

Parent Research 2006-07

Prepared for:
The Pittsburgh Public Schools
High School Reform Task Force

Prepared by:
Jean-Anne Matter, Ph.D.

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Background/Method

- Parent input desired on high school reform ideas
- Three studies done
 - Telephone survey, January-February 2007
 - 302 parents, 75/76 each, parents of PPS high school students, middle school students, 4-5th graders, and students in non-PPS programs
 - Mail survey, February-March 2007
 - Mailed to over 18,000 PPS households, all grades
 - 1973 respondents (10.6% response rate)
 - Focus groups, December 2006
 - 2 groups each of parents of high school students, middle school students, and students in non-PPS programs (49 participants)
 - All included a broad mix of persons from throughout the Pittsburgh Community



Background/Method



- 2000 Census data for PGH HH with children under 18: 70% white, 27% African American, 3% other.
- PPS student population is 61% African American, 37% white, 2% other.
- All research reached a broad cross-section of the Pittsburgh community.
- Phone survey reached more men and more African Americans.

		Phone (N=302)	Mail (N=1973)	Focus Groups (N=49)
Gender	Female	77%	82%	69%
	Male	24%	18%	31%
Age	Under 30	7%	11%	3%
	31 to 40	32%	30%	35%
	41 to 50	43%	38%	43%
	51+	18%	21%	19%
Race	White/Caucasian	57%	68%	57%
	Black/African American	38%	27%	40%
	Other	5%	6%	3%
Employment	Work full-time	60%	60%	57%
	Work part-time	14%	19%	10%
	Not currently employed outside the home	26%	21%	32%
Income	Less than \$25,000	23%		25%
	\$25,000 to 50,000	34%		50%
	\$50,000 to \$75,000	25%		13%
	\$75,000 +	19%		10%
Education	Not college grad		57%	74%
	College grad		43%	26%
Grade Range of Oldest Child	K-5		25%	
	K-8		22%	
	6-8		14%	
	9-12		40%	

- Phone survey involved parents of:
- 76 4-5th Graders
 - 75 6-8th Graders
 - 76 9-12th Graders
 - 75 Non-PPS Students (4th-12th grades)
- Focus groups involved parents of:
- 14 Middle School Students
 - 19 High School Students
 - 16 Non-PPS Students

The Concepts



- Safe & Welcoming: Respectful behavior, interventions for children with behavioral challenges
- Pittsburgh Promise: Planning and resource support for education beyond high school
- 9th Grade: Special programs for this transitional year
- Personalized Education: Individual attention, meaningful relationship with an adult
- School Choice: More options, “best fit” for students
- Pittsburgh Pact: Signed agreement with schools, students & parents that sets expectations

Conclusions

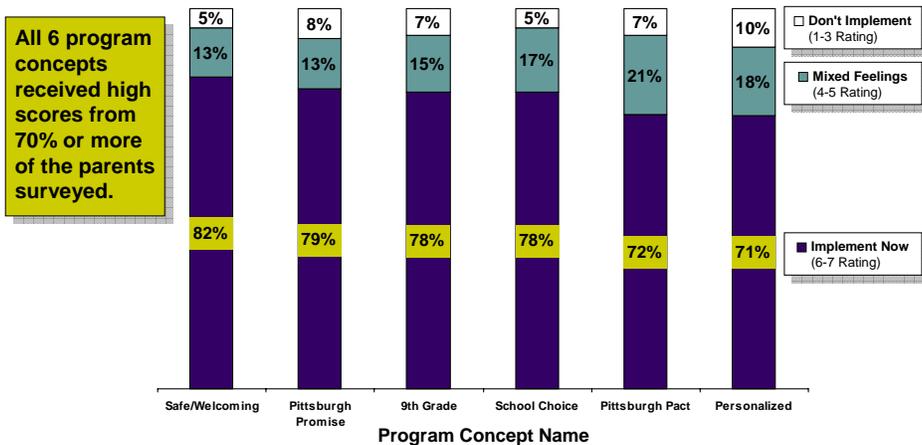


- Responses were strikingly similar across studies, despite different methodologies.
- The concepts developed by the High School Reform Task Force were very well received by parents in all three studies.
- All segments of the Pittsburgh community responded similarly to the ideas.
- The top concept was “Safe and Welcoming Schools,” which addresses widespread concern with student behavior, especially among those who have removed a child from PPS.
- An additional priority is helping parents plan and pay for post secondary education.
- While these two concepts were of most interest, all the Task Force ideas received strong community support.
- Parents have many questions about how these ideas will be implemented. Continuing communication and dialog will be key to involving parents and the community in effective implementation.

