



School Portfolio Community Engagement Report

August 13th, 2024

Agenda

1

Context and Understanding: Why is the district doing this work now? Why is Community engagement important to the process?

2

Community Engagement Approach: What were the steps we took?

3

Community Themes and Insights: What did we hear? What did we learn?

4

Next Steps: What will happen next? What are the next steps in the process?

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**PPS was built long ago, now
is the time to build for the
future**

“20,000 students deserve better from us”
– Community Advisory Member

“We need to stop just talking about addressing equity, declining enrollment, and being innovative. It's time to actually start doing it.” – Community Advisory Member

“We have to address our reality of declining enrollment and an unsustainable budget. This is an exciting opportunity to do that while also strengthening the opportunities and experiences that we provide to our students...” – Community Advisory Member

At the beginning of this process, we started with a series of key questions essential to aligning the school portfolio to a vision for building better PPS schools for the future.

Shared Goal: Advance the community's collective vision for equity, excellence and efficiency through changes to the design of PPS' school portfolio



Key Question 1: What are the key student experiences and priorities that the larger school community wants to ensure all students have in PPS schools?

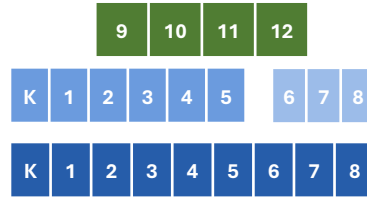


Key Question 2: What changes in the PPS school portfolio will provide more opportunities, resources, and access for PPS students in district schools?

We shared that our definition for portfolio design includes several different components



Number & Size of Schools



Grade Configurations



School & Program Types



Locations



Transportation



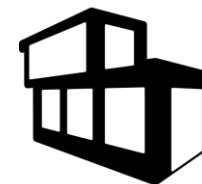
Feeder Patterns & Attendance Zones



Enrollment & Admissions Policies



Connection to Community Resources



School Amenities

Data and community engagement are a vital tool to understanding PPS past and current student experiences as well as understanding a vision for future PPS schools.

“All middle schools should offer Algebra. It is foundational for STEM and preparing students for their chosen future.”
- Town Hall Attendee

“Foreign languages in addition to regular academics is what takes a students to the next level in terms of being a well-rounded global citizen.”
- Town Hall Attendee

Current Course Offerings:

- 10% of students in grades 6-8 took an Algebra course in the 2023-24 school year.

Current Course Offerings:

- 18% of students in grades 6-8 took a World Language course in the 2023-24 school year.

It was essential that input be collected from a wide range of community members and stakeholders to properly inform the planning process and vision for PPS schools.



The diverse knowledge and expertise of each stakeholder group provide unique insights for planning, vision development, and implementation.

Stage 1-2 Engagement
June and July
(Gather Feedback & Set the Direction)



Secondary Students/Alumni



Families/Parents/Guardians



School Leaders and Staff



Community Members/Partners

Stage 3 Engagement
August and September
(Adapt and Refine For the Future)

All Stage 1-2 stakeholders and...



Elementary Students



Funders/Philanthropic Community



Business/Chamber/Industry



University/City/Government

Our work is to **define and codify a vision** for building an improved student experience in PPS schools.



PPS must create a school portfolio for PPS students that:



Provides diverse course offerings, pathways & programs

at schools across the district in every area of the city

01



Provides programming opportunities

within neighborhood and magnet schools.

02



Creates more equitable access to schools and programs for all students

03



Targets investments and resources to improve the learning experience and learning environments for all students

04

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Community engagement includes a multi-faceted approach to gather feedback from staff, students, parents, and community members.



At the beginning of our work with PPS, we shared the following objectives for stakeholder engagement:



Build authentic staff and community engagement focused on building the **collective vision for designing district schools for the future**



Gather input and feedback regarding school designs and school experiences that would enable students to excel and thrive in PPS



Engage in collaborative discussions needed for alignment integration to create the vision and the work associated with portfolio design

ERS and PPS outlined a multi-faceted approach to share information and gather feedback across the school district community.



