the 12th Grade) <sup>7</sup>	Low Income Students <sup>6</sup>
<b>Neighborhood</b>	14.2%	22%	22.2%	95%
	Range: 0.1-45%	Range: 14-35%	Range: 8-35%	Range: 78-100%
<b>Citywide</b>	6.1%	16%	16.5%	95%
	Range: 1.9-9.6%	Range: 9-19%	Range: 9-26%	Range: 77-100%
<b>Magnet</b>	1.9%	4%	10.93%	69%
	Range: 0-10.2%	Range: 0.7-9%	Range: 4-20%	Range: 33-100%

However, the share of those at risk students varies widely across school types. For SY 2014 - 15, the only similarity across schools types is the rate of low-income students served by neighborhood high schools and their citywide admission counterparts. The neighborhood high schools had a slightly higher share of male students than their counterparts as well. With respect to other student level indicators, it is notably evident that the more selective the school, the fewer vulnerable students.

Neighborhood high schools on average educate a nearly 30% larger share of special education students than citywide admission high schools and five times as large a share of special education students as compared to magnet high schools. None of the magnet high schools enroll as large a share of special education students as any neighborhood high school.

The variance in enrollment of children who at one point were in the child welfare system is also stark. Based on the latest available data, from SY 2012, neighborhood high schools have twice the share of child welfare-involved students compared to magnet high schools and again a 30% larger share of these students than the citywide admission schools.

Most striking is the extraordinary high share of ELL students attending some of the neighborhood high schools. In SY 2014 - 15, four neighborhood high schools educated half of neighborhood high school ELL students while none of the citywide admission or magnet high schools enrolled even 10% of these students.

With respect to the distribution of ELL and special education students, the data indicates that the District is not meeting the stipulations of a legally binding federal court order issued in 1998 which required the District to increase the inclusion of students with disabilities and appropriate support in all high schools and programs. The order also established admissions targets as seven percent for magnet schools and 10% for criteria-based schools or citywide admission high schools.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, it is evident that efforts to expand school choice by creating new district-run or charter high schools have increased the concentration of poverty, ELL and special education students in the neighborhood high schools. New strategies that meet the needs of these students in these schools are necessary to positively affect the outcomes of these students, and consequently improve the prospects for the city as well.

## Act Now

- + **Increase the share of students retained by high schools with academic admission criteria** by encouraging magnet school leaders to adopt practices that will boost the share of students who enter ninth grade and graduate from these schools and include in-school year transfer rates as part of the School Performance Report and principal evaluations for these schools. The District should also consider ways to **implement a high school payment system that ensures that money follows students when students transfer mid-year**. This recommendation should not apply when transfers are a result of a family moving to another section of the city.
- + **Develop a set of coherent models for neighborhood high schools to use to support students who enter during the school year** after failing in another school or leaving a residential or transitional facility such as Reti-Wrap. Further, the District must resolve all problems associated with the transition of academic records.
- + **Put in place processes and goals so that citywide admission and magnet high schools annually make progress on enrollment of more special education students and ELL students**. Progress on these measures should be included on principal evaluations for these schools.
- + **Recruit more male and minority teachers** – Given the demographic profile of neighborhood high schools, teacher recruitment must specifically be focused on increasing the share of culturally competent teachers. While three of every four students in Philadelphia were black or Hispanic in 2012, about one in four teachers was black or Hispanic.<sup>9</sup>
- + **Adopt a “Money Follows Need” policy** - The district should craft a weighted student funding formula that ensures that schools receive per student payments based on the demographic profile of their students with respect to income, race, ELL, special education and child welfare experience.

## School Leadership and Staff Are in Crisis

State budget cuts severely impacted vulnerable school districts the most, leading to even more challenging environments in the neighborhood high schools.

PCCY's analysis found that even though cuts took place all across the district, they were particularly harsh in the neighborhood high schools.

Specifically:

- + Neighborhood high schools averaged four or more principals in five years from SY 2009 - 10 to SY 2014 - 15.
- + Neighborhood high schools lost more teachers than any other school type and suffered the worst student to teacher ratio growth of any high school type from SY 2010 - 11 to SY 2013 - 14.
- + Neighborhood high schools were the only high schools to lose counselors while experiencing security staff increases from SY 2010 - 11 to SY 2013 - 14.

**Principals:** It's indisputable that principals and assistant principals are integral to the fabric of a school. Under current bare-bones conditions, neighborhood high schools rely on the principal to serve as the instructional leader, climate manager, dean of discipline, community partnership liaison and building operation specialist. It should come as no surprise that the degree of principal turnover was staggering.

**The average neighborhood high school student experiences a revolving door of principal leadership before graduation.** In the five-year period from SY 2009-10 to SY 2014-15:



## No Assistant Principals.

Edison High has one principal and 1,334 students. This is the highest principal to student ratio for any high school. Before the budget cuts, the school had three assistant principals.

- + Seven of 19 neighborhood high schools had four or more principals, and none of these schools had fewer than two principals in the period.
- + Citywide admission high schools averaged one new principal.
- + Magnet high schools averaged between two and three new principals.

**Assistant Principals:** PCCY found that the principals without a team to support them are the first to burn out and are quick to leave. In fact, interviews with principals indicate that they need assistant principals and that they leave the toughest schools not because of the students but because it is impossible to build a team necessary to make their school work.<sup>10</sup> As a result these principals accept positions in less challenging schools or school districts or administrative positions in the central office.

While the turnover of principals is staggering among the neighborhood high schools, the thinning of the assistant principal ranks has made the job of every new and remaining principal that much harder. In SY 2010 - 11 to SY 2013 - 14:

- + Nearly half (9) of the neighborhood high schools had no assistant principal.
- + A third of these schools had only one assistant principal.

The conditions in this regard were equally as dire in the other high schools types. (None of the citywide admission high schools have an assistant principal and only three of the 17 magnet schools have one assistant principal.)

**Teachers:** The total number of teachers budgeted for the neighborhood high schools was cut by 400 from SY 2010-11 to SY 2013 -14.

The historical shortage of resources in the neighborhood high schools has meant that teachers often do the work of social worker, truancy officer, academic coach, and college advisor all with little support from even the best intentioned albeit overburdened principal.

The FY 2011 state school funding cuts made that situation worse for teachers and their students. Across the district 680 teachers were laid off. Every high school weathered cuts to its teaching force; but neighborhood high schools were hardest hit. The teaching force cuts caused the highest level of turnover in neighborhood high schools compared to others and caused the most pronounced erosion of teacher to student ratio compared to the other district-run high schools.

- + The total number of teachers budgeted for the neighborhood high schools was cut by slightly more than 400 from SY 2010 - 11- to SY 2013 - 14.
- + Neighborhood high schools had the highest share of teacher turnover compared to other district-run high schools.
- + Neighborhood high schools had a 25% decline in the teacher to student ratio, twice the rate of decline of either the citywide admission (13% decline) or magnet high schools (10% decline).

**School counselors:** It's well known that in Philadelphia no schools have gone untouched by the drastic cuts to counselors and student supports. The cuts to counselors were across the board, but here again the cuts hit the neighborhood high schools hardest. In the schools with the highest concentration of at-risk students, specifically where 22% of the students were at one point in their lives on the child welfare caseloads, the counselor ranks were cut by 61%.

Across the neighborhood high schools, for every one counselor on average there are 542 students. The ratio is nearly the same in the other types of district-run high schools.

**TABLE 3: COUNSELOR AND STUDENT SUPPORT REDUCTIONS**

	2010	2014	Percentage Decrease
<b>Neighborhood</b>	91	35	56%
<b>Citywide</b>	54	22	60%
<b>Magnet</b>	19	8	42%

Philadelphia students experienced significant staff losses due to budget cuts.

