

School Reconfiguration Plan
Excel.9-12: The Plan for High School Excellence
Moving into 2010 and Beyond
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
June 21, 2010

The following FAQ was prepared regarding the Pittsburgh Public Schools presentation at the June 21st Education Committee meeting regarding the next phase of the plan for high school excellence school facility reconfiguration plans.

Pittsburgh Obama at Pittsburgh Peabody Facility

Q. What criteria did the IB Site Selection Committee use to make their recommendation of Pittsburgh Peabody?

A. The IB 6-12 Site Selection Committee considered the needs of the parents, students and the District when developing its recommendation of the Peabody facility for the site of Pittsburgh Obama.

First the Committee created a short list of potential facilities from a set of criteria proposed by the Superintendent: less than 50% occupancy, 50+ Classrooms, 4+ Computer Labs, Pre-existing high school, ready science labs, Gymnasium, Pool. This effort narrowed the field to include the Connelly, Langley, Oliver, Peabody, Reizenstein and Westinghouse facilities. The Committee then conducted a survey to determine parent priorities and looked at other data including demographics and feeder patterns of students. From all of this data the Committee developed its own set of criteria and scored the high schools on the short list based on building program/facilities amenities, location and finances. Additional considerations included adequate computer lab facilities, natural light, bus drop-off sites, access to local universities, community resources, renovation costs and maintaining 75% of school capacity. After scoring, the site that met the most criteria was Peabody.

Q. Why did the District choose to recommend closing the program at Pittsburgh Peabody?

A. The East Region: Lawrenceville to Homewood Advisory Committee, made up of parents, community members and staff, found that the East Region simply did not have the population to sustain three comprehensive high schools in Pittsburgh Westinghouse, Pittsburgh Milliones 6-12 and Pittsburgh Peabody in the same geographic area. Further, the independent DeJong facilities report recommended the closure of Pittsburgh Peabody based on the declining enrollment projections, which forecast Pittsburgh Peabody's student population will be down to approximately 259 students by 2018.

Q. What did the Pittsburgh Peabody Committee recommend?

A. In April and May of 2009 the committee, made up of community members, District staff and school faculty, met numerous times to develop a plan to best serve the needs of the Pittsburgh Peabody feeder pattern students. During the process the committee looked at data and other committee recommendations, including the recommendation of the IB Site Selection Committee, public documents about the East Region, and student enrollment and achievement data.

The Committee's recommendations included use of the Peabody name if the Peabody facility is utilized; implementation of enhanced support system for feeder pattern students and families to prepare them for equal access to high school options and give them the opportunity to succeed in their program of choice; creation of a plan for a default or feeder pattern school for students who do not want to attend a school of choice; and opportunity given to advocates of Pittsburgh Peabody feeder pattern students to participate in a broader District high school discussion and development of comprehensive plan to best serve the needs of the Peabody feeder pattern students.

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Q. Will current Pittsburgh Peabody students be given a choice of schools to attend?

A. Yes. Pittsburgh Peabody feeder pattern students that do not make a magnet selection for the 2011-12 school year will be offered the choice of attending Pittsburgh Milliones 6-12 or the reconfigured single gender academies at Pittsburgh Westinghouse. This selection is a one-time selection and is only available for current Pittsburgh Peabody students.

Q. What are the District's capital improvement plans for this facility prior to opening the school as Pittsburgh Obama?

A. There is no current capital plan for improvements to the Peabody facility.

Pittsburgh Westinghouse 6-12 Proposal

Q. What was the recommendation of the East Region: Lawrenceville to Homewood Advisory Committee regarding Pittsburgh Westinghouse?

A. The East Region: Lawrenceville to Homewood Advisory Committee, made up of parents, community leaders and District staff, recommended in March of 2010 seven action steps. These were to implement the Full Service School Model modeled on the Homewood Children's Village; reconstitute failing schools; adopt an extended year and extended day schedule for students in the East Region with preference given to four equal 10-week quarters with three-week intercessions to allow greater acceleration and remediation; change school configuration to 6-12 which is preferable to the 9-12 configuration; allow student access to multiple learning environments and structures, in and outside of the classroom; establish single-gender academies; and, create a choice area within the East Region, allowing current Pittsburgh Peabody feeder pattern students the choice to attend wither Pittsburgh Milliones 6-12 or the new school at Pittsburgh Westinghouse 6-12.

Q. What evidence does the District have to support recommending single gender classrooms at Pittsburgh Westinghouse?

A. The resource materials on single gender education are voluminous. In recent years a number of researchers have built an increasingly persuasive case that co-ed schools in many cases are not educating girls as well as boys. Based on the research findings, the U.S. Department of Education has concluded that "there is empirical support for the view that single-sex schools may accrue positive outcomes, particularly for young women." With much of the focus over the past decade on the impact of coeducation on girls, some researchers have suggested that boys may be disadvantaged as well, albeit in different respects.

But why do some students do better in single-sex environments than in co-ed schools? A few theories have been offered. In coed schools, "there is a good deal of gawking, speculating, and general preoccupation with those of the opposite sex who are most proximate." Single-sex schools, by eliminating this factor, enable a more single-minded focus on academics. Put another way, students may pursue their studies, classroom discussions, and school activities without needing to be confronted on a daily basis with male-female socialization issues.

In addition to exploring the available research, the District has piloted single gender classrooms at Pittsburgh Milliones 6-12 with positive results for both boys and girls.