Results: Telephone Survey



% Rating Each Concept on a 7-Point Scale
7=Implement Now, 1=Do Not Implement



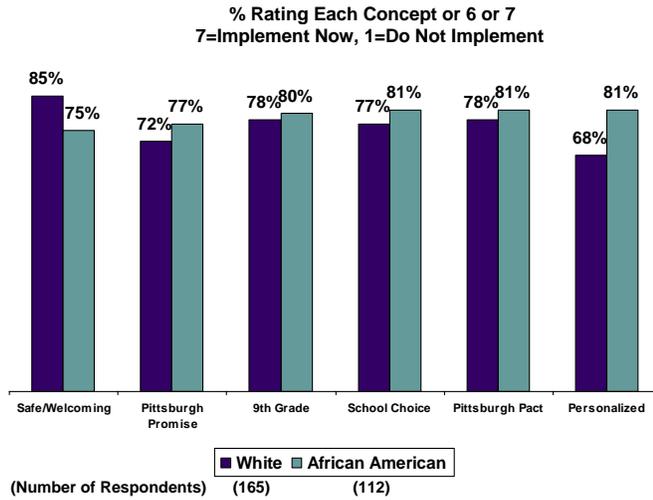
All 6 program concepts received high scores from 70% or more of the parents surveyed.

Results: Telephone Survey



Results were similar across all types of parents.

For instance, the chart to the right shows the similarities between White and African American parents.



Results: Telephone Survey



Why Did You Move Your Child/Children Out of PPS?

% Who Chose*	This Reason ...
59%	Quality of education
59%	Discipline, safety and security
57%	Behavior of other students
47%	Individual attention
40%	Quality of teachers and administrators
28%	Our family's beliefs and values
28%	My child has special needs that were not being met by PPS
7%	Other

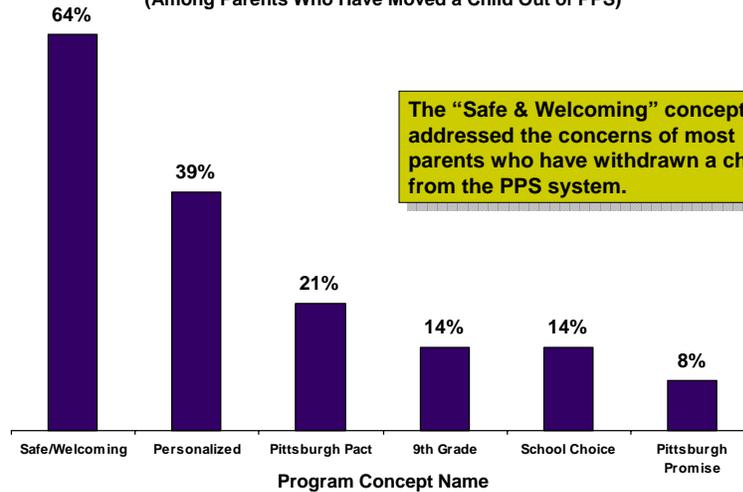
Quality of education, discipline/safety/security, and behavior of other students were the reasons cited most often for moving a child out of the PPS system.

*Parents chose as many as they wanted from a list that was provided. 75 parents who have moved one or more children were included in the survey.

Results: Telephone Survey



% Indicating That The Concept Addresses Their Concerns
(Among Parents Who Have Moved a Child Out of PPS)



The "Safe & Welcoming" concept addressed the concerns of most parents who have withdrawn a child from the PPS system.