In July 2024,
a detailed stakeholder engagement plan was shared with the
PPS board for the first major phase of engagement.



The plan outlined an engagement action plan for each major
stakeholder group within the PPS district.

Community engagement serves as a central piece to designing and building schools for the future. Gathering feedback and input are essential for each major phase of work.

May-July 2024

Phase 1



Gather Feedback & Set the Direction

Host community conversations to gather feedback and information regarding priorities for the future.

June-July 2024

Phase 2



Plan for the Future

Utilize quantitative and qualitative data (interviews, community feedback, survey, etc.) to inform draft scenarios and initial proposal.

August 2024-TBD

Phase 3



Adapt and Refine For the Future

Gather feedback from school district stakeholders and community on the initial proposal and adjust to refine the plans for board review.

Dates: TBD

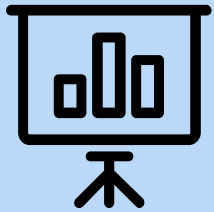
Phase 4



Implement and Build

Implement transition plans for new school models and/or build schools in collaboration with the community.

We utilized a variety of different methods to gather feedback and information across PPS. Each source provided a rich understanding of the district.



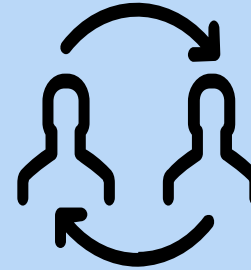
Surveys



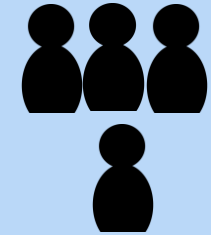
**Community
Townhalls &
Conversations**



**Document
Reviews**







**Interviews,
Meetings, &
Focus Groups**







**Student
Engagement**

Our process coming into Phase 1, as well as gathering important data from a variety of internal and external stakeholders across the district, included a variety of methods, including a landscape assessment to understand community needs and staff

Each engagement provided an opportunity to gather insight and understanding from stakeholder groups in the district.

Engagement Type 	Data Points 	Engagement Lead 	Notes 
Teacher and Staff Survey	476	ERS	38 of 50 traditional schools represented by at least 1 respondent.
Family & Community Engagement Survey	746	ERS	Survey was distributed via the PPS website and postcards.
Secondary Student Survey	341 (MS) 362 (HS)	ERS	13/23 schools with grades 6-8 and 9/9 schools with grades 9-12 represented by at least one respondent.
Assistant Principal Meeting Poll	11	ERS	Administered through Poll Everywhere.
Principal Meeting Poll	34	ERS	Administered through Poll Everywhere.
School Leader Survey	17	ERS	School leader respondents represented all board member districts. Optional follow-up survey to Poll Everywhere.
Let's Talk	13	PPS	ERS added 10 questions related to Staff Town Hall and 3 questions related to the Plan.
Parent Engagement Survey	Question 1: 2978 Question 2: 2999 Question 3: 2908	PPS	ERS provided 3 questions related to the Plan.

Secondary students participated in student focus groups and student surveys to share priorities.

Engagement Type 	Data Points 	Engagement Lead 	Notes 
Board Member Town Hall	1,700 questions and comments gathered.	ERS	11 sessions (including one virtual) across all nine board zones.
Advisory Committee	35+ across both sessions.	ERS	6/25 (in-person @ Central Office) 7/15 (virtual)
Principal and Assistant Principal Meetings	30+ across both sessions.	ERS	6/25 (in-person) 6/27 (in-person) 7/18 (virtual)
Interview with Central Office Leadership and Staff	15 interviews	ERS	Interviews conducted both in-person and virtually. Interviewees span across Athletics, CTE, Early Childhood, ESL, Facilities, Magnet programming, Performance and Management, School Performance, School Safety, Special Education, Student Support Services, Talent Management, and Transportation.
Student Focus Groups	14 Focus Groups	PPS Students	High School: Perry, Allderdice, Obama, Westinghouse (middle school students also), Brashear. Middle School : Allegheny 6-8, King , Colfax, Morrow Greenfield, Sterrett, Brashear, Langley, Classical (PCA), Schiller.