National data shows that increased presence of police contributes to the likelihood that African American and Latino students will be pushed into the school-to-prison pipeline. In spite of that data and severely limited resources, security staff increased in nearly half (9) of the neighborhood schools. Meanwhile, three of the eight citywide admission and five magnet high schools had no security officers at all in 2010-11 or 2013-14. Five of the eight citywide admission high schools and 13 magnet high schools reduced their security staff since 2010-11.

Seven neighborhood high schools are implementing a successful Restorative Justice model, or "restorative practices".<sup>11</sup> For six years through SY 2007, West Philadelphia High School was on the state's "Persistently Dangerous Schools" list. Just one year after implementation of the Restorative Practices approach, the school quickly reduced the number of violent acts and serious incidents by 52% during the 2007– 2008 academic year.<sup>12</sup>



## Principals Tell Us:

*“One counselor cannot handle seniors, 11th graders, and college admissions.”*

*“We finally got a second counselor this year but we are losing her next year.”*



## Act Now

### *Focus on Great Leadership Practices*

- + **Adopt a District-wide plan to retain effective principals in the neighborhood high schools** – The Superintendent should set a goal of keeping all effective principals in these schools for a minimum of five years. This sounds obvious but the patterns of losing principals to higher paying districts or recruiting them for central administrative positions is deeply ingrained and accepted. Instead the district must adopt a policy, backed by financial rewards, to keep these good principals in these schools. In addition, the district must create opportunities for gaining prestige such as recognizing principals for innovation and school improvement so that they stay in their schools.
- + **Give principals a reasonable complement of effective top staff and empower them** – To support principals and retain them they need a professional leadership team and greater flexibility to make staff and instructional changes.
- + **Designate a “district-wide leader of neighborhood high schools”** – Currently no one person is responsible for ensuring the success of the cohort of neighborhood high schools. An Assistant Superintendent for Neighborhood High Schools can help principals focus on what is working and grow it, while helping the cohort of principals problem solve and improve together. Further this person can assist the Superintendent strategically to align the school improvement efforts of the Offices of Academics, Student Supports, Assessment and Technology in these schools.
- + **Create a data dashboard of key indicators of building stress so trends can be addressed** – The Assistant Superintendent for Neighborhood High Schools and every neighborhood high school principal needs easy access to data indicators that are critical signs of building stress such as teacher and student absenteeism, number of uncovered classrooms, actual class sizes and number of children returning from placement into each school. Understanding factors creating stress inside their building can help a principal problem solve, anticipate and address trends rather than seeing every emergency as an isolated incident.

### *Support Teachers:*

- + **Adopt policies that will retain more effective teachers** – The high level of teacher turnover due to budget cuts was disruptive. To keep teachers in neighborhood high schools going forward the District must intentionally focus on what they need to be successful. Specifically the teachers we interviewed call for ensuring common planning time and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning.
- + **Put floating substitutes permanently in these high schools first** – Teachers pointed out safety risks as well as instructional challenges created by vacancies and absenteeism. The District should shift its substitute teacher model to the floating substitute approach whereby by each a school is allotted an appropriate

number of building level substitutes who are on staff for the entire year. This approach would both ensure common planning periods can happen and decrease overcrowded classes.

- + **Recruit and retain strong new teachers using a cohort hiring model**
  - Newly hired teachers would be supported by experienced teacher mentors both in class and outside of class time for at least the first year.

### **More Student Supports**

- + **Increase the number of counselors** – As new resources flow to these schools, new counselor positions should be considered a priority.
- + **Increase the presence of social workers** – The City of Philadelphia’s Department of Human Services transformation of child welfare services presents a unique opportunity and imperative for increasing the presence of social workers in the neighborhood high schools. The contracts with the Community Umbrella Agencies or DHS social workers should be deployed to these schools to ensure that the agencies can achieve the desired goals for child welfare involved youth.
- + **Create a model for Neighborhood High School Community Schools** – Charge the Assistant Superintendent for Neighborhood High Schools to work with the high school principals to create a coherent model for the integration of community social services in these high schools.
- + **Expand the use of Restorative Practices in the Neighborhood High Schools** – Instead of increasing the security presence in schools, the District should complete the roll out of the Restorative Practices training and support the model. It is less costly and research suggests it is likely to have sustained result.

## **What Are The Students Learning And How Are They Doing?**

Despite the data-driven climate, it is difficult to analyze the academic performance of our high school students. For three straight years, annual target scores on the PSSA exams were changed by the state, making it impossible to draw year-to-year comparisons. The newly implemented Keystone Exams have produced alarmingly low scores and in response the state is poised to postpone the requirement of passing the exams to qualify for a diploma. Because of these challenges and inconsistencies, the data in this section must be considered with caution.

Moreover, there are also serious limitations in our ability to compare the academic data of schools with such vastly different student populations.



## **Principals Worry About Achievement**

*“Most of our students are below reading level.”*

*“Our students are at least 3 years behind, academically.”*





District-run magnet and citywide admission schools can expel, counsel out or require students to transfer to other schools throughout the school year; charters can do the same. These transfers typically occur when the student is not able to keep up with the coursework or has exhibited high absenteeism or other disciplinary issues. More often than not, the students who fail in the

citywide admission, magnet or charter high schools end up enrolling in one of the district-run neighborhood high schools.

With respect to the Keystone exams, the results are significantly affected by the skill level of the students when they enter high school. In order to fairly assess the educational productivity of the three types of district run high schools, a deeper analysis of the skill level of incoming freshman by type of high school is necessary, but beyond the scope of this project. It is also critical to view student outcomes in the context of the school funding crisis in Pennsylvania. Philadelphia schools have long been underfunded but consider that today's juniors and seniors are the same students who experienced massive layoffs of teachers, counselors, nurses, librarians, and critical support programs when they were in the formative high school years of eighth and ninth grade.

### **Rigor is in limited supply**

Based on SY 2014 - 15 course titles, it appears that every neighborhood high school offers courses necessary for college entrance. The School District's data indicates that every neighborhood high school offers four years of English and at least three years of math and science ranging from Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science and Physical Science. However, much more in-depth research is needed to determine if the content of these courses actually prepares the students for college.

While Advanced Placement courses are available, more research is needed to determine how many students have access to the courses, or the percentage of students who take and pass AP exams from neighborhood high schools.

In spite of the smallest of the neighborhood high schools having 350 students and the largest enrolling nearly 3,000, in SY 2014 - 15:

- + Nine neighborhood high schools offered up to five AP classes.
- + Five neighborhood high schools offered six or more AP classes.
- + Only two neighborhood high schools, Northeast and George Washington, offered International Baccalaureate programs.

### Remediation needs are enormous

While both Citywide and Magnet high schools consider grades, among other criteria for admission, neighborhood schools do not. As a result, neighborhood high schools enroll a higher number of students who struggle academically. Principal interviews confirm the need for effective remediation strategies given that some students enter high school more than three years behind. It was evident from the interviews that the District has not given the schools guidance or the resources to implement proven models for boosting the skills of the students lagging behind. In 2009, 40% of Philadelphia's eighth grade students scored below proficient or advanced on the math PSSA. These students entered high school in SY 2010 and through SY 2013 were taking the state's assessments. Unfortunately the data shows that neighborhood high school state assessments of the 11th grade students are far below any reasonable expectations for high school.

### Relevance is also too inaccessible

Most students who are in a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program must take a National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) exam in their senior year to prove mastery in certain CTE subjects. The SY 2015 data shows that about 5,600 students were enrolled in one of the District's 115 CTE courses.<sup>13</sup> Only about 800 students across the district took the exam; approximately two thirds of these students were enrolled in neighborhood high schools.

Neighborhood high school students underperformed on NOCTI, but not at markedly lower rate their than the District's overall performance.