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The Mail Survey



- Purpose: Obtain parent perception of school performance & further input on high school reform concepts.
- Questions addressed:
 - Evaluations of current school performance in 7 areas.
 - Familiarity with the Code of Conduct, Student Handbook, and Parent Hotline.
 - Concepts: Brief versions of the reform concepts.
- Scale used: Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree.
- For simplicity, parents were asked to focus on their oldest child when answering the questions.

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The Mail Survey

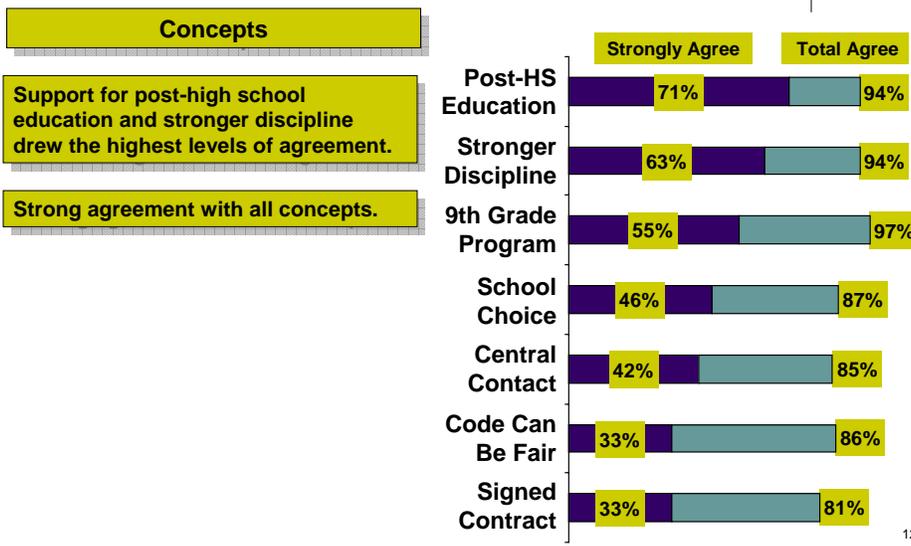


High School Reform Task Force Concept Statements

Post-HS Education	I believe the District should provide services and scholarships to make education after high school more accessible and affordable for all Pittsburgh Public Schools students.
Stronger Discipline	I believe strengthening discipline is a key step to establishing a positive learning environment for all students.
9th Grade Program	Students and their families would benefit from orientation sessions during critical transition years such as 8th to 9th grade.
School Choice	I am supportive of the District moving from a model where the District assigns students to schools to a model where parents and students have more choices.
Central Contact	I prefer contracting one central place to address my questions and concerns or provide feedback.
Code Can Be Fair	I believe the Code of Student Conduct outlines discipline procedures that can be applied fairly and consistently across all schools.
Signed Contract	A signed agreement between parents, students, teachers and the District that outlines clear expectations for learning, student behavior and work ethic would be helpful.

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Results: Mail Survey



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Results: Mail Survey

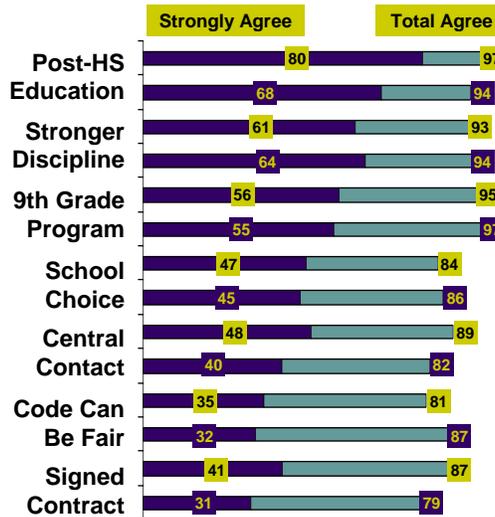


Pattern of agreement was similar across all types of parents.

