Creating Secondary Learning Communities in Pittsburgh Public Schools

Rethinking the Instructional Paradigm to achieve *EXCELLENCE FOR ALL*
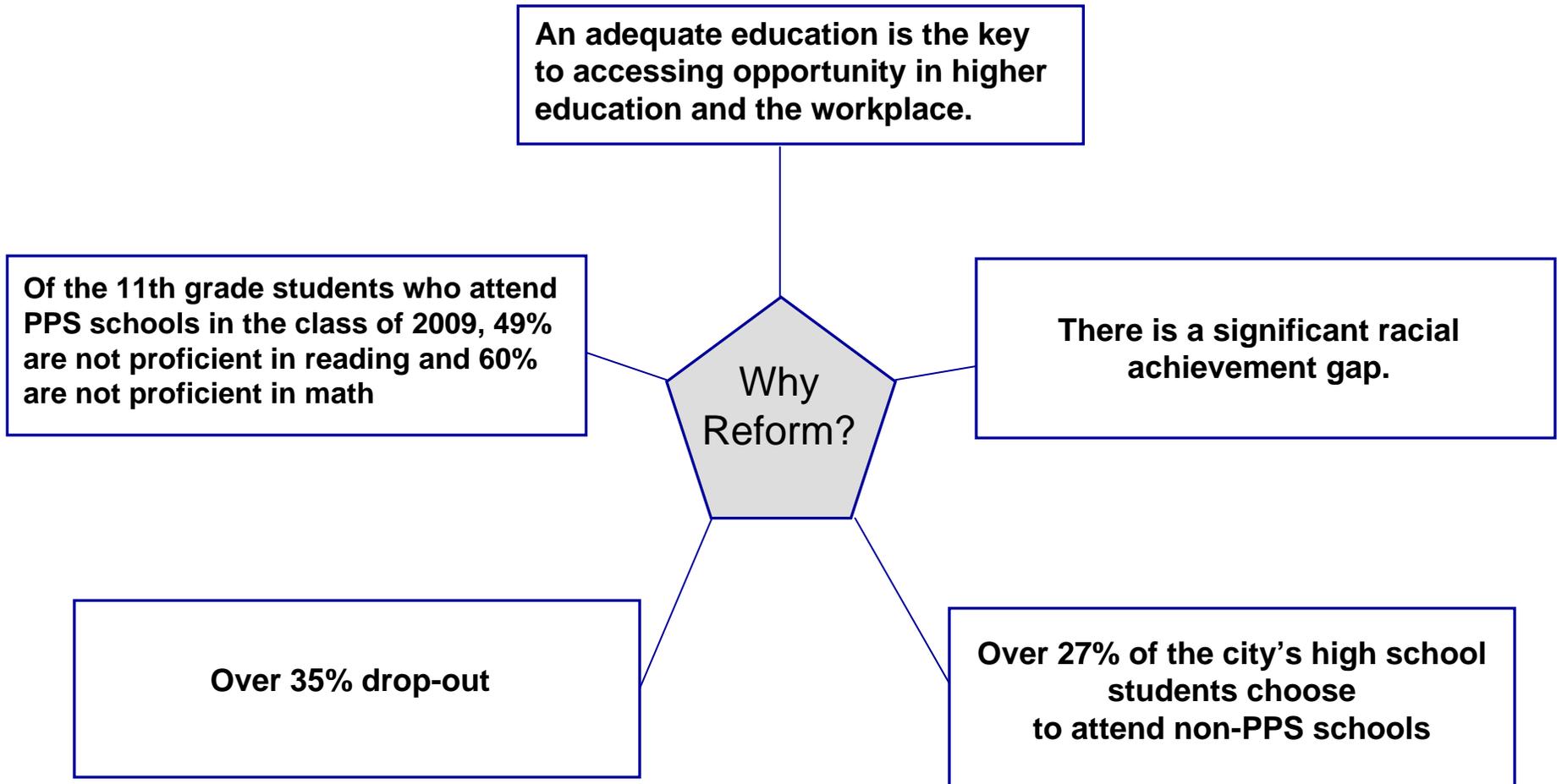
Pittsburgh Public Schools

Office of High School Reform

October 24, 2007

EXCELLENCE
FOR ALL

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Creating Secondary Learning Communities in Pittsburgh Public Schools

- Understanding the problem

- Understanding the mission and goals

- Understanding the paradigm shifts

  - **Pittsburgh Public Schools will be composed of four learning community models.**

  - **PPS Secondary School framework will include what has traditionally been termed 6th Grade.**

  - **Learning is a lifelong process, not a temporal outcome.**

  - **Learning is personal to the individual student.**

  - **A school building does not define a community; rather an educational community is firmly rooted within meaningful relationships among its stakeholders.**

  - **Secondary Learning Communities will serve students in three campus configurations**

- Research and practice that supports these initiatives

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At least five compelling facts support reforming Pittsburgh's secondary schools.

An adequate education is the key to accessing opportunity in higher education and the workplace.

Of the 11th grade students who attend PPS schools in the class of 2009, 49% are not proficient in reading and 60% are not proficient in math

Why Reform?

There is a significant racial achievement gap.

Over 35% drop-out

Over 27% of the city's high school students choose to attend non-PPS schools

As currently configured and delivered, secondary education does not adequately prepare most young people for life after high school.