PPS leadership supported the community engagement efforts by executing a comprehensive plan to get the word out.

Engagement Platform	# of times	Engagement Lead	Notes
Peachjar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 Flyers • 2 news releases delivered electronically to more than 13,000 parent emails related to Town Halls 	PPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Member Town Hall flyers sent districtwide • Individual Board Member Town Hall Flyers sent to families of schools within each Board district.
Constant Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 constant contact email communications 	PPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Staff Town Hall June 4 – PPS Staff • 1 Superintendent Message – Staff, Families and Community (15,768/9,189 reads - 62.6 percent open rate) • 3 PPS Email to Staff, Families and Community • 8 PPS Weekly News to Staff Feature Town Halls
Paid Advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 Email blasts • Social Media/Digital Online Ads • 1 Radio Ad • 3 Print Ads • 1 KDKA In Your Neighborhood feature 	PPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Pittsburgh Courier – Email Blast and Print Ad • WAMO /Audacy Social Ads and Radio Ad • Pittsburgh Post-Gazette – 2 email blasts sent to 60,000 (Target: Parents with children ages 5 -15; Pittsburgh zip codes within the City Pittsburgh) • Facebook Ads • KDKA –TV IYN • Pittsburgh Urban Media social media outreach and e-blasts



A number of PPS tools were used to communicate the town hall events to families across the district.

Engagement Platform	# of times	Engagement Lead	Notes
Social Media/District App-Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 Facebook Events Created • PPS App notifications for each Town Hall • Web Slides • Quick Links • Videos 	PPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web Slides created for town halls and engagement survey • Quick Links created for facilities utilization plan and engagement survey. • Why Behind the What Video
Talking Points Communication Tool for Text Messages to Schools in the Board District / Robocalls to all families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 Talking Points Messages delivered in advance of each townhall. • 2 Robocalls 	PPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking Points messages translated in family home language
Postcard Mailing Home (Survey)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mailed to the homes of all families and staff 	PPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Included QR Code to Survey created by ERS

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School leaders...

How did we engage school leaders?

Engagement Type	Data Points
Principal Meeting Poll	34 respondents
Assistant Principal Meeting Poll	11 respondents
School Leader Survey	17 respondents
Principal and School Leader Meeting	30+ attendees across two sessions

“We need to ensure plans moving forward for ESL students. There are limited resources and supports for them currently and this is an increasing population.”

-Asst. Principal School Leader

What did we hear from school leaders?

- Challenges concerning having little resource flexibility as a school leader.
- Importance of mental health supports and concern over recent loss of mental health partnerships.
- Burden of staffing shortages on educators and school leaders, especially in small schools.
- Concern over ESL population growth rising faster than staffing.

Students...

How did we engage students?

Engagement Type	Data Points
Secondary Student Survey	341 middle school respondents 362 high school respondents
Secondary Student Focus Groups	14 groups High School: Allderdice, Brashear, Obama, Perry, Westinghouse Middle School: Allegheny, Brashear, Classical (PCA), Colfax, Greenfield, King, Langley, Morrow, Schiller, Sterrett, Westinghouse.

What did we hear from students?

- Appreciation of the variety of clubs and sports but desire for more variety that fit student interest.
- Concern over safety, with frequent fights and inadequate security being major issues.
- Requests for more diverse academic and career and technical education courses.

“CTE programs expand people’s capabilities. In some classes, we want to use machines more and get hands-on experiences.”

- Student Focus Group Participant

Source: Secondary Student Survey; Student Focus Group Notes

*Elementary students will have an opportunity to engage in Phase 3 engagement activities

Teachers and staff...

How did we engage teachers and staff?

Engagement Type	Data Points
Teacher and Staff Survey	476 respondents

“We rarely collaborate - we do required PDs that are very scripted, and we don't have time to plan together.”

- *Teacher and Staff Survey Respondent*

What did we hear from teachers and staff?

- Inconsistent access to targeted academic supports for students who need it.
- Inconsistent teacher collaboration or professional development opportunities.
- Overwhelming workload due to too many sections/courses to cover and teachers covering duties for vacant or absent support staff.