For instance, the chart to the right shows the similarities between African American and White respondents

African Americans (487)

Whites (1238)



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The Mail Survey



Evaluations of oldest child's current school

Positive/welcoming	My child's school provides a positive and welcoming learning environment.
Teachers know child	Teachers in my child's school know my child's strengths and weaknesses and provide extra help when needed.
Notifies of trouble	My child's school does a good job of notifying me when my child is having trouble.
Communicates	My child's school does a good job in communicating with parents.
Counselors/staff know child	School counselors and school-based staff know my child's strengths and weaknesses and provide extra help when needed.
Help if trouble	My child's school does a good job at providing me with help and resources when my child is having trouble.
Post-HS information	The Pittsburgh Public Schools do a good job in providing students and parents with information about education opportunities beyond high school.

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The Mail Survey

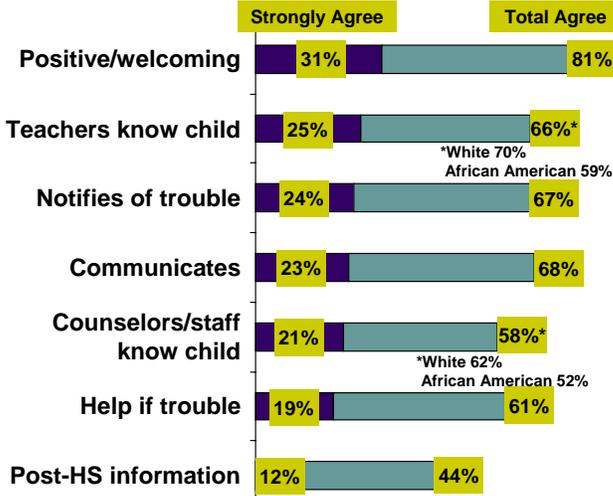


Evaluation Questions

Highest agreement:
current school is positive,
welcoming.



Lowest agreement: PPS
does a good job providing
information on post-high
school education
opportunities.



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The Mail Survey



Positive feelings about a child's school decrease markedly as the child gets older.

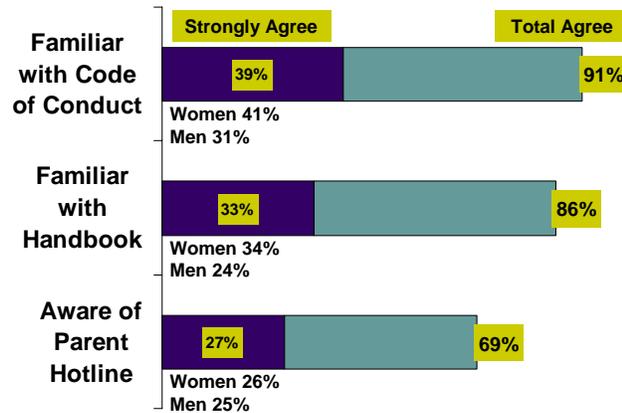
Grade Range at Oldest Child's School:	% Who Strongly Agree				Decline From K5 to HS
	K-5	K-8	6-8	9-12	
Positive/welcoming	49%	33%	22%	19%	-30%
Teachers know child	36%	31%	22%	17%	-20%
Notifies of trouble	33%	25%	23%	17%	-16%
Communicates	35%	22%	23%	14%	-20%
Counselors/staff know child	30%	24%	22%	16%	-14%
Help if trouble	30%	21%	17%	12%	-18%
Post-HS information	15%	13%	10%	10%	-6%

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The Mail Survey



Familiarity Questions



Most are at least somewhat familiar with the Code of Conduct and Handbook (women more than men).

The Hotline is less well known.

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The Focus Groups



- Purpose: Opportunity for more in-depth discussion of High School Reform Task Force concepts; refine language to improve communications.
- Concepts tested in the focus groups*:
 - Personalized Education
 - 9th Grade Transition Program
 - School Choice/Smaller Schools
 - Science and Technology High School
 - Career Education
 - Conduct & Expectations
 - The Pittsburgh Promise

*Different versions were tested as changes were made to reflect parent input.

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Conclusions



- Parents were very positive toward the Task Force's ideas.
- Questions and concerns tended to be about execution rather than about the concepts themselves. It will be important to execute well.
- Continuing communication and dialog with the community will be key to effective implementation. Parents need careful explanation to address their questions about how the programs will be implemented.