Postsecondary education is more important than ever	Between 2000 and 2015, about 85 percent of newly created U.S. jobs will require education beyond high school. – Workforce Readiness Project
High schools are not preparing most graduates for secondary education	In 2002, only 34 percent of graduates were considered to be adequately prepared for college. – Manhattan Institute
Students, parents, and families are forced to make up the difference	"Higher education institutions, businesses, and students and families themselves are spending upward of $17 billion each year on remedial classes just so students can gain the knowledge and skills that they should have acquired in high school." – Achieve, Inc.

Greene, J.P. & Winters, M.A. (2005, February). *Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates: 1991-2002*. New York: Manhattan Institute, Center for Civic Innovation. Retrieved from http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_08.htm (accessed September 18, 2006).

Closing the Expectations Gap 2006: An Annual 50-State Progress Report on the Alignment of High School Policies with the Demands of College and Work (2006). Washington, D.C., Achieve, Inc.: 32.

Casner-Lotto, J. (2006). The Conference Board, Inc., the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Working Families, and the Society for Human Resource Management. http://21stcenturyskills.org/documents/FINAL_REPORT_PDF09-29-06.pdf

These principles guide the reform process. Excel 9-12 (2007)

SAFE & WELCOMING SCHOOLS   *School is a physically and emotionally safe place that supports learning*

RELATIONSHIPS   *Personalized learning environment with meaningful connections to teachers, peers, and the school*

STUDENT SUPPORT   *Consistent and ongoing help to ensure student progress towards goals*

RIGOR   *High academic expectations for all students; engaging and demanding content and teaching*

RELEVANCE   *Prepare and connect students to the real world*

Excellence for All will define success for the system, for schools, and for students

STUDENT OUTCOME GOAL

All students will access and succeed in advanced coursework appropriate to their skills and interests. Each will leave Pittsburgh Public Schools connected to and prepared for a relevant postsecondary opportunity.
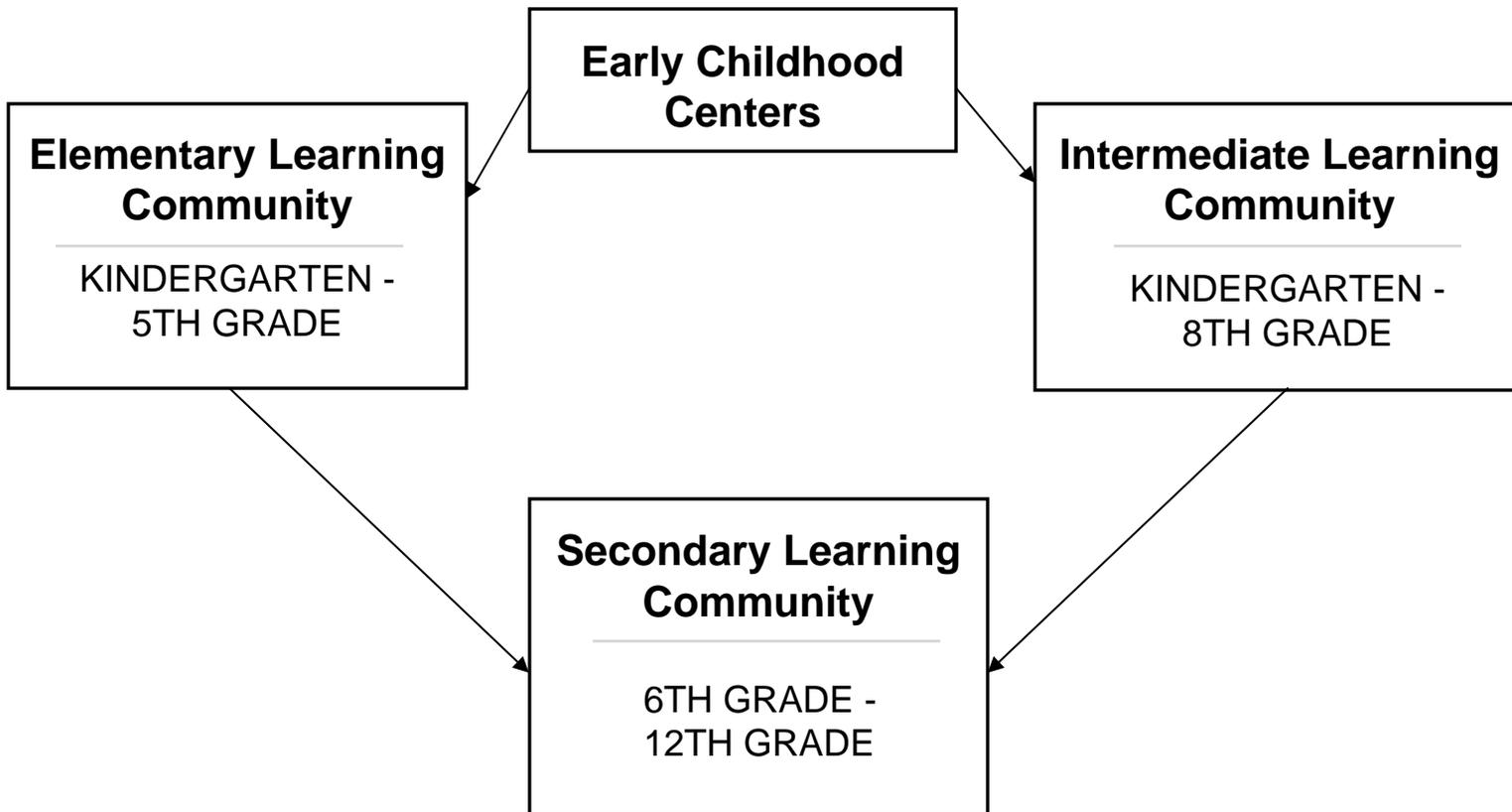
SCHOOL GOALS