Students in the neighborhood high schools performed nearly on par with the District, in SY 2015.

- + The average NOCTI passage rate across Philadelphia schools was 70%.
- + Neighborhood high school students NOCTI passage rate was 63% on average.
- + Students attending the citywide admission high schools passed the exams at a rate of 69%.

Another proven vehicle for making school relevant to students is to offer a rich array of arts instruction and interesting electives that give them access to ideas and new forms of self-expression. PCCY found the neighborhood high schools were lacking in this area as well.

Based on the SY 2015 course book for the district, fifteen of the schools offer one or more selection of music, band or yearbook options. Three of the 19 schools offer a general art class while 16 have theater or graphic design among their courses. The majority of schools offer fewer than ten electives for students to choose from over their entire four-year high school experience. Beyond course electives, data on the access to extra curricular sports, clubs or other enrichment



Based on the number of students taking the test it appears that career and technical education programs that lead to solid certifications in a field are available to about 10% of the students enrolled in neighborhood high schools.

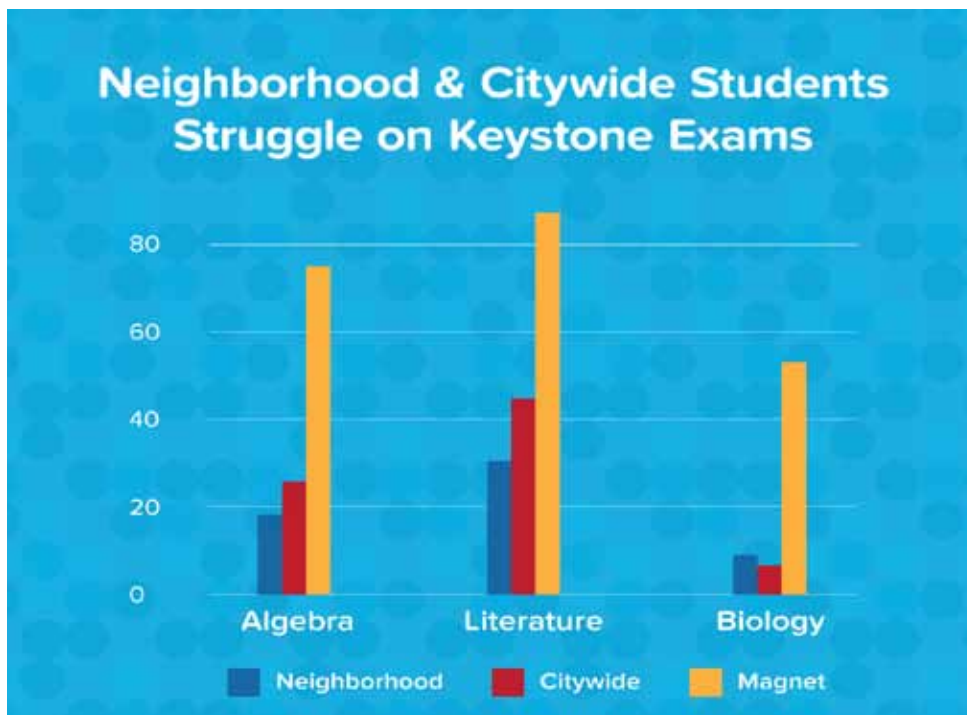


activities by high school could not be determined since this information is not uniformly collected by the District centrally or at the school-level. These “extras” are cited by research as significant contributors to school attendance and graduation.<sup>14</sup>

### Keystone Exams

The Keystone Exams were first administered in school year 2012-2013 to test end-of-course proficiency in Algebra 1, Literature, and Biology.

Not surprisingly, Philadelphia schools with the most vulnerable students performed poorly. A larger share of students from neighborhood high schools failed to pass the exams compared to students in the other types of district-run high schools. However, on average the neighborhood high schools showed surprisingly positive results compared to their citywide admission high school counterparts since nearly ten times more students in the neighborhood high schools are likely to have taken the Keystone exams. The SY 2015 performance of citywide and neighborhood high schools is alarming.



#### *In neighborhood high schools:*

- + 19% of students passed the Algebra exam with scores ranging from 6% to 24%.
- + 29% of students passed the literature exam with scores ranging from 13% to 53%.

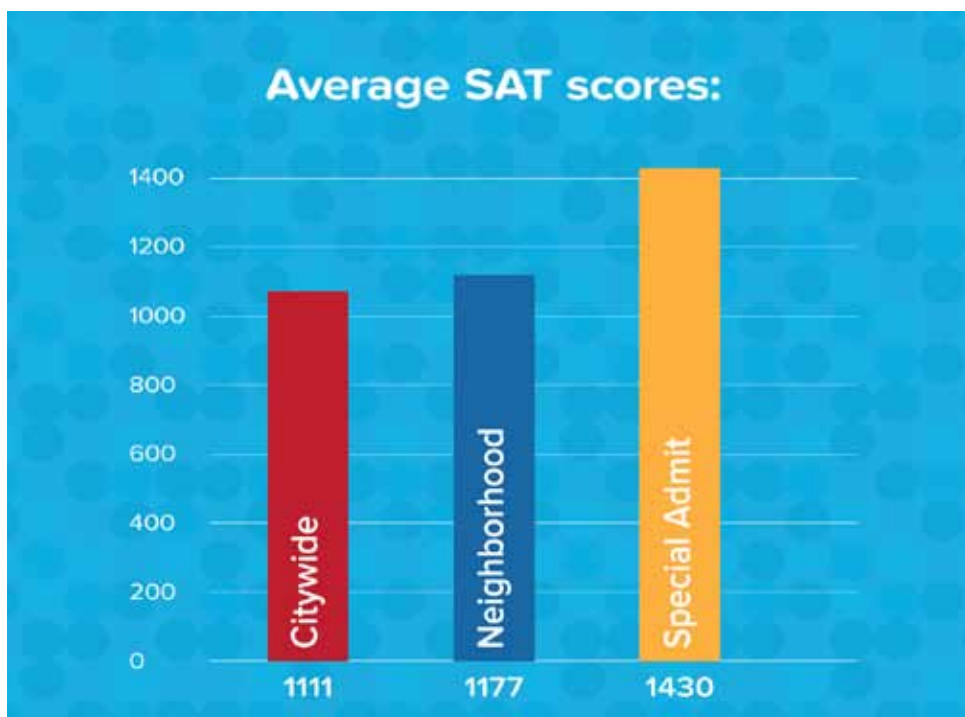
#### *In citywide schools:*

- + 24% of students passed the Algebra exam with scores ranging from 7% to 53%.
- + 43% of students passed the literature exam with scores ranging from 24% to 75%.

Magnet schools, which accept only the strongest students, performed considerably better than the citywide and neighborhood counterparts,

## SAT Exams<sup>15</sup>

The latest available data for SY 2013 shows that the average SAT score in the U.S. was 1,497 out of a possible 2,400. Pennsylvania students scored 37th in the nation, with an average SAT score of 1,480 for that school year. Philadelphia's district-run high schools of every type scored below statewide and national averages on the SAT. Not surprisingly, on average, students in magnet high schools score the highest (1,384) on the SATs. It is important to examine SAT data with caution given that the exam is optional, and typically the most focused students take the exam.



Nearly twice as many students take the SAT at magnet schools than any other district-run high school. Surprisingly, the share of neighborhood and citywide admission high schools taking the SAT were nearly the same, 52% and 59% respectively. **Even more striking, with comparable shares of students taking the SAT exams in both types of high schools, the results are basically the same despite the significantly larger number of at-risk students enrolled in the neighborhood high schools. In SY 2014, SAT scores for the students in the neighborhood high schools was 1117 and for the citywide admission high schools it was 1111.**

These results are a very surprising and hopeful given the challenges faced in the neighborhood high schools related to student demographics, high staff turnover, and limited course offers.