Advisory Committee...

How did we engage the Advisory Committee?

Engagement Type	Data Points
Advisory Committee Kickoff	22 Respondents
Advisory Committee #2	19 Respondents

What did we hear from the Advisory Committee?

- Focusing our plans on preparing PPS students for the future
- Taking action to ensure that students have more offerings and opportunities across all PPS Schools

“We can't have new schools in every neighborhood, but maybe with aggressive consolidation we can have new and excellent schools in each corner of the city. Is the city even ready for a radical re-thinking of our schools?”

- *Advisory Committee Member*


We collected thousands of comments and/or questions and identified key theme areas that denoted what stakeholders wanted for current and future PPS students.

A future where students have access to...


Great Teachers & Leaders with Sustainable Workloads




Individual Attention that Matches Need




Diverse Course Offerings, Pathways & Programs



Strong Partners in Special Education (PSE) & English as a Second Language (ESL) Supports



Robust Whole Child Supports




Safe & Secure Schools



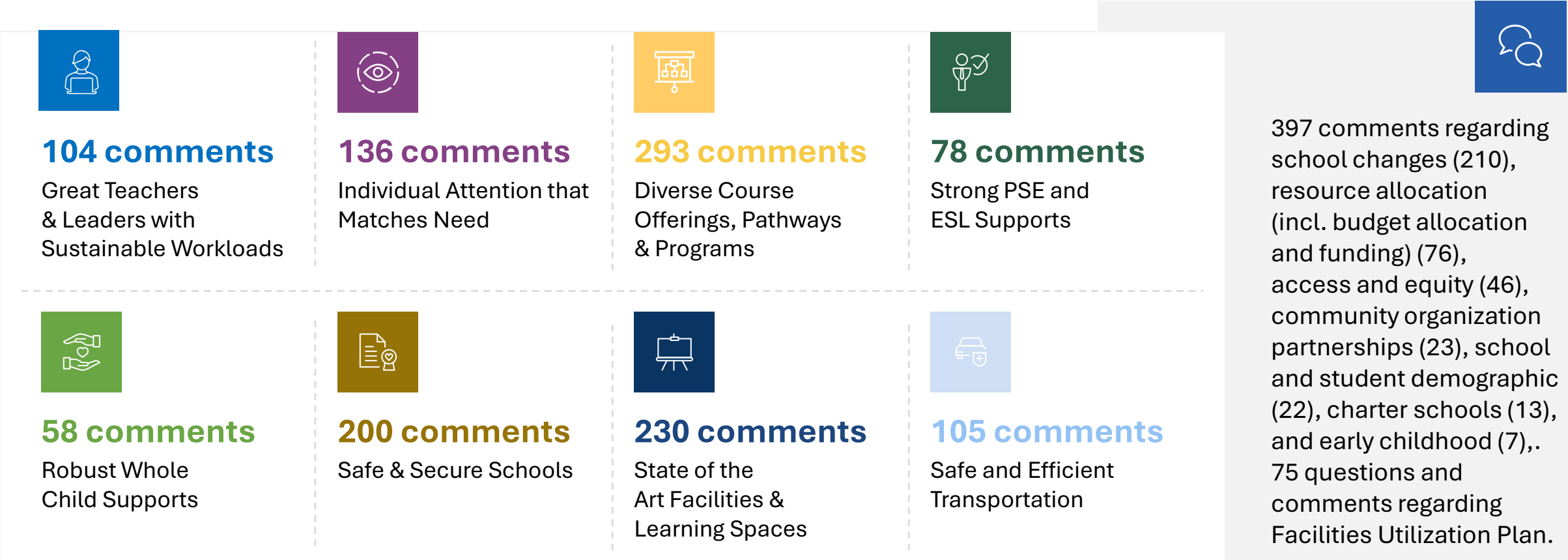
State of the Art Facilities & Learning Spaces



Safe & Efficient Transportation



Townhalls and community conversations provided an opportunity to understand the opportunities and the challenges across school communities.





Great Teachers & Leaders: A key component of the plan moving forward will need to prioritize staffing and supports for instructional staff.