1. Safe and Welcoming School
2. Relationships
3. Student Support
4. Rigor
5. Relevance

SYSTEMIC GOALS

1. Change the academic and professional trajectories of all students.
2. Reconnect with families who have chosen to exit the system attracting students and families back to Pittsburgh Public Schools.

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Paradigm Shift: Pittsburgh Public Schools will be composed of four learning community models.

Early Childhood Centers

Elementary Learning Community

KINDERGARTEN - 5TH GRADE

Intermediate Learning Community

KINDERGARTEN - 8TH GRADE

Secondary Learning Community

6TH GRADE - 12TH GRADE

Pittsburgh Public Schools has adopted an aggressive Reform Agenda

In partnership with the Foundation Community, PPS is engaged in the following:

Comprehensive Curriculum Reform with Vertical and Horizontal Alignment

Aggressive Professional Development with implementation of on-site Coaches for teachers and principals

Principal Urban Leadership System for Excellence (PULSE) – Pay For Performance for Principals

Development of the Office of High School Reform

Pittsburgh Emerging Leadership Academy (PELA) - Training of Administrators within the District
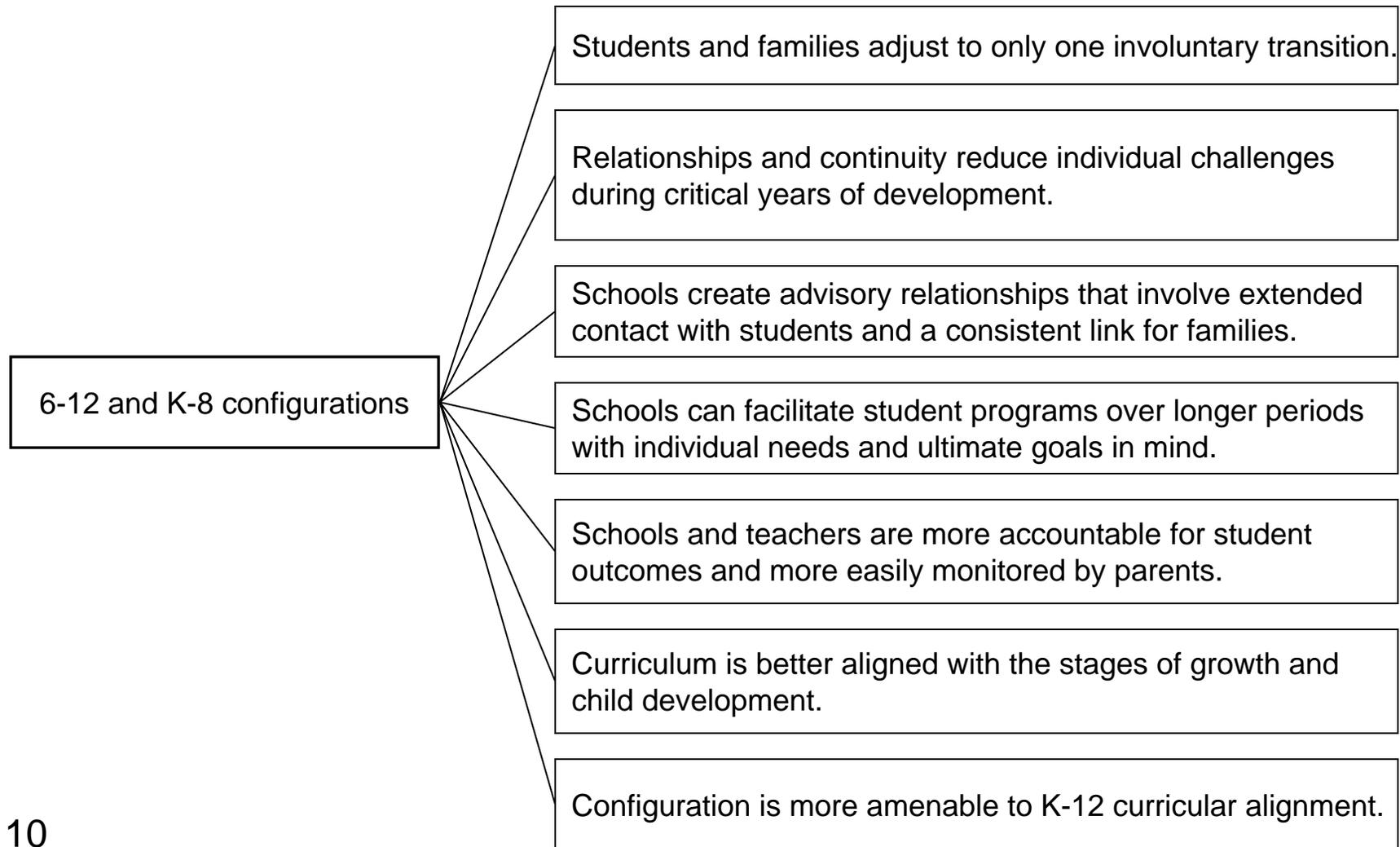
Secondary School Reform builds upon the Superintendent's *Excellence For All* Agenda.