## Graduation rates<sup>16</sup>

The District's four-year graduation rate rose to 65% for SY 2014 from 57% eight years earlier. With respect to graduation the citywide admission schools and magnet high schools trend together and graduate a much larger share of their students than their neighborhood high school counterparts. In spite of their poor showing, it is promising that neighborhood high schools now graduate a majority of their students and that the rate is rising.

**TABLE 4: GRADUATION RATE BY SCHOOL TYPE - SY2014**

School Type	Graduation Rate
Neighborhood	64%
Citywide	89%
Magnet	95%

## Post Secondary Enrollment<sup>17</sup>

PCCY looked at what happened next for the class of 2014, and slightly more than half (51.4%) were enrolled in a post-secondary program the following fall. The outcomes here showed that for this class the data stays true to school form.

- + 35% of neighborhood high school students.
- + 44 of citywide admission.
- + 72% of magnet school graduates.

It is worth noting that while graduation rates vary widely across school type, a majority of both the neighborhood and citywide admission high school are failing to take advantage post secondary programs.

## Act Now

To improve the outcomes of neighborhood high schools, new resources must be directed to meet student academic needs. Specifically PCCY recommends:

- + **Smart and available intensive remediation** – Help these schools assist their students as they work to catch up by centrally funding summer school for every grade, adding aides to the classrooms, offering remediation courses as electives and exploring other proven models.
- + **Dramatic growth in skills-based learning** – A 2015 district evaluation shows promising outcomes for CTE students. For example, CTE students outpace their citywide peers by graduating at a rate of 84% and are more likely to graduate on time. Additionally, CTE programs have been shown to eliminate racial achievement gaps in graduation rates.<sup>18</sup>

- + **More access to college prep courses** – Increase the diversity of students attending the neighborhood schools by increasing the AP course offerings or avenues for acquiring college credits in neighborhood schools. To the extent feasible replace honors courses with AP courses.
- + **Arts and electives** – Close the gap between interest and availability for in-school arts classes as well as expanding access to electives that will increase the level of student engagement.
- + **Ensure Principals and District central administrative leaders have reliable and up to date information on electives and enrichment activities for students** – Currently the way data is collected on courses, internships, enrichment and extra-curricular programs—and usage rates of these opportunities is scattered, inaccurate and incomplete; as a result no cogent decisions or plans can be made.

## Conclusion

Philadelphia’s neighborhood high schools may be struggling, but they have demonstrated that against overwhelming odds, they can help some students succeed. They are nearly 100% poor, more than a quarter of their students are classified as special education, more than 15% do not speak English as their first language and nearly a quarter have been involved in the child welfare system at some point in their young lives. These schools operate as open doors to every student throughout the school year and, as a result, have become a dumping ground for students from other schools.

While there is no quick fix, improving our schools is not rocket science. For far too long, school reform experts and the District leadership have attempted to impose complicated and promising approaches to instruction without making sure the basic conditions for success are in place. The District and its students would be best served by getting the fundamentals right in order to create a strong platform on which to build world class instructional practices that can catapult these schools to much higher performance levels.

We learned from this data that there is promise in the halls of neighborhood high schools: in the students and their teachers. The Keystone and SAT results indicate that teachers and students in Philadelphia’s neighborhood schools have exhibited untapped potential for success. Our recommendations offer the newly elected state and local leaders, the SRC and Superintendent, a roadmap for beginning to tap this potential.

## Endnotes

- 1) Socolar, P. (2015, May 22). Graduation rate for District schools at a new high - 70%. Retrieved November 13, 2015, from <http://thenotebook.org/summer-2015/158606/graduation-rate-philadelphia-schools-hits-new-high>
- 2) Karoly, L. (2015). *The Economic Impact of Achievement Gaps in Pennsylvania's Public Schools*. Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation.
- 3) PCCY. (2015). *The Legal, Fiscal and Oversight Challenges of Granting New Charters in Philadelphia*. Retrieved from <http://www.pccy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/PCCYCharterReport-2015.pdf>
- 4) Quint, J. (2006). *Meeting Five Critical Challenges of High School Reform: Lessons from research on three reform models*. MDRC. [http://www.mdr.org/sites/default/files/full\\_440.pdf](http://www.mdr.org/sites/default/files/full_440.pdf)
- 5) About Us. (2014, December). Retrieved November 13, 2015, from <http://philasd.org/about/#charter-schools>
- 6) School Information. (n.d.). Retrieved November 13, 2015, from [https://webapps.philasd.org/school\\_profile](https://webapps.philasd.org/school_profile)
- 7) The Department of Human Services of the City of Philadelphia provided the summary data for the number of students by high school who were involved in the child welfare system at some point in their lives. The data set for this computation was collected by Policy Lab of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia from the following sources: (1) SDP enrollment, attendance, and achievement data for four cohorts of students (all 3rd, 7th, 9th, and 12th graders totaling 68,525 students) from the 2011-2012 school year; and (2) DHS records for matched students summarizing varying levels of involvement in the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system beginning from the first instance when the child became known to DHS until June 2012. See full Policy Lab Report, Hwang, S., Griffis, H., Song, L., & Rubin, D. (2014, June). *Supporting the Needs of Students Involved with the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice System in the School District of Philadelphia*. Retrieved November 13, 2015, from [http://policylab.chop.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/publications/PolicyLab\\_Report\\_Supporting\\_Students\\_Involved\\_with\\_Child\\_Welfare\\_June\\_2014.pdf](http://policylab.chop.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/publications/PolicyLab_Report_Supporting_Students_Involved_with_Child_Welfare_June_2014.pdf)
- 8) *The LeGare Decision*- In 1994, the Education Law Center filed a federal class action law suit on behalf of a special education student who was categorically denied admission to a variety of high school programs in the District because he needed special education services. In 1995, the Plaintiffs and the District agreed to settle the case which required that the District take action to:
  - Ensure that each student with a disability has an equal opportunity to participate in the high schools and high schools programs that are available to students generally.
  - A student with a disability may not be excluded on the basis of admission criteria relation to ability, school performance, attendance, or behavior if they can participate in that program successfully given reasonable accommodations that do not substantively alter the program, such as extended time for tests, additional materials, or itinerant learning support services.

In 1998, a federal court judge entered a Supplemental Order, ordering the District to increase the inclusion of students with disabilities and appropriate support in all high schools and programs. 7% for citywide admission schools or magnet schools, 10% for criteria based schools or citywide Despite the Supplemental Order, many of Philadelphia's citywide and magnet schools are still not meeting the legal targets for enrollment.

9) The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education. (2015, September 21). Retrieved November 13, 2015, from <http://www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/teacherdiversity>

10) Defining the Role of the Assistant Principal. (n.d.). Retrieved November 13, 2015, from <http://www.nassp.org/content.aspx?topic=56581>, Strauss, V. (2015, February 10). Why a great principal burned out — and what might have prevented it. Retrieved November 13, 2015, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2015/02/10/why-a-great-principal-burned-out-and-what-might-have-prevented-it/>

11) Restorative Practices Schools: Bartram, South Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin, Overbrook, King and Roxborough

12) PCCY. (2014, November). A Growing Commitment to School Climate and Safety in Philadelphia: Capturing the Rollout Experiences with Restorative Practices & School-wide Positive Behavior Support Year One Report. Retrieved from <http://www.pccy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/PCCY-School-Climate-and-Safety-Report-11-14.pdf> .

13) Socolar, P. (2015, September 21). Results of the 2015 NOCTI exams for CTE students, school by school. Retrieved November 13, 2015, from <http://thenotebook.org/fall-guide-2015/158938/cte-nocti-exam-results-school-by-school>

14) Holloway, J. (1999). Research Link / Extracurricular Activities: The Path to Academic Success? *Educational Leadership*, 57(4), 87-88.