Staffing

49 comments



- Need sufficient staffing across all schools to cover core and elective classes, support diverse student needs, and provide equitable learning opportunities. This includes full-time teachers for specials subjects, adequate support staff, and full funding for extracurriculars.

Teacher Supports and Collaboration

27 comments



- Prioritize high-quality instruction with well-prepared teachers, continuous professional development, tailored trainings, and mentorship opportunities. Ensure equal access to high-quality teachers and materials for all students.
- Ensure leadership stability, set high expectations, and foster a positive, culturally responsive learning environment.

- > The above topics represent the most mentioned within Great Teachers & Leaders.
- > The remaining comments covered retention and recruitment (26) communication between leadership and staff (2).



Individual Attention & Need: The diversity of needs across the PPS students and schools requires providing more access for all students and building more supports for families.

Class Size

64 comments



- Maintaining good student/teacher ratios, especially in special education and arts programs.
- Adjusting schools to match class size and resources, avoiding overcrowded classrooms to ensure individualized attention.

Student Supports

55 comments



- Ensuring equitable access to programs for all students, including gifted/AP and special education supports.
- Prioritizing the needs of the most at-risk students, including special education, ELL, and mental health services.
- Providing comprehensive support services, such as counselors, social workers, and paraprofessionals, to meet students' diverse needs.

- > The above topics represent the most mentioned under Individual Attention & Need.
- > The remaining comments covered individualized learning (10) and intervention supports (7).



Diverse Course Offerings, Pathways & Programs: Ensuring equitable access across neighborhood and magnets schools will be important for the future

Course Offerings

77 comments



- Ensure all students have access to a diverse range of programs, including art, music, PE, world languages, STEM, advanced courses, and vocational education (career and technical education), to provide a well-rounded education.
- Guarantee equitable access to these programs for all students, regardless of their community or school.

Magnet Programs

59 comments



- Ensure equitable resources for both neighborhood and magnet schools, which could reduce the need for magnets, especially at the elementary level. Consider expanding highly desired programs like Sci-Tech, CAPA, and Obama to meet demand and reduce waitlists.
- Address concerns about the lottery system for magnet schools by implementing higher standards for continued enrollment and making certain CTE programs more accessible as magnets.

- > The above topics represent the most mentioned under Diverse Course Offerings, Pathways, & Programs.
- > The remaining comments covered curriculum (46), gifted (31), afterschool (20), advanced courses (13), postsecondary (13), future ready courses (10), extracurriculars (9), STEM (7), CTE (6), related arts (2).



Diverse Course Offerings, Pathways & Programs : Ensure equitable access to gifted, AP, and special education programs within the school community

Access & Equity

46 comments



- Ensure equitable access to gifted, AP, and special education programs within the school community.
- Provide all students with access to the programs they need to succeed and thrive, including mental health services, sports, and arts.
- Guarantee that students from all subgroups, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, have the same opportunities as other students.
- Offer equal quality education and resources to students in low SES neighborhoods.



Strong PSE and ESL Supports: Given the continuous increase in ESL student enrollment, PPS will need to invest in more support, instructional spaces, and programs.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

33 comments



- Providing dedicated ESL support spaces and bilingual programs to integrate students and support those with IEPs.
- Supporting English learners who are moving into the city, including addressing their anxiety and keeping them engaged in school.

Whole Child Services (including Social Emotional Learning)

53 comments



- Increase social/emotional support in all schools to ensure special needs kids don't have to travel far from home for appropriate support.
- Hire counselors instead of more security, and ensure compassionate teachers follow and implement IEPs.
- Establish full-time social emotional services in all schools, addressing the loss of therapy providers.

> The remaining comments covered PSE (41) and ADA-accessibility (4).



Safe & Secure Schools: Creating learning environments that build positive cultures and address safety and security are a priority for the future.

School Culture

47 comments



- Foster caring relationships over multiple years to create a safe and supportive school culture.
- Create environments of belonging and well-being, focusing on making schools places where teachers and students want to be.
- Build strong community ties by integrating schools with their neighborhoods, promoting walkability, and hosting community events.