- Pittsburgh Public Schools has an expansive Early Childhood Program
- Following a comprehensive Rand Study, the Pittsburgh Public Schools engaged in a reorganization of elementary and middle schools.
    - Right-Sizing Plan
        - Maintaining K-5 Schools that were working for our children
        - Reorganization of many schools into K-8 models where there would be a more coherent delivery of instruction.
        - Creating Accelerated Learning Academies utilizing the America's Choice Model to extend the school day and school year for K-5 and K-8 schools that have historically under-performed

- The Establishment of the Office of High School Reform
    - The Creation of Secondary Learning Communities
    - The Office of High School Reform will begin its laser focus on the education of our students in the middle years.

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Research supports the integration of middle schools into both K-8 and 6-12 configurations

6-12 and K-8 configurations

Students and families adjust to only one involuntary transition.

Relationships and continuity reduce individual challenges during critical years of development.

Schools create advisory relationships that involve extended contact with students and a consistent link for families.

Schools can facilitate student programs over longer periods with individual needs and ultimate goals in mind.

Schools and teachers are more accountable for student outcomes and more easily monitored by parents.

Curriculum is better aligned with the stages of growth and child development.

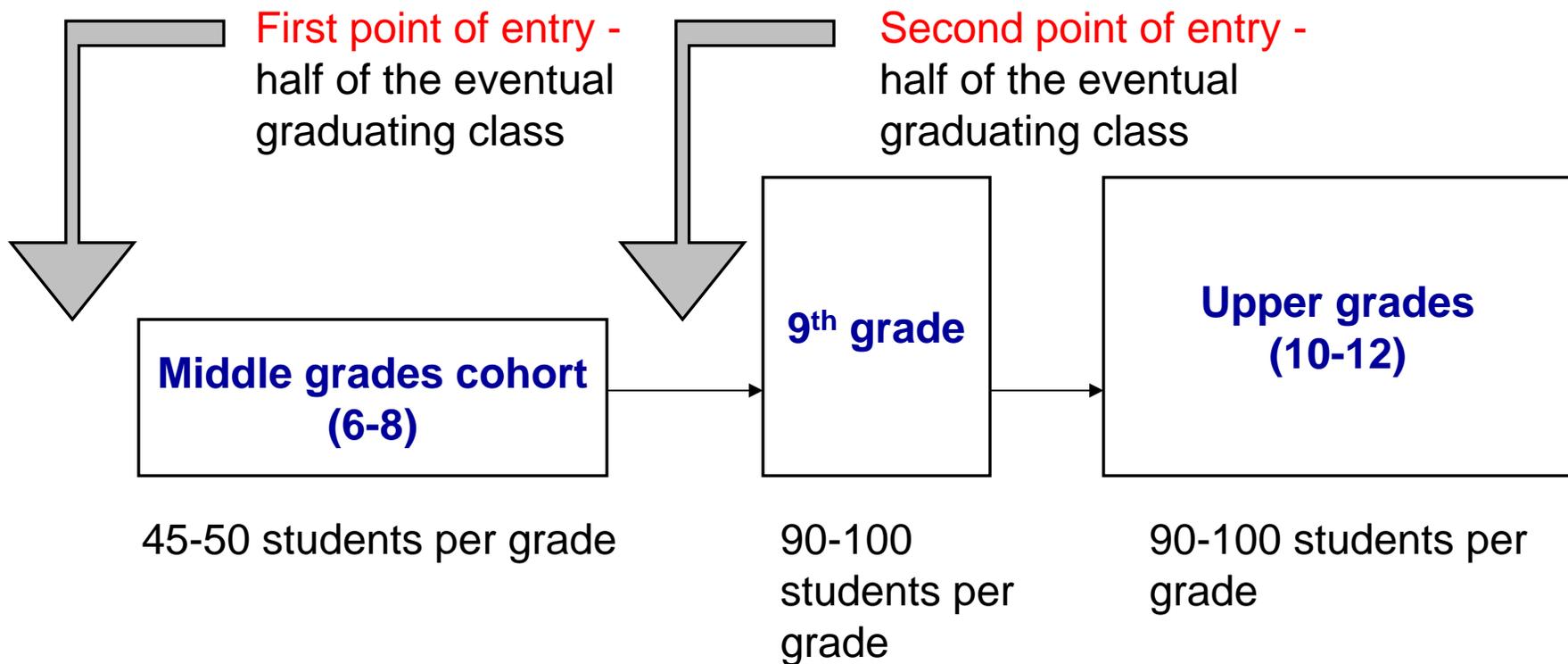Configuration is more amenable to K-12 curricular alignment.

Paradigm Shift: The inclusion of 6th grade is a part of the PPS Secondary School framework.

- Developmentally this is when a child is naturally inquisitive.
  - The question "why" is ever present because of the myriad changes that occur in the middle years for all children.
- Research demonstrates that students are capable of abstract thinking at much earlier ages than has traditionally been recognized in public school education.
- Foster inquiry and higher order thinking *prior to* when students are accountable for what has traditionally been termed high school credit.
- Studies have shown that if we fail to engage children in the middle years, they are more likely to drop out. (See attached.)