15) <http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/o/open-data-initiative>

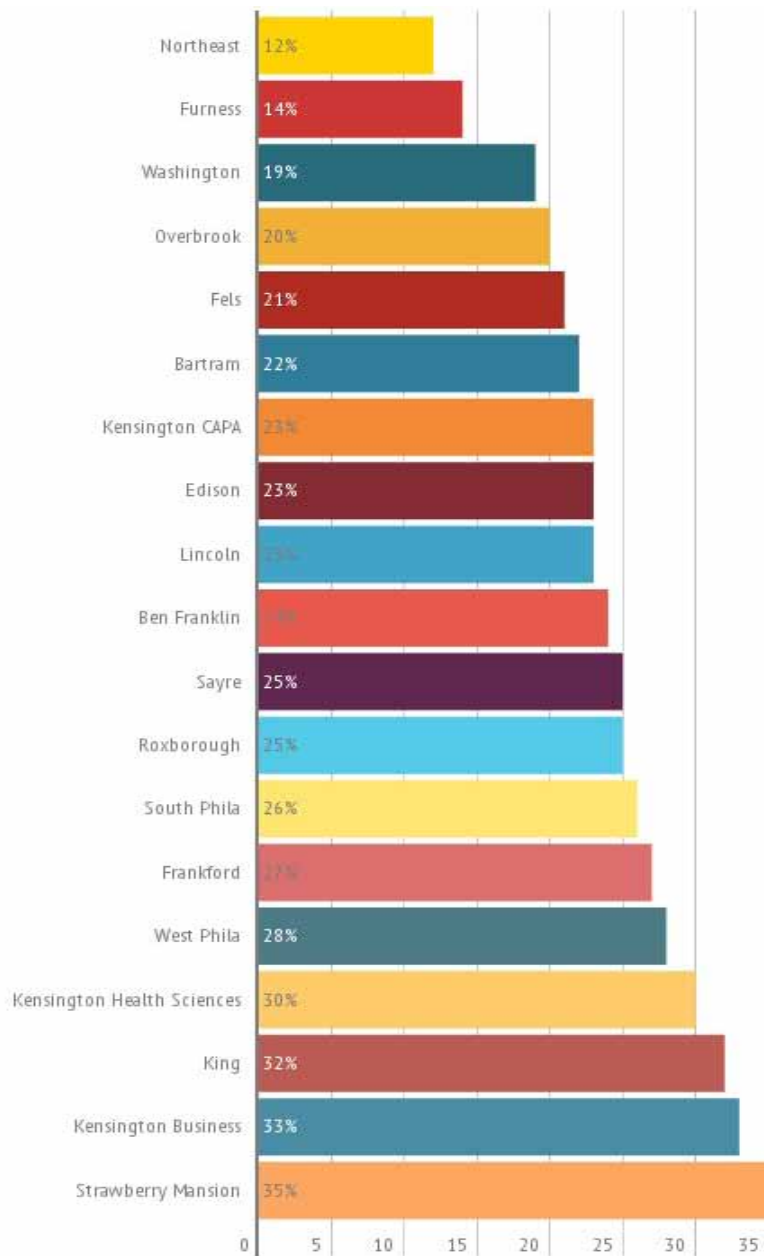
16) <http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/o/open-data-initiative>

17) <http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/o/open-data-initiative>

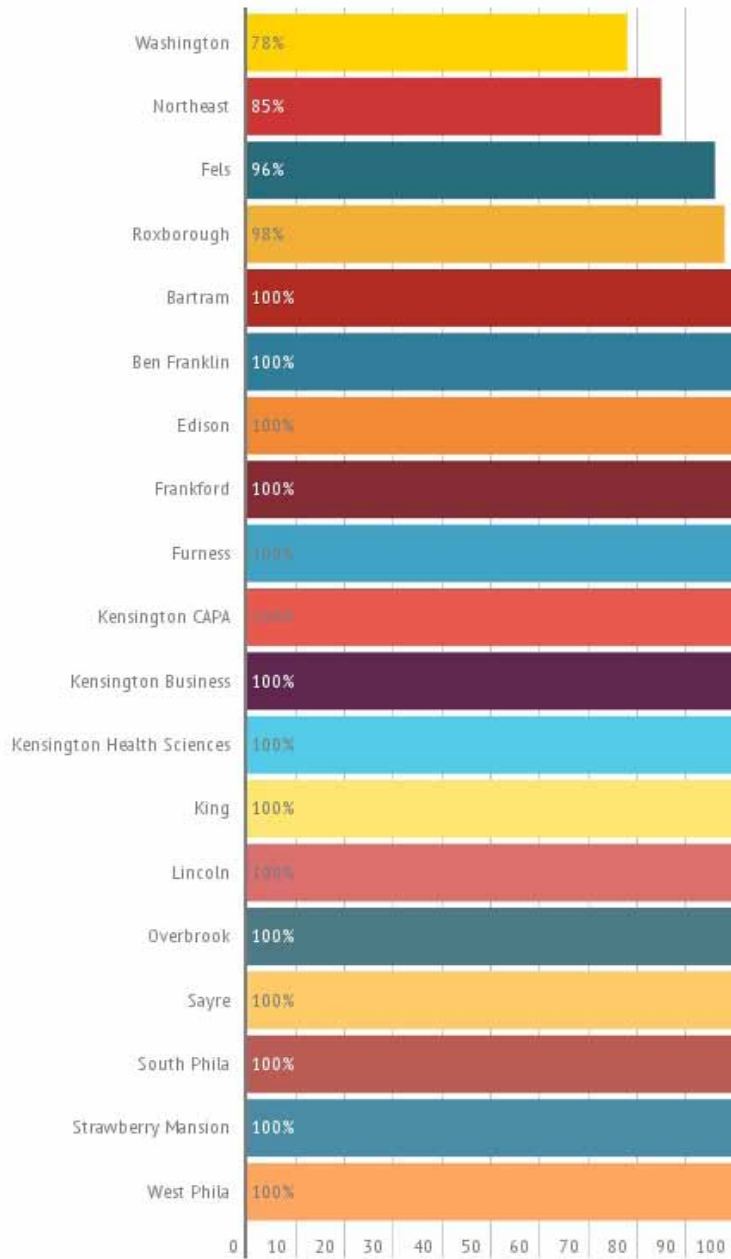
18) Hangle, Bill (2015, August 2015). Making career and technical education into a first-class option. <http://thenotebook.org/blog/158907/making-career-technical-education-first-class-option>

