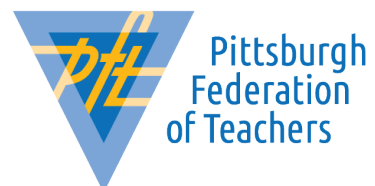




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School Safety and Beyond

Setting High Standards
for the Safety, Equity and
Social-Emotional Well-Being
of Pittsburgh Public Schools'
Students and Staff





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Executive Summary

School Safety and Beyond: Setting High Standards for the Safety, Equity and Social-Emotional Well-Being of Pittsburgh Public Schools' Students and Staff

Schools were never just a place to sit and learn math and literacy skills. Schools are at the center of a child and family's life, as well as the community and educators embracing them. We know that not all schools are equitable or provide a safe place for students to grow and develop in the way they need. The triple crisis we are facing of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability and systemic racism at every level has beamed a bright spotlight on this truth.

While Pittsburgh Public Schools has made great strides toward creating equitable schools, the quest for education justice in our schools is a never-ending process, and we must continue to push forward in this work to ensure that all students, regardless of their race, gender or neighborhood, are provided with a high-quality education that sets high aims for student and staff safety, ensures equity in resources and prioritizes social-emotional well-being.

This report, *School Safety and Beyond*, is intended to take a critical look at past efforts and identify proposals to strengthen and build upon. Supported by national and local research as well as Pittsburgh students and educator experiences, these solutions include:

1. Implementing a Robust, Citywide Pre-Arrest School Police Diversion Program
2. Strengthening and Expanding Restorative Justice Programs
3. Fulfilling the Promise of Community Schools
4. Increasing Mental Health Supports and Trauma Awareness
5. Expanding Specialized Instructional Support Personnel
6. Investing in Pittsburgh's Teacher Diversity Pipeline
7. Guaranteeing High-Quality Early Childhood Education for Every Student
8. Promoting Career and Technical Education

This report recognizes that Pittsburgh Public Schools has a good foundation to build upon for making schools more equitable for all students. Through acting on the recommendations made in this report and making the necessary investments to make these recommendations a reality, PPS can move from having a good foundation for making schools more equitable to having great and equitable schools that meet the needs of students. We look forward to working with all local and regional supporters of education to make that happen.

Key Recommendations:

1. Implementing a Robust, Citywide Pre-Arrest School Police Diversion Program

- i. Have the city of Pittsburgh and the Allegheny County executive convene a taskforce of relevant agencies and district, educator and nonprofit partners to structure and coordinate the logistical and staffing supports needed.
- ii. Provide PFT school police members the additional training, coordination and supports necessary for implementation.
- iii. Have the school police diversion taskforce set an urgent deadline for recommendations and implementations, preferably for the next school year.

2. Strengthening and Expanding Restorative Justice Programs

- i. Hire a restorative practices coordinator (RPC) for every school.
- ii. Provide initial and periodic training in the advancements of restorative practices for every RPC.
- iii. Provide a monthly school-based professional development session on restorative practices to school staff, facilitated by the RPC.
- iv. Provide a de-escalation room at every school.
- v. Appoint a district-union taskforce on restorative justice that will help support restorative justice implementation and gauge progress.
 1. With PPS-allocated funding, school communities submit proposals of their restorative justice plan for whole school community implementation and appropriate staffing and scheduling, starting with a revamping of restorative justice programs in at least 10 schools.
 2. This recommendation models the school buy-in necessary for the implementation of restorative justice with fidelity through a school-site restorative justice proposal team composed of a balance of educators, parents, students and administrators.

3. Fulfilling the Promise of Community Schools

- i. Reinvigorate the community school efforts in Pittsburgh with a focus on re-engaging the wider community and educators so that the PPS community school model lives up to its promise.
- ii. Consider a targeted expansion of the community schools model, beginning in neighborhoods most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iii. Provide dedicated time for community school site managers to report out at each staff meeting.
- iv. Develop and implement a post-high school graduation mentorship program for students entering college.

4. Increasing Mental Health Supports and Trauma Awareness

- i. Educate teachers and school staff fully on trauma-informed practices and the trauma-informed systems that are/will be in place.
- ii. Improve schools so that they function in a coordinated way across initiatives of restorative practices, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, discipline committees, the Student Assistance Program and referral systems.

- iii. Institute full- or part-time resiliency coaches/rooms that are available to educators.
- iv. Initiate a modest resiliency incentive awards budget at every school that is to be used for the health, welfare and well-being of staff in order to increase the positive working and learning environment of the school.

5. Expanding Specialized Instructional Support Personnel

- i. Improve the centralization of the district's Student Support Services Department to coordinate, evaluate, align and communicate mental health and trauma supports and resources to ensure equitable access and appropriate resources and tools to meet student needs.
- ii. Institute a district-union taskforce to determine the correct ratios of SISP to students, with a lens for equity and need in the district.
- iii. Define and differentiate the roles of SISP explicitly, including the work that overlaps.
- iv. Provide and protect the time needed for whole-staff trainings conducted by counselors and social workers.
- v. Create time in classrooms for counselors and social workers to help implement social and emotional learning.