If one of these four things happen in the 6th Grade, the student is 75% more likely to drop out.

- Earn an F in English
- Earn an F in Math
- Receive an Unsatisfactory for his or her behavior at the end of a marking period.
- Attend school less than 80% of the time, that is missing more than two days in a two week period.

Pittsburgh Public School students will have two primary entry points into secondary schools.

First point of entry - half of the eventual graduating class

Second point of entry - half of the eventual graduating class

Middle grades cohort (6-8)

9th grade

Upper grades (10-12)

45-50 students per grade

90-100 students per grade

90-100 students per grade

NOTE: Wherever they enter, students enter secondary school with college readiness as the focus.
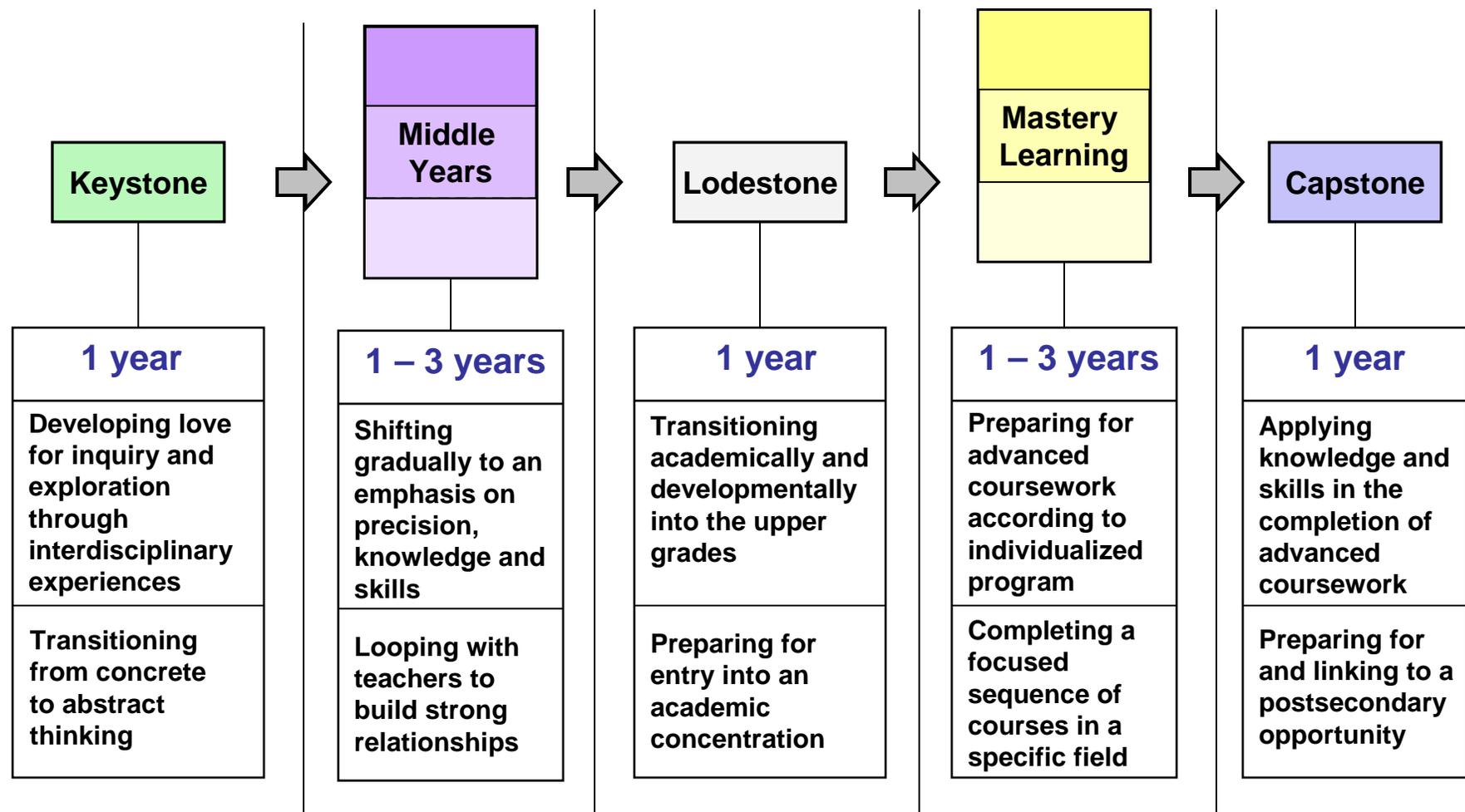
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Paradigm Shift: Learning is a lifelong process, not a temporal outcome.

- "Question everything. Learn something. Answer nothing."
  - » Euripedes

- "Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."
  - » James Madison

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The learning trajectory of a student is informed by his/her experience and ability to explore and manipulate increasingly complex concepts.

- *The teacher is the most important factor in the educational development of a student*
- *Learning only occurs when a student can connect the material being taught to an experience that he/she has had.*
  - *More time on task is not remediation-rather it simply produces repetition and replication of the material that was taught.*
- *Learning is an intensely personal, active, experiential process.*

Paradigm Shift: Learning is personal to the individual student.