Building Security

37 comments



- Ensure safety inside schools to meet the needs of all students and retain families in the district.
- Implement better entry and visitor verification systems, such as double doors, sign-in procedures, and security personnel assigned to monitor entrances.
- Provide consistent and upgraded security measures across all schools, including buzzers, metal detectors, and camera systems.

> The above topics represent the most mentioned.

> The remaining comments covered general safety concerns (37), community (16), parent involvement (15), neighborhood safety (10), parking (1), start time (1).



Safe & Secure Schools: Creating learning environments that build positive cultures and address safety and security are a priority for the future.

Discipline

36 comments



- Implement consistent consequences for student behavior to show that rule-breaking is not acceptable.
- Enhance restorative practices instead of punitive measures to address the school-to-prison pipeline and create healing-centered spaces.

- > The above topics represent the most mentioned.
- > The remaining comments covered general safety concerns (37), community (16), parent involvement (15), neighborhood safety (10), parking (1), start time (1).



State of the Art Facilities & Learning Spaces: Given current state of buildings in the district, PPS will need to invest in renovations in order to build new learning spaces across the district.

HVAC

90 comments



- Ensure equitable access to AC to address the equity issue of relying on parents to provide cool spaces for remote learning.

Building Features and Amenities

84 comments



- Implement sustainable building practices.
- Ensure buildings have enough space for all programs, including dedicated spaces for art, music, PE, therapy, libraries, and other activities.

Technology

32 comments



- Provide more tech support for parents, families, and staff to ensure effective use of technology.
- Ensure comfortable learning environments with up-to-date technology to keep pace with the modern world.
- Provide equal access to technology across all schools, ensuring that even the neediest students have the tools they need.

- > The above topics represent the most mentioned.
- > The remaining comments covered school size (16) and historical building status (8).



Safe and Efficient Transportation: PPS will need to think about more accessible and reliable transportation for all students, regardless of location, to support equitable access to academics and special programs.

Transportation

105 comments



- Ensure accessible and reliable transportation for all students, regardless of location, to support equitable access to academics and special programs.
- Evaluate and adjust bus and walking routes carefully, considering Pittsburgh's complex geography and past issues with bus reliability.
- Provide adequate resources and address safety concerns for students traveling long distances to and from school, including the need for more crossing guards.
- Support walkable schools and community integration to foster a sense of place and school spirit.

School Changes: There were several comments related to school changes that helped to provide clarity and direction regarding design scenarios.

Enrollment Decline

45 comments

- Promote special programs in every school to avoid losing families to non-PPS programs. Ensuring access to college prep, gifted, and magnet programs is crucial to retaining families.

Feeder Alignment

53 comments

- Maintain clear and predictable feeder patterns that keep students with their peers and within their neighborhoods to foster community and continuity.
- Evaluate and adjust district and neighborhood boundaries to ensure equitable access to quality schools and reduce long travel times for students.

Grade Configuration

49 comments

- Create more consistency and clarity in grade configurations across the district.

School Consolidation

44 comments

- Preserve school communities and minimize disruptions to maintain established relationships and support networks among students, teachers, and families.
- Provide transition supports to help students and families adjust to changes, ensuring continuity in education and social connections.