## Appendix

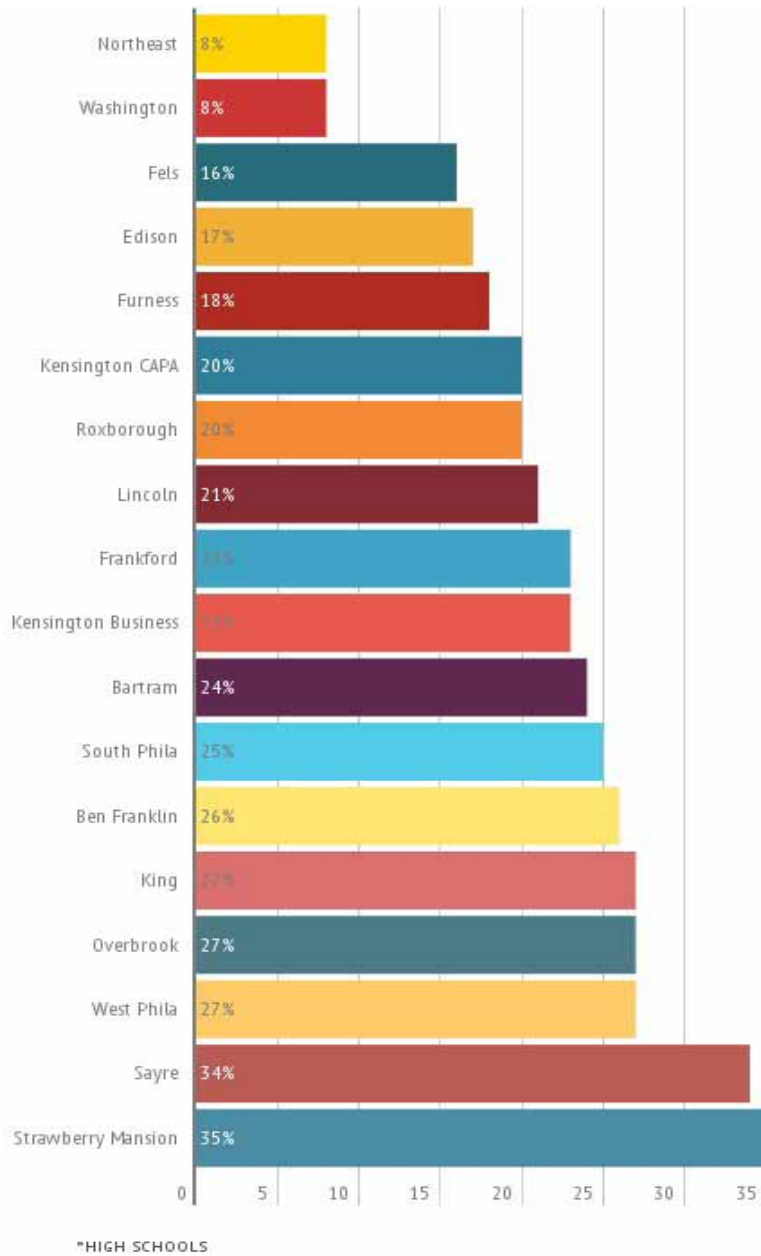
### SPECIAL ED STUDENTS IN NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS



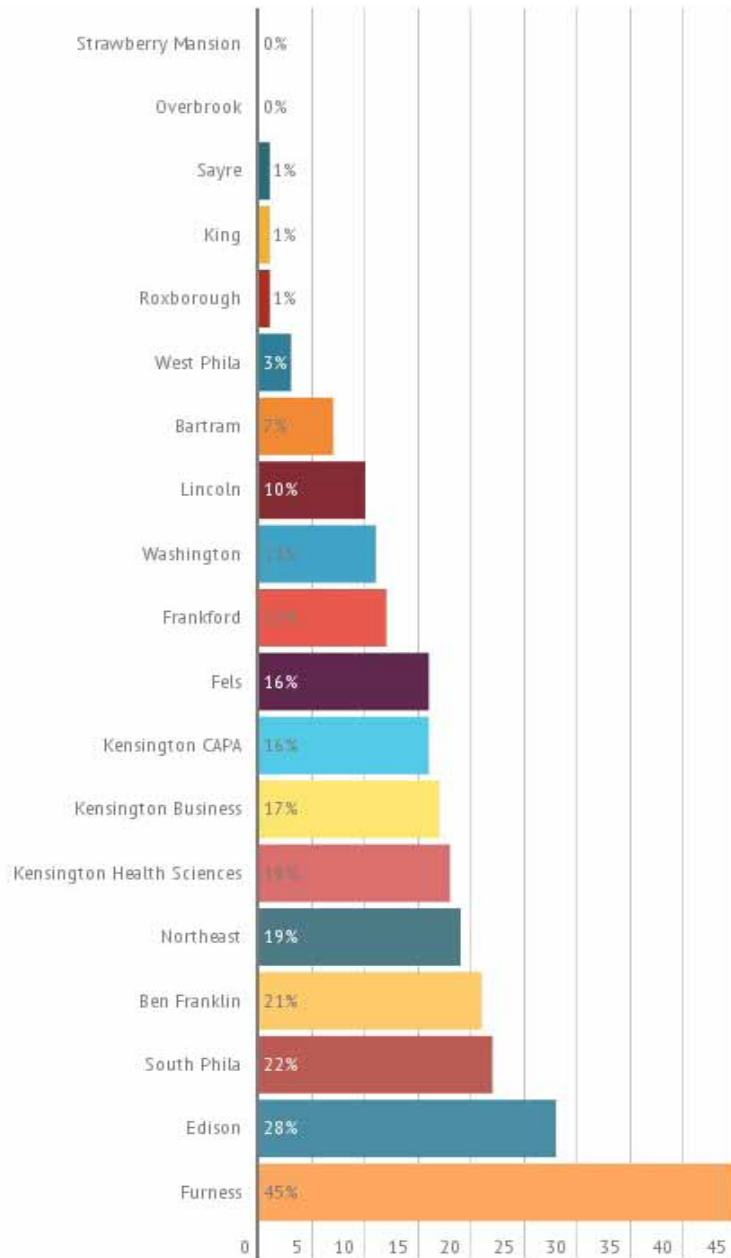
## ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS IN NEIGHBORHOOD HIGH SCHOOLS