Keystone	Middle Years	Lodestone	Mastery Learning	Capstone
1 year	**1 – 3 years**	**1 year**	**1 – 3 years**	**1 year**
Developing love for inquiry and exploration through interdisciplinary experiences	Shifting gradually to an emphasis on precision, knowledge and skills	Transitioning academically and developmentally into the upper grades	Preparing for advanced coursework according to individualized program	Applying knowledge and skills in the completion of advanced coursework
Transitioning from concrete to abstract thinking	Looping with teachers to build strong relationships	Preparing for entry into an academic concentration	Completing a focused sequence of courses in a specific field	Preparing for and linking to a postsecondary opportunity

Romance
(Curiosity)

Precision
(Knowledge)

Generalization
(Application)

Standards Based Curriculum and Report Cards

- PPS will identify and adopt "power standards" or the essential skills and concepts that students must master to move from one milestone to the next

- PPS will utilize innovative strategies and curriculum to address specific needs.
  - Literacy: Junior Great Books, Great Books Foundation; Read 180
  - Mathematics: The Algebra Project; Transition to Advanced Mathematics, Talent Development Model
  - Civic Responsibility: Civics be the Change

- PPS will report student progress on narrative-rich, standards-based report cards that empower parents with information regarding actual student progress.

Authentic, aligned assessments must complement the curriculum.

- Capstone Year Project
  - Interdisciplinary Portfolios that demonstrate the acquisition of a base of knowledge

- The development of a Pittsburgh Public Schools Graduation Exam
  - Literacy-rich exit examination, developed by the Pittsburgh Public Schools and aligned with the instructional philosophy of the district

College readiness should be the focus of secondary schools.

- Philosophy: *All students should not graduate at the same time, while demonstrating widely disparate competencies. Rather, all students should graduate at different times with the same level of competency.*

Paradigm Shift: A school building does not define a community; rather an educational community is firmly rooted within meaningful relationships among its stakeholders.

There can be no vulnerability without risk; there can be no community without vulnerability; there can be no peace, and ultimately no life, without community.
>>M. Scott Peck

This is the duty of our generation as we enter the twenty-first century -- solidarity with the weak, the persecuted, the lonely, the sick, and those in despair. It is expressed by the desire to give a noble and humanizing meaning to a community in which all members will define themselves not by their own identity but by that of others.
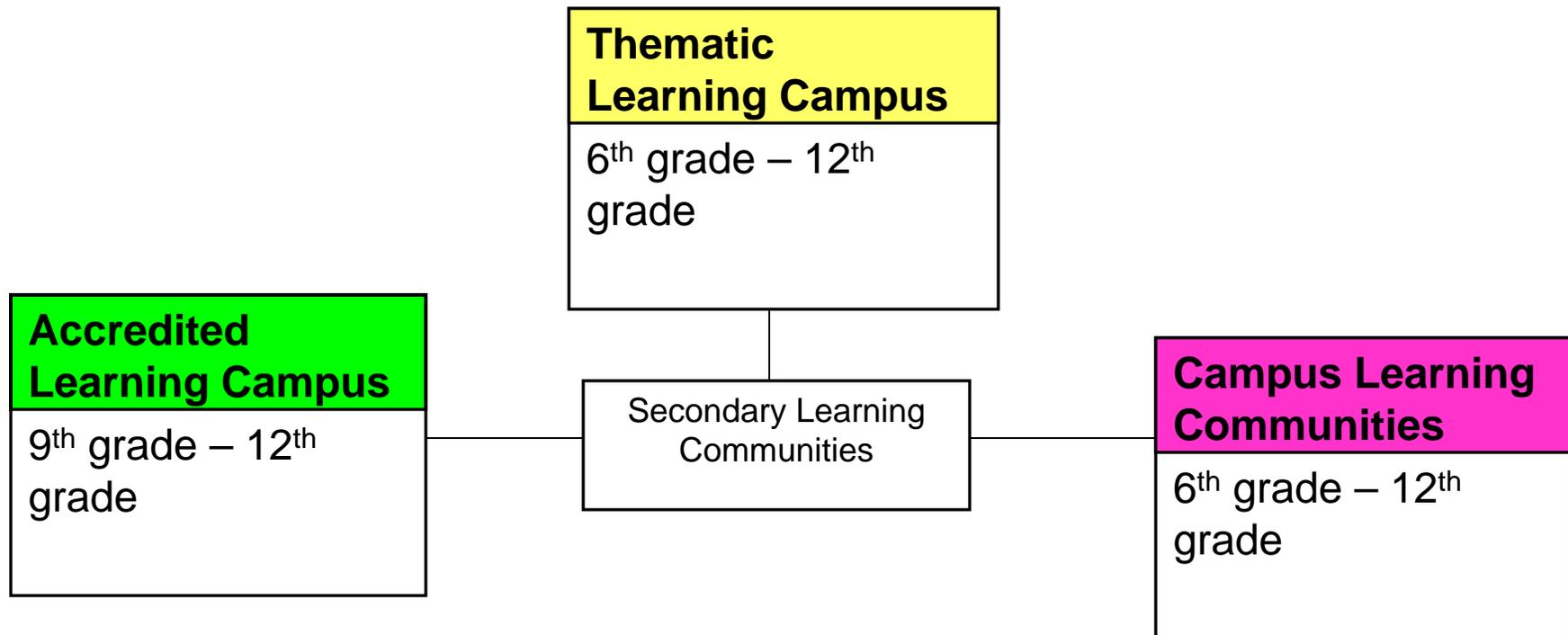>>Elie Wiesel

Community creates expectations.

