

#1

Donnese Tyler

Teacher/Staff/Parent

## Student Achievement Center Closing Letter

I am here once again to voice concerns about the closing of the Student Achievement Center. Although we all know it's a done deal, I am still here fighting for my students and the program. The students who attend SAC do not stand a chance of graduating within four years or at all if SAC closes and credit recovery moves to after school hours at their home school. Students will be faced with the many distractions that led them to SAC in the first place. We can not forget that SAC offers students their regular in-person, grade-level classes, in-person credit recovery classes, and online credit recovery classes. With the closing of SAC, they will no longer have these options. The only option PPS is now giving our students is offering them credit recovery after school.

Offering CR as period 10 is not effective.

Students do not attend.

Period 10 does not give students enough time to make up multiple classes in a short time period.

Believe it or not, students do not want to fail.

They are faced with many outside factors that can and do affect their academics.

Some parents aren't able to provide a stable environment.

Students are responsible for younger siblings.

Mental health issues may play a role.

Truancy for various reasons

Homelessness

Transient students

Students have to work. They cannot attend period 10 because they MUST work. It is not a choice for them, but with this plan, PPS is taking this choice away from our students and families. Students seeking alternative education will be forced to leave the district to attend other alternative education programs outside of the district or drop out of school all together.

What about the middle school students who attend SAC for the Overage Program? They no longer have the opportunity to take advantage of that program and to be placed in their correct grade level for their age. Instead, there will be much older students in classes with much younger students. This will then lead to students looking to graduate high school at the mature age of 21 or 22. We know students will not stay in a traditional high school setting at that age. Instead, they will drop out of high school. Is that what we want for our students?



Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Baxter School (Student Achievement Center) Hearing Testimonies  
July 21, 2025

Please do not give up on some of our most vulnerable students like so many others have, not only in this district, but in their lives in general. They deserve to be believed in, and they deserve to have the tools necessary to enable them to succeed. These tools may not look like the same tools that other students receive in a traditional school and traditional classroom setting, but that doesn't mean they don't deserve them as well. The students who attend SAC for alternative education can not afford for anyone else to give up on them, especially not their very own school district, but we all know nothing we say is going to change your decision. Your minds are made up! That was evident in the voting.

Thanks,

Donnese Tyler  
PPS/SAC Teacher

#2

Anne Farris

Parent

Hi, I'm Anne Farris, a PPS parent living in the North Side.

Pages 52-53 of the UPDATE Feasibility Report Spring 2025 is entitled "Reimagining Credit Recovery," the basis being that the credit recovery program moves to feeder schools. In terms of equity, this sounds reasonable. Current SAC students are not provided transportation, greatly limiting accessibility. What is not included in the report is how this will be implemented. What does this staffing look like? How does this program flex per feeder school based on the number of qualifying students each year? What classrooms, facilities, state-of-the-art tech and equipment will these students have access to? And importantly, what social emotional supports will be put into place to facilitate the connection to the school communities that have been lost previously due to students being transferred away from their home schools.

Does keeping students connected to their home schools promote a sense of belonging when they need specialized support, separate from the general population of the home school? I believe the stark reality that lack of planning for support staff and classroom space moves our students with exceptionalities back into the proverbial basement, where I remember the "special ed" classrooms were during my PPS elementary school years. And while in the same building, me and my classmates did not develop any connections with those students. I am not saying I don't believe this change could have positive outcomes, I am asking what the PLAN is to ensure students needing credit recovery will learn in equitable environments, both academically and socially. How has PPS learned to meet these challenges? What proven models of success are being used to make this program even more successful? Where will these students find connections to the mentors and community of students working toward similar goals when they are dispersed to their feeder schools? What supports are in place to guide these students who have not thrived in these same feeder schools, to build confidence to believe they are capable of success? Based on their own testimonies, it seems there are models of this at SAC but I have not heard that SAC administrators and staff have been consulted to shape this plan.

The "planned improvements": Stronger School Connections, Flexible Credit Recovery Options (individualized plans and accelerated coursework), and Expanded Alternative Education Pathways (strengthening alternative education programming to reduce student departures to external providers)



Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Baxter School (Student Achievement Center) Hearing Testimonies  
July 21, 2025

- these are ideas, not plans, and ones that require a significant increase in specialized staff in EVERY school. What staffing does the Future-Ready plan include to support this reimagined credit recovery program? Is this even a program, or is this another IEP checkbox?

Please show respect for the students, their caregivers, their educators, and their supports that they deserve when you vote to remove them from their current community and show the respect for your elected office and the community you represent by ensuring you fully understand the needs of this vulnerable population, that the superintendent has made it clear what the plan is to improve the quality of their experience, and that you believe in that vision before you vote to close this school.



Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Baxter School (Student Achievement Center) Hearing Testimonies  
July 21, 2025

#3

April Clisura

Parent/Other – School Bus Driver



Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Baxter School (Student Achievement Center) Hearing Testimonies  
July 21, 2025

#4

Julie Stewart

Teacher/Staff

Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Baxter School (Student Achievement Center) Hearing Testimonies  
July 21, 2025

#5

Valerie Webb-Allman

Valerie Webb-Allman

SAC Public Hearing Testimony

7/21/25

I'm going to give you a testimony to what my son's credit recovery experience was like at his home school so that you can see what other students with disabilities may experience with the closure of the program at SAC.

My son entered high school at the beginning of the pandemic. He is autistic, has several learning disabilities, one being a specific learning disability in written expression, and navigates physical health issues that all contribute to his barriers in learning. With everything that we all faced over those 4 years, I was not shocked at all that my son had failed several classes. He could have qualified to go to the Student Achievement Center, but we felt that he should stay in his home school environment so as to not force him through yet another transition and further impact his already precarious mental health. This being said, 10th period wasn't nearly enough time for him to successfully complete the missing courses and he relied heavily on my time and ability to serve as a sort of paraprofessional after school, every day.

Edgenuity is not built for students with IEP's. Period. Naturally, ELA courses were the biggest struggle and they were the ones he needed to make up the most. However, one of the semesters revolved around writing an essay about a time that he felt judged. One of the things my son's autism impacts is his understanding of these social emotional feelings. He may judge others, but he has never personally experienced the feeling of judgement from others. In addition, my son's specific learning disability severely impacted his ability to write. I talked to the teachers several times about my son's ability to actually participate and learn what he was supposed to be learning because his basic educational needs couldn't be met by this program or by the lack of time in a classroom setting. Together, we did our best to get him through it. But, there is no doubt that he did not learn what he was supposed to and he only learned to hate this

Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Baxter School (Student Achievement Center) Hearing Testimonies  
July 21, 2025

subject even more.

My son had the privilege of teachers that were willing to dedicate additional time and be flexible with him. He had the privilege of a college educated parent with the time and understanding to serve as a teacher/paraprofessional at home. So many students that go to SAC don't have that.

I want SAC to be in every school. However, we know that it isn't a reality on how this plan is written. Are these students going to be an afterthought over and over? If you want an example of what kids should be focused on the most for these upcoming transitions, these are the kids. If you close this school, their needs should be the metric on how success is measured. You are already limiting their ability to make up credits, taking the dedicated professionals that know how to reach these kids and spreading them to the winds and forcing them to stay in environments that they struggle to thrive in. If you don't want these kids to just drop out and go to Passport charter, where we will pay more for their transportation and education, you need to do this right. Please, make these kids the metric for success. Many of them have already been let down by adults that are supposed to support them. Don't be the last nail in their coffins. I strongly encourage you to go back to the March and April 2025 public hearings to listen to the testimonies of several teachers pleading for you to center the needs of their students. I have listed their names and speaker numbers below.

March 2025:

#2 Donnese Tyler

#4 Jamie Lynn Reesh

#44 Rachel Milliron

#46 Joshua Zelesnick

April 2025:

#11 Joshua Zelesnick (reading letters from students)

#49 Kathleen Accamando

Thank you.

Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Baxter School (Student Achievement Center) Hearing Testimonies  
July 21, 2025

#6

Lily Allman

Student

SAC Testimony

7/21/25

Closing SAC recklessly will harm students. You are trying to close this program without listening to staff or student input. And in this case, that is NOT something you should be doing, period. SAC helps students who need credit recovery or need help catching up with things they might have or did miss if they are also too old for their grade.(Example: 14 y/o in 7th grade) SAC also provides safe spaces for students and classrooms that aren't over capacity. No matter what you think, closing this program isn't feasible. There are no exceptions. If this FU plan were to be passed, so many current and future students would have their futures impacted, and not in a good way. If there is any credit they need to make up for multiple classes, many wouldn't be able to make up the credit, and therefore wouldn't be able to graduate. This program and the staff has helped so many students and I really, really hope it can continue to help these students, but that won't be possible if this plan is passed. The names listed below are staff from SAC who spoke at public hearings and I thought needed to be mentioned.

1. Donnese Tyler
2. Jamie Lynn Reesh
3. Rachel Milliron
4. Joshua Zelesnick (Two times)
5. Kathleen Accamando

These staff members have shown up and spoken up, so stop and listen to them if you won't listen to the students. If you actually listen to these staff members, maybe you guys could create a plan that could meet the needs of the students.



Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Baxter School (Student Achievement Center) Hearing Testimonies  
July 21, 2025

#7

Julionna Eleam

Parent



Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Baxter School (Student Achievement Center) Hearing Testimonies  
July 21, 2025



Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Baxter School (Student Achievement Center) Hearing Testimonies  
July 21, 2025



Pittsburgh Public Schools Public Baxter School (Student Achievement Center) Hearing Testimonies  
July 21, 2025