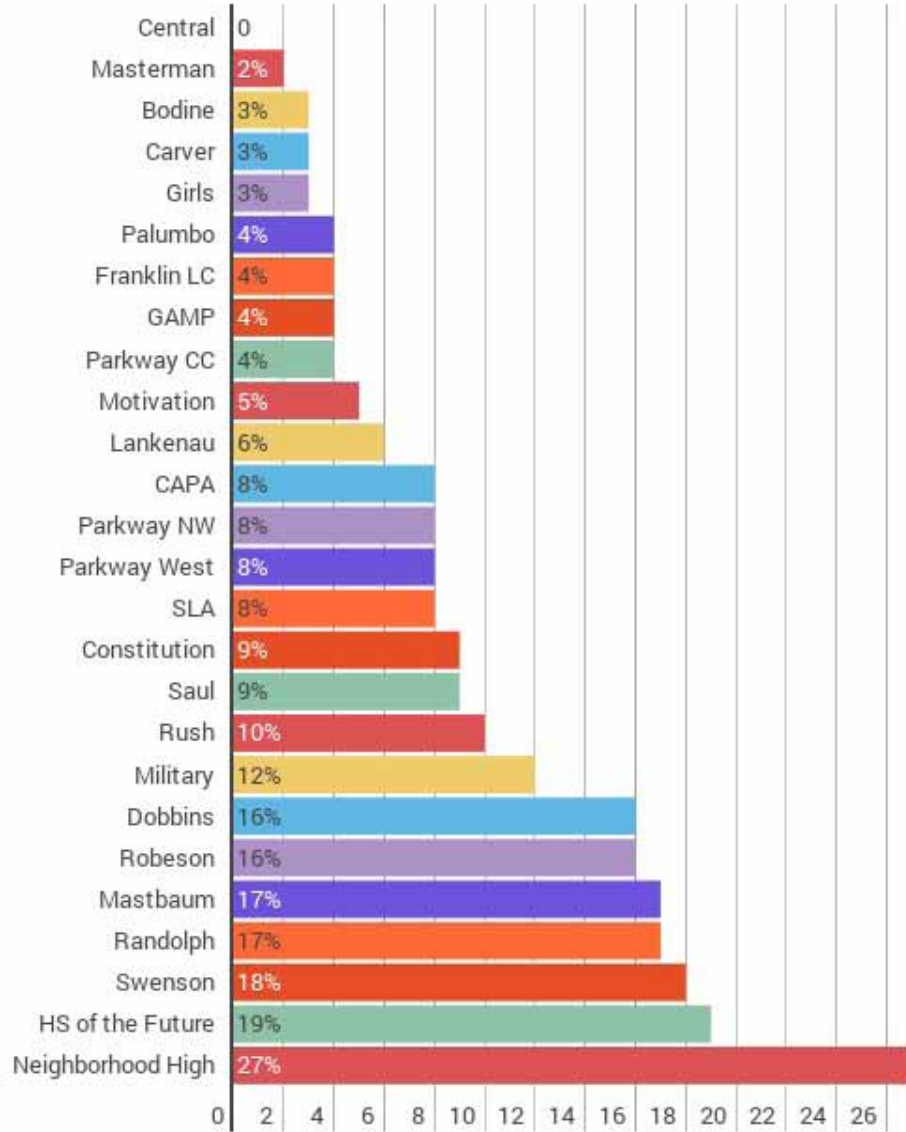
## DHS INVOLVED STUDENTS IN NEIGHBORHOOD HIGH SCHOOLS



## ELL STUDENTS IN NEIGHBORHOOD HIGH SCHOOLS



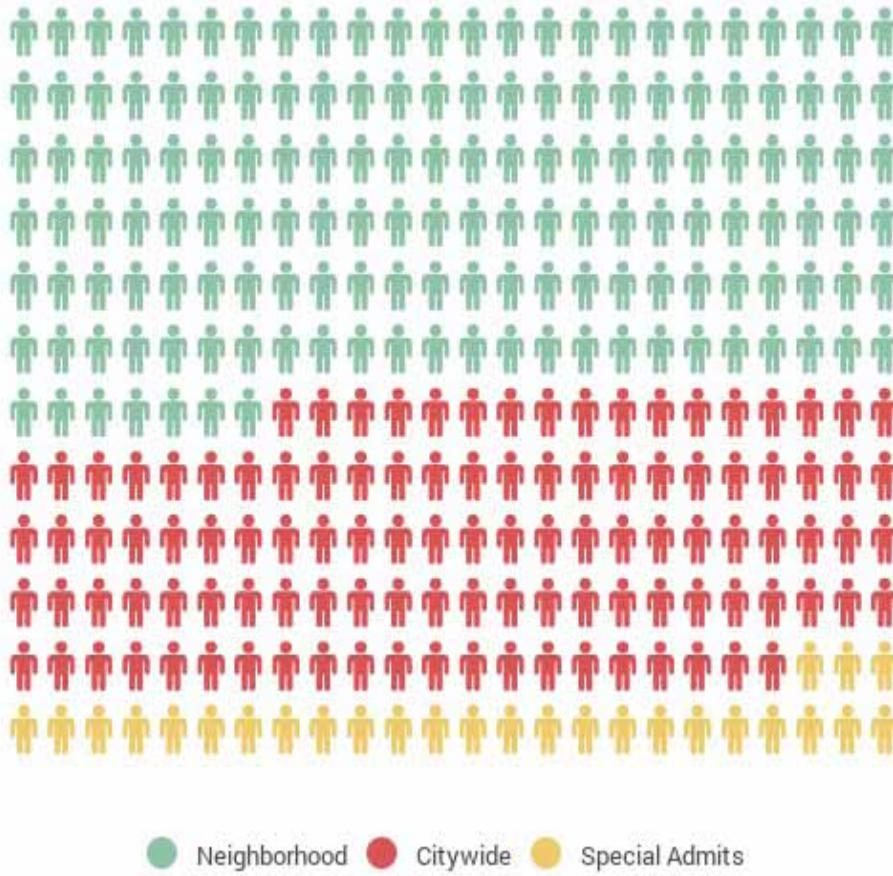
## SPECIAL ED STUDENTS UNDERSERVED IN CITYWIDE ADMISSION AND MAGNET SCHOOLS



Citywide Admission and Magnet Schools serve significantly fewer Special Ed students than Neighborhood Schools