- The development of a school community requires commitment and investment of all of its constituent parts.
  - Teachers set standards to which students are accountable.
    - "Look, Act and Speak as if you are ready to engage in the learning process."
    - Clear Academic Expectations aligned to standards
  - Students not only individually adhere to those standards, but also actively ensure that peers do not violate an explicit "trust" established by the collective.

Community is cultivated and nurtured.

- A community is the creation of a "space" within which both adults and students thrive and glean a sense of belonging and purpose.
  - Teachers set personal and professional standards to which they adhere.
  - Teachers are invested in the growth of students.
  - Counselors engage in college planning and preparation beginning in the 6th Grade
  - Parents and teachers partner with one another to develop a web of support to ensure student success.
    - Parents develop and review "personal education plans" with teachers and counselors at the 6th, 8th and 10th grades.
  - Administrators, both central office and building level, dedicate resources to support the school community, in general, and each classroom, in particular.

Paradigm Shift: Secondary Learning Communities will serve students in three campus configurations

Thematic Learning Campus

6th grade – 12th grade

Accredited Learning Campus

9th grade – 12th grade

Secondary Learning Communities

Campus Learning Communities

6th grade – 12th grade

The **Thematic Learning Campus (TLC)** provides a highly focused education.

Pittsburgh Science and Technology-TLC is an example of a thematic learning community. All students in the TLC will be chosen through a lottery to ensure proper representation from all segments of the Pittsburgh community.

Each will begin with a 6th – 8th grade cohort and what has traditionally been a 9th grade class. The student body will grow each year until it graduates its first class in 2012.

Each TLC will substantively partner with a university, college, or organization to implement an educational program for 400-600 students.

The **Campus Learning Communities (CLC)** also provides the opportunity to focus learning
CLCs will be located throughout the city on existing high school and middle school campuses.
Each CLC will offer a set of academic concentrations or small learning communities. Moreover, at least one on-campus CTE program would exist on each campus as an option for students to choose as their area of concentration.
The concentrations and concentration courses on each campus will be designed in consultation with a University and/or Community Partner and taught by PFT teachers who have undergone specialized training to teach the course or in some cases by adjunct faculty.

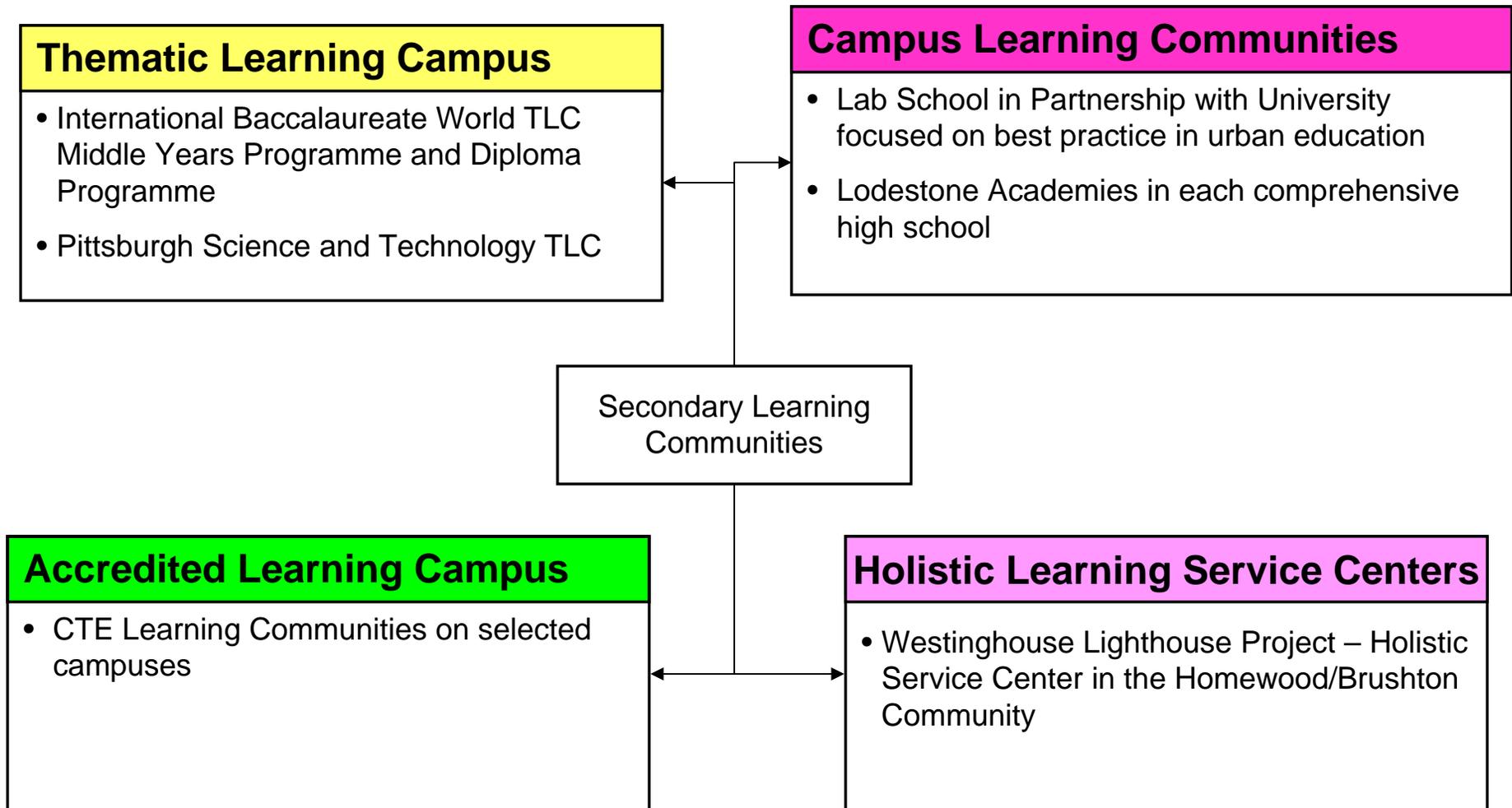| The **Accredited Learning Campus (ALC)** provides certification and/or Associate's Degrees opportunities |
| --- |
| On each campus, career and technical will have a significant presence. One school located near a CCAC campus will adopt the Middle College Model. |
| Emphasis on rigor and advanced coursework including certification/accreditation in trades and technical professions |
| Flexible mechanisms for promotion insure that all students graduate having selected a specific postsecondary opportunity |