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Pittsburgh Faison and Pittsburgh Lincoln

Q. How were Pittsburgh Faison K-8 and Pittsburgh Lincoln K-8 chosen to be reconfigured?

A. Faison was identified on the list of underperforming schools by the U.S. Department of Education, and will be designated as a Turnaround school by the District making it eligible for federal resources.

In addition, both schools were identified by the DeJong report as facilities recommended for closure of the intermediate building, for reconfiguration into K-5 schools with the 6-8 grade students moving to a reconfigured Pittsburgh Westinghouse.

Pittsburgh Oliver

Q. What is the Gateway to the Promise model at Oliver?

A. This proposed model is an “early college” program where students are given an opportunity to earn college credits while they are in high school. Additionally, the model has elements that are from the “Gateway to College” model which emphasizes structures and supports that are designed for at-risk students. Moreover, the Gateway to the Promise program will have robust Career and Technical Education offerings that will lead to post-secondary degrees and/or certifications for each of our students.

The model will seek to form explicit partnerships with the Community College of Allegheny County, the Building and Trades Organizations in Allegheny County and other post-secondary training institutions for our students. In addition to the connections post-high school, the model will incorporate post-secondary planning relationships with the three feeder-pattern middle years programs on the north side at Pittsburgh King ALA K-8; Pittsburgh Manchester K-8, and Pittsburgh Northview ALA K-8 to scaffold students into the program model.

Community Input and Next Steps

Q. Can the public have input on this plan before the Board takes action?

A. Yes! First, it is important to remember that there has been tremendous community input into the development of this plan, from the DeJong report to the IB Site Selection Committee, the Peabody Committee, the East Region Advisory Committee and other public meetings. Second, persons interested in learning more or submitting input can go to the District’s website at www.pps.k12.pa.us and click on the *School Reconfigurations* button on the homepage and submit comments via an online submission form. Third, persons wishing to testify at the District’s next monthly Public Hearing on July 12 at 7:00 PM can sign up to speak by calling the Superintendent’s office at 412/ 622-3600.

Q. When is the Board expected to take action on this plan?

A. A vote by the Board has been requested by the administration on this school reconfiguration plan for July 21, 2010 at their Legislative Session.

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Q. How can the public view the school reconfiguration plan and supporting documents?

A. We recommend that anyone interested in learning more about the reconfiguration plan visit the District’s website at www.pps.k12.pa.us and click on the *School Reconfigurations* button on the District’s homepage. There you can find copies of all relevant documents, such as the June 21st Education Committee presentation, District press releases, the IB Site Selection Committee Report, the Peabody Committee Report, the East Region Advisory Committee report, information on the *Excel.9-12* plan and other information as well as an online form to submit comments.

General

Q. What is happening at other urban districts facing school closure issues?

A. In recent months, mass school closings are becoming more frequent in urban school districts across the country. In Missouri, after years on inaction, Kansas City Schools made the decision to close 28 of its schools at once. The district put off making tough choices for decades, resulting in the mass closing of nearly half of the district’s schools which will take effect this summer. Similarly, Detroit Public Schools decided in June to close 45 of its schools over a three year period, nearly one-fourth of the schools in the district; this includes the closing of 33 buildings this year. The Cleveland school district voted in March to close 16 of its more than 100 buildings within the year.

Q. What other schools have been reconfigured as part of the District’s Excel.9-12 plan?

A. Excel.9-12 is a five-year roadmap for improving the academic performance of all High Schools that was launched during the 2006-07 school year. Highlights of the implementation of the Excel.9-12 plan include the opening of Pittsburgh Milliones 6-12, Pittsburgh Obama 6-12, Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12 and Pittsburgh Science and Technology Academy 6-12. The Board’s has also adopted a new framework plan for Career and Technical Education in 2010.

Q. When will the District have PSSA data from the schools that have already been reconfigured as part of the District’s Excel.9-12 plan?

A. PSSA testing data is available at our high schools for 11th graders. Therefore, PSSA results will not be available until the first 9th grade class of each school has completed the 11th grade. See chart below for complete listing:

School	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
UPrep	9 th Grade		PSSA	
Obama	9 th Grade		PSSA	
CAPA		9 th Grade		PSSA
Sci-Tech		9 th Grade		PSSA

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Q. How does this plan differ from the recommendations of the DeJong independent facilities report?

A. The District's plan for school reconfiguration is informed by, but not dictated by, the work of the DeJong independent facilities report, as well as other public and community input and the added academic lens of the District's own work to improve the educational options for students.

Specifically regarding DeJong, the District is recommending and the DeJong report recommended:

- The closure of Pittsburgh Peabody;
- Reconfigure Pittsburgh Faison K-8 as a K-5, close the Intermediate building and send 6-8 grade students to Pittsburgh Westinghouse;
- Reconfigure Pittsburgh Lincoln K-8 as a K-5, close the Intermediate building and send 6-8 grade students to Pittsburgh Westinghouse; and
- Close the Homewood Early Childhood Center and reopen at another District facility.

The District's recommendations differ with the DeJong report in several areas:

- The District is recommending the Peabody facility for the location of Pittsburgh Obama, while the DeJong report recommended the Reizenstein facility;
- The District is recommending the Faison Intermediate building (Crescent Building) as the site of the Homewood Early Childhood Center, whereas the DeJong report recommended the Homewood ECC be located at the Lincoln Intermediate Building (Belmar Building); and
- The DeJong report recommended the closure of Pittsburgh Oliver, while the District is recommending reconfiguring Oliver as the Gateway to the Promise Center with a robust CTE program.