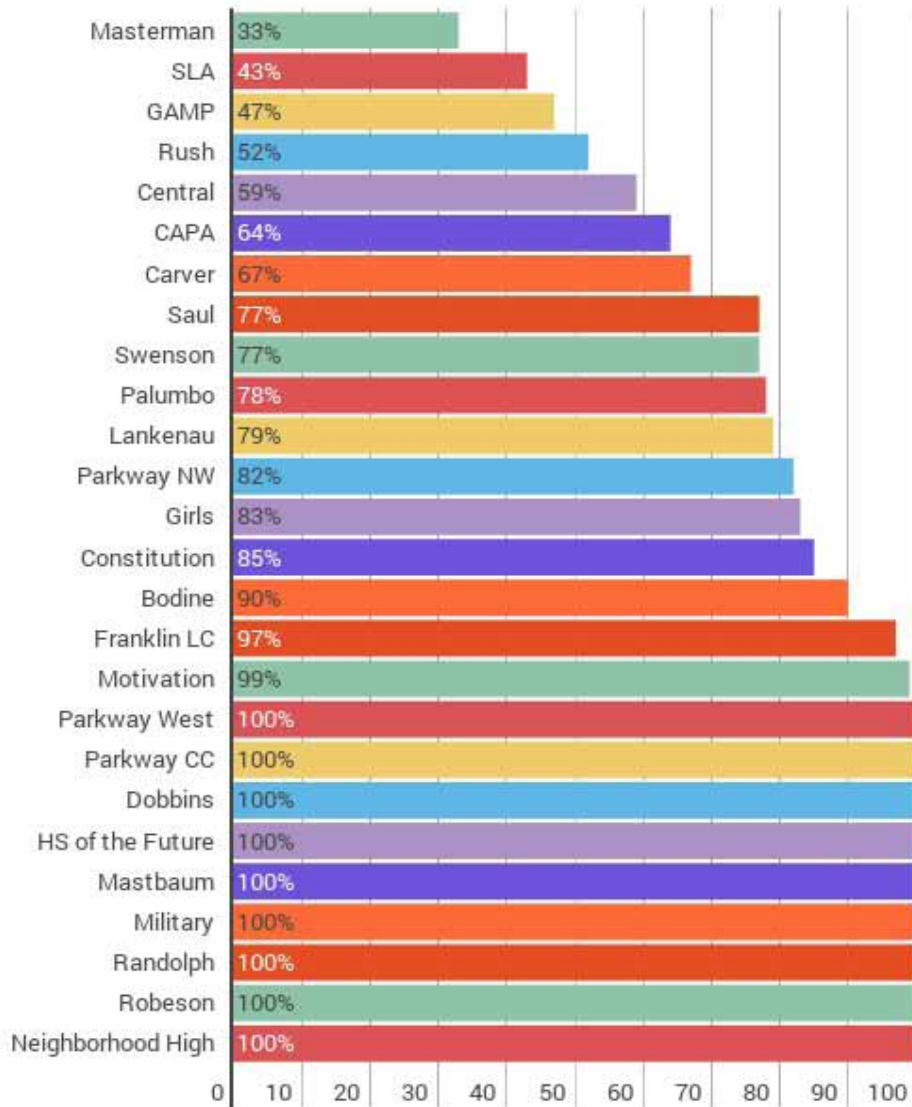
## SPECIAL ED STUDENTS UNDERSERVED IN CITYWIDE ADMISSION AND MAGNET SCHOOLS

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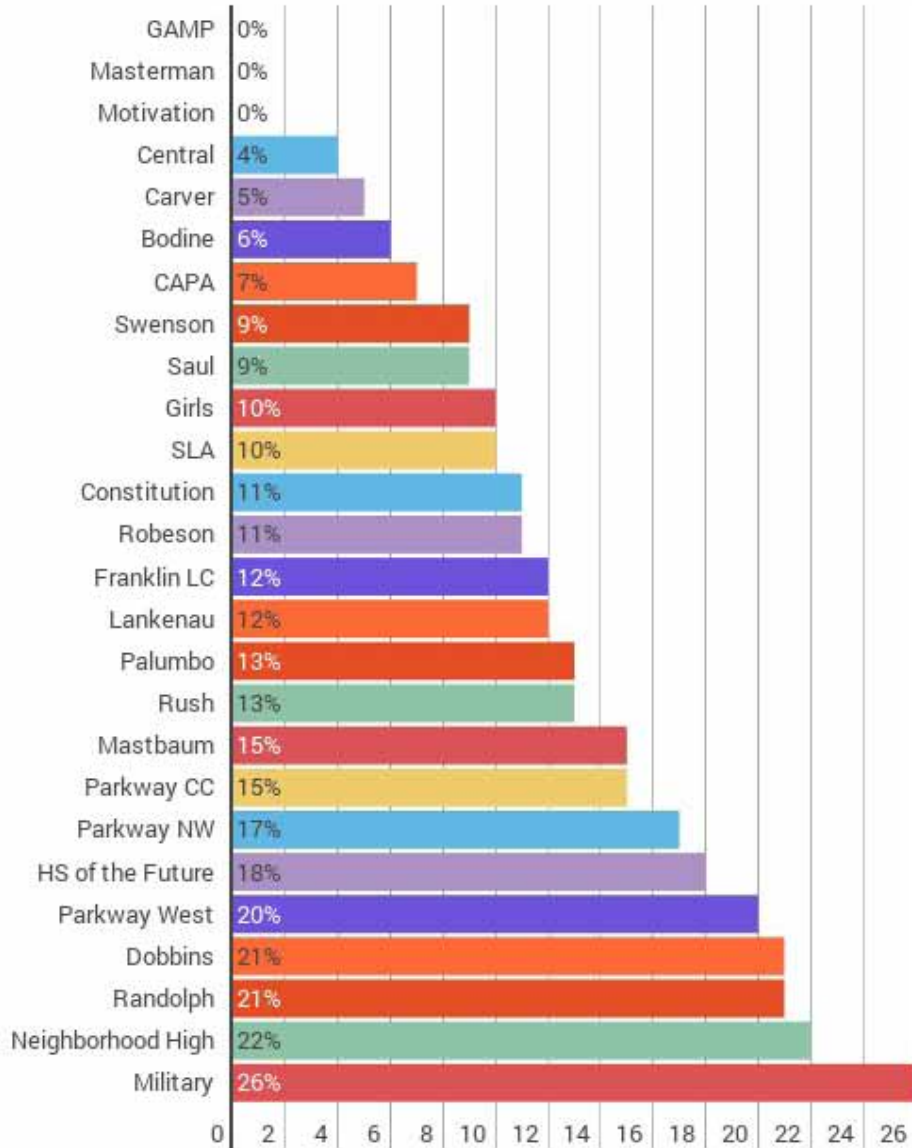
Citywide Admission and Magnet Schools serve significantly fewer Special Ed students than Neighborhood Schools

## ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS UNDERSERVED IN MAGNET SCHOOLS



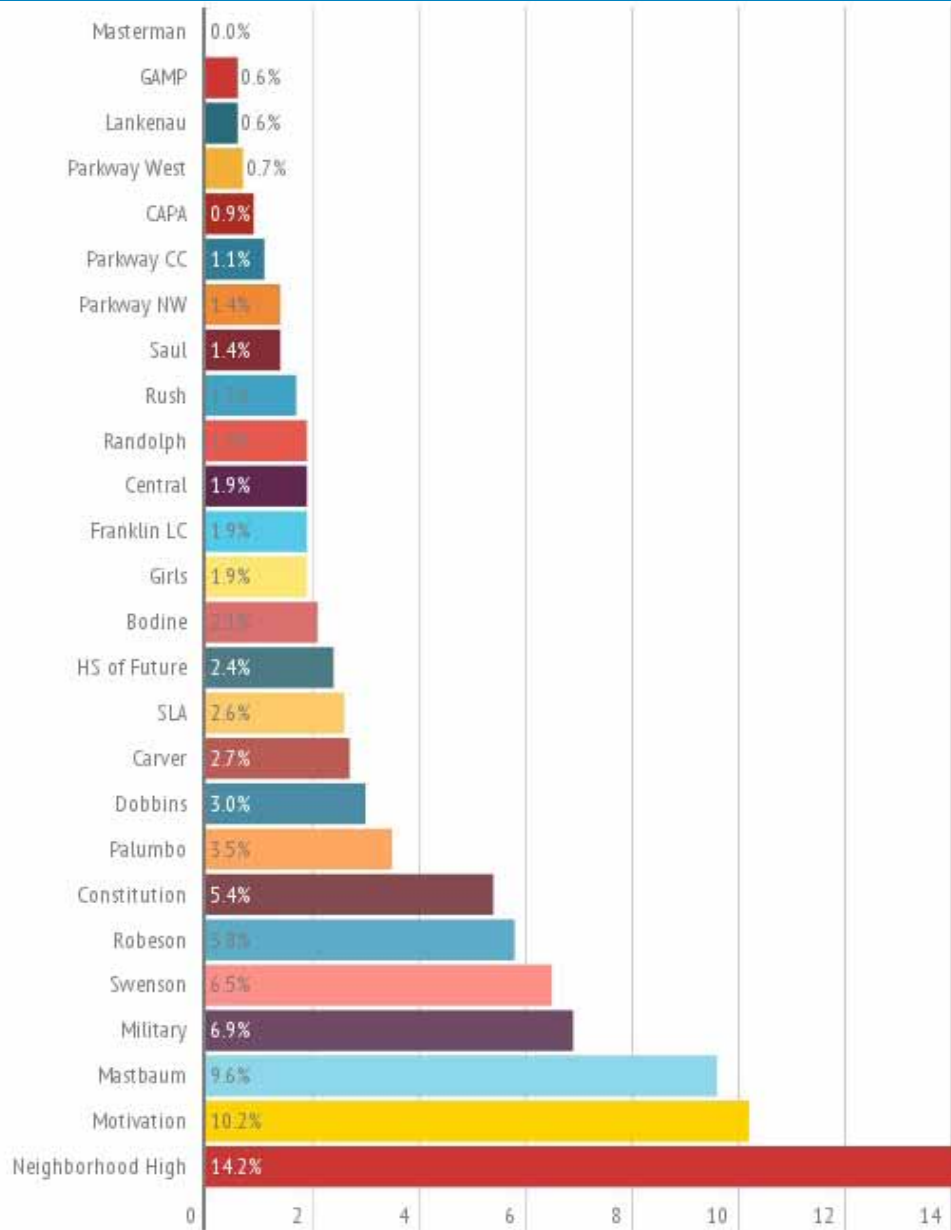
Magnet Schools serve significantly fewer Economically Disadvantaged students than Neighborhood Schools

## DHS INVOLVED STUDENTS UNDERSERVED IN CITYWIDE ADMISSION AND MAGNET SCHOOLS



Citywide Admission and Magnet Schools serve significantly fewer DHS Involved students than Neighborhood Schools

## ELL STUDENTS UNDERSERVED IN CITYWIDE ADMISSION AND MAGNET SCHOOLS



Citywide Admission and Magnet Schools serve significantly fewer ELL students than Neighborhood Schools



Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) serves as the leading child advocacy organization working to improve the lives and life chances of children in the region.

Through thoughtful and informed advocacy, community education, targeted service projects and budget analysis, PCCY watches out and speaks out for children and families. PCCY undertakes specific and focused projects in areas affecting the healthy growth and development of

children, including child care, public education, child health, juvenile justice and child welfare.

Founded in 1980 as Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, our name was changed in 2007 to better reflect our expanded work in the counties surrounding Philadelphia. PCCY remains a committed advocate and an independent watchdog for the well-being of all our children.

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