The **Holistic Learning Service Centers** provide support for families of PPS students
Located on three regional campuses where the surrounding communities have significant challenges which impede the academic performance of children.
Designed to promote healthy and stable families that will in-turn support PPS children.
Service in all areas, including counseling, housing, health, and other subsistence needs

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The Office of High School Reform is currently planning the following learning communities.

Thematic Learning Campus

- International Baccalaureate World TLC Middle Years Programme and Diploma Programme

- Pittsburgh Science and Technology TLC

Campus Learning Communities

- Lab School in Partnership with University focused on best practice in urban education

- Lodestone Academies in each comprehensive high school

Secondary Learning Communities

Accredited Learning Campus

- CTE Learning Communities on selected campuses

Holistic Learning Service Centers

- Westinghouse Lighthouse Project – Holistic Service Center in the Homewood/Brushton Community

A significant body of research supports the proposed academic model for Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Educational Theory	**Aims of Education, Rhythms of Education, Alfred North Whitehead**	In *Aims of Education* Whitehead cautions against "teaching small parts of a large number of subjects". Instead he advocates teaching fewer subjects very thoroughly, and doing so in a way that explores their connections with other subjects.
Policy Research	**Meeting Five Critical Challenges of High School Reform, Janet Quint**	Small learning communities can increase attendance and reduce dropout rates. Faculty advisory systems can "give students a sense that there is an adult in the school looking out for their well-being".
Cognitive Development	**Taking Science to School, Duschl et. al.**	Conclusions include that: "What children are capable of at a particular age is the result of a complex interplay among maturation, experience, and instruction. What is developmentally appropriate is not a simple function of age and grade, but rather is largely contingent upon opportunities to learn."

Research supports the integration of middle schools into K-8 and 6-12 configurations

Title	Author	Conclusions
Breaking Ranks in Middle Schools	National Association of Secondary School Principals	Nine Cornerstone Strategies of Implementation which center around rigorous instruction, teacher empowerment and planning, and student advisory. Schools will create small units in which anonymity is banished.
Focus on the Wonder Years: Challenges Facing the American Middle School	Jaana Juvonen Vi-Nhuan Le Tessa Kaganoff Catherine Augustine Louay Constant RAND Education, 2004	Recommends that districts "consider alternatives to the classic 6-8 grade middle school configuration that would reduce multiple transitions for students and allow schools to better align their goals across grades K-12." page 19

Practice supports the consolidation of the middle school into K-8 and 6-12 configurations

School	Location	Conclusions
University Park	Worcester, MA	Middle grade inclusion provides time for sufficient scaffolding to higher order thinking. A connection to college is created upon their entry into the middle years.
Rochester Public Schools	Rochester, NY	Nearly all schools moved to a K-6, 7-12 configuration. Test scores and academic achievement rose within two years, district-wide.
Lionel Wilson Preparatory Academy	Oakland, CA	6-12 Model Charter School which increased standardized state test scores by 25% within four years of its inception
Frederick Douglas Academy	Harlem, NY	6-12 Model which utilizes high stakes NY Regents exam in the 8th Grade as the standard of achievement in math, U.S. History, and ELA A connection to college is created upon their entry into the middle years.

Pittsburgh Public Schools:
The New Paradigm

- Pittsburgh Public Schools will be composed of four learning community models:
  - Early Childhood Centers
  - Elementary Learning Communities
  - Intermediate Learning Communities
  - Secondary Learning Communities

- Secondary Learning Communities will have the following configurations:
  - Thematic Learning Campuses
  - Campus Learning Communities
  - Accredited Learning Campuses

- Secondary Learning Communities will emphasize the following constructs:
  - PPS Secondary School framework will include what has traditionally been termed 6th Grade.
  - Learning is a lifelong process, not a temporal outcome.
  - Learning is personal to the individual student.
  - A school building does not define a community; rather an educational community is firmly rooted within meaningful relationships among its stakeholders.

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