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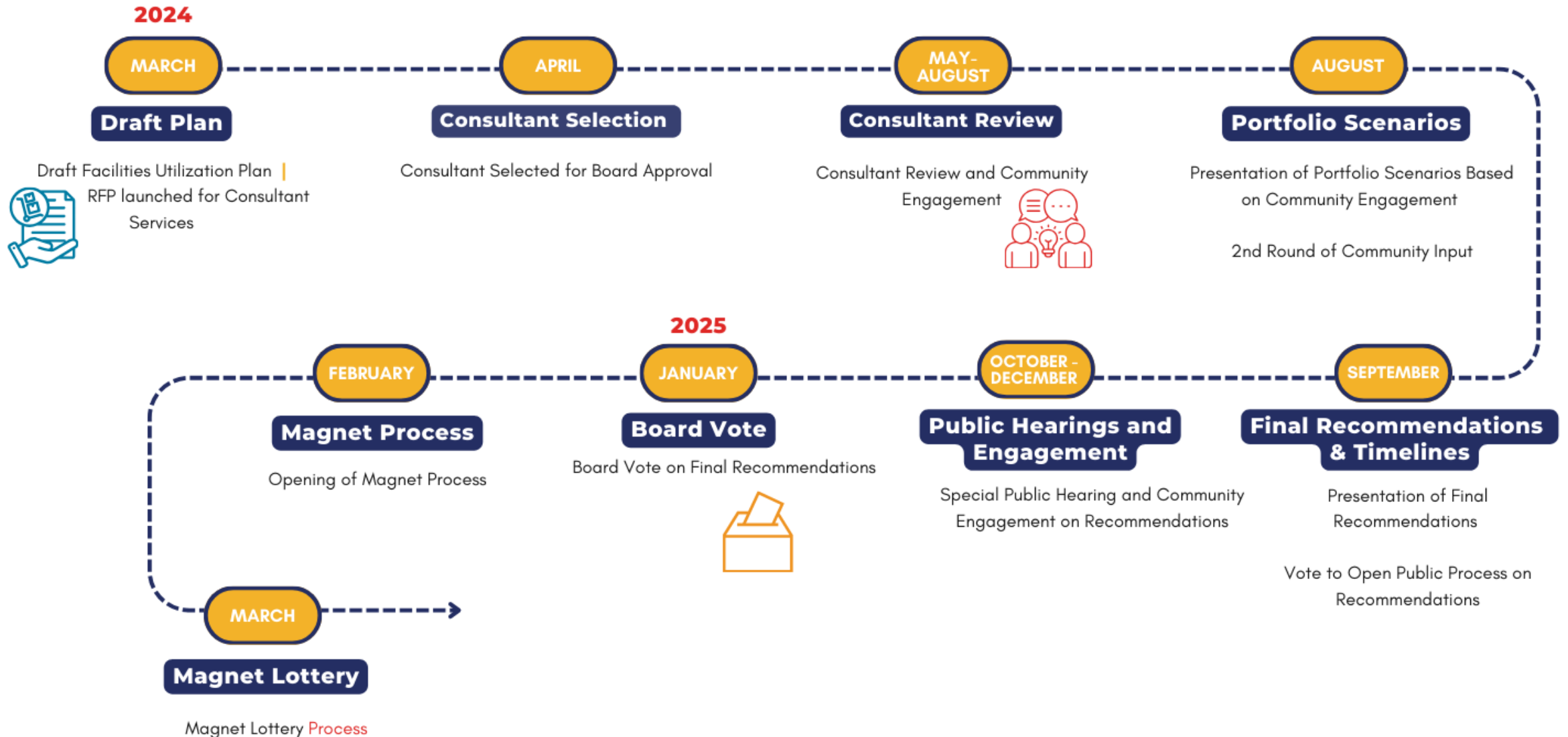
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We propose that PPS utilize August and early September to gather feedback from the staff and larger district community on the proposed district changes.



After the proposal is shared with the PPS Board of Education and the administration, it will be important for the community to provide feedback on the plan.



PPS BOE and administration will engage the community to inform the initial draft plans and scenario (s).

Meeting	Date
Board Education Committee Meeting	August 13
Design Team Session	August 14 or August 15
Pop-Up Days	August 15, August 20, August 23
School Leader Input Session	August 21
Regional Community Input Session	August 22
Public Hearing	August 26
School Portfolio Proposal/ Facilities Utilization Plan Webinar	August 27
Regional Community Input Session	September 4
Regional Community Input Session	September 5
Regional Community Input Session	September 3

In the next presentation, ERS will share the proposal for PPS school portfolio changes.

- The proposal for school changes was guided and informed by the stakeholder input and community engagement that took place over the last few months.
- The proposal illustrates what the ERS teams think it would take to reimagine PPS' portfolio in support of the community's collective priorities.
- It will be important for the district to continue to gather feedback from school district stakeholders and the community on the initial proposal and to adjust and refine the plans based on that feedback.