6. Investing in Pittsburgh's Teacher Diversity Pipeline

- i. Increase the involvement of PFT in improving diversity in the teacher workforce. PFT is committed to finding the funds necessary to hire a teacher diversity organizer/director as part of the PFT staff whose primary function would be to:
 - 1. Recruit a more diverse teaching workforce by working directly with the Brashear Teaching Academy lead helping track these students through college and shepherd them back to the PPS district.
 - 2. Strategize on how to positively support members struggling with diversity sensitivity and tone.
 - 3. Work with the PFT Diversity Committee and the PFT African American Teacher Mentoring Program to promote and support diversity in the PFT teaching force.
 - 4. Work as a liaison with the city government as it expands its Equity Taskforce to include an education equity component.
- ii. Provide district support to the Brashear Teaching Academy through mentorships and advising services for student participants.
- iii. Increase the dual credit hours that students receive for partaking in the program from .5 a semester to 1.5 a semester.
- iv. Provide additional funding to the teaching academy program, and promote this successful model while looking for opportunities to expand geographically in PPS to offer closer options for students.
- v. Convene stakeholders to think together on current and future pathways for teacher diversity in Pittsburgh.

7. Guaranteeing High-Quality Early Childhood Education for Every Student

- i. Commit resources to ensure that high-quality early childhood education programs reach every child and family that needs it.
- ii. Commit resources to recruiting families into the program, with a focus on families that lack access to technology.
- iii. Make the transition from ECE to kindergarten seamless, from streamlining the double-step application process to ensuring progress notes are shared with kindergarten teachers.
- iv. Train ECE teachers in social-emotional learning so they can better serve the needs of students and families.
- v. Invest in extended-day wraparound services and programs at school sites to meet the needs of families.

8. Promoting Career and Technical Education

- i. Continue to evaluate opportunities to expand partnerships and align job and career opportunities, such as the one established with Allegheny Health Network.
- ii. Continue and evaluate ways to increase student exposure to partnerships with Pittsburgh-area labor unions and apprenticeships, such as through the successful Build On districtwide fairs.
- iii. Work collaboratively with stakeholders across the district to share available CTE options, beginning in middle schools.
- iv. Evaluate additional staffing needs for the district's CTE Department to ensure the best balance of internal and external engagement needs to best recruit and retain students and staff.



Introduction

Over the past decade, Pittsburgh Public Schools has made strides toward creating equitable schools. Yet, as we know, the quest for equitable schools is a never-ending process, and we must continue to push forward in this work to ensure that all students, regardless of their race, gender or neighborhood, are provided with a high-quality education that sets high aims for student and staff safety, ensures equity in resources and prioritizes social-emotional well-being.

Vast inequities exist in Pittsburgh and our nation that are being thrust into the spotlight due to the triple crisis we are facing of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability and systemic racism. It is critical that Pittsburgh Public Schools once again takes a closer look at the inequities and systemic injustices that exist in our school district and city, and takes the opportunity to determine what equitable, safe and joyful schools look like. If Black lives matter, this moment compels us to take action.

We are in an extraordinary moment in our city and in our country. A moment we must meet with bold solutions to big and complicated problems. This report is intended to take a critical look at past efforts to address student and school safety, equity and well-being; identify proposals to strengthen these efforts and build upon them; and highlight ways to invest in them if we have the political commitment to do so. Supported by national and local research as well as Pittsburgh students and educator experiences, these solutions include:

1. Implementing a Robust, Citywide Pre-Arrest School Police Diversion Program
2. Strengthening and Expanding Restorative Justice Programs
3. Fulfilling the Promise of Community Schools
4. Increasing Mental Health Supports and Trauma Awareness
5. Expanding Specialized Instructional Support Personnel
6. Investing in Pittsburgh's Teacher Diversity Pipeline
7. Guaranteeing High-Quality Early Childhood Education for Every Student
8. Promoting Career and Technical Education

As a union of educators, we share a commitment with parents and the community to making the lives of our students better. We've fought together for the creation and implementation of community schools with wraparound services. We know that we are most powerful when we work together. The words in this report become more powerful when educators, parents, district personnel, legislators, labor and the community collaborate and work together to make them real. We plan to engage our school communities in dialogue and action to make our shared goals a reality.

Pittsburgh Public Schools has a good foundation to build upon for making schools more equitable for all students. Through acting on the recommendations made in this report and making the necessary investments to make these recommendations a reality, PPS can move from having a good foundation for making schools more equitable to having great and equitable schools that meet the needs of students. We look forward to working with all local and regional supporters of education to make that happen.

Setting High Standards for the Safety, Equity and Social-Emotional Well-Being of Pittsburgh Students and Staff

I. Implementing a Robust, Citywide School Police Diversion Program

Why It Matters

While the number of behavioral incidents and arrests have decreased in Pittsburgh Public Schools in recent years, any school arrest and, by direct consequence, involvement in the criminal justice system by students is a failure; a failure not of an individual school, but of our society as a whole for collective non-intervention earlier. If it truly “takes a village to raise a child,” a school police pre-arrest diversion program that successfully stops the cycle of arrest, with wraparound services and support, would aspire to live up to these values.

Philadelphia implemented its Police School Diversion Program in 2014-15, a partnership between the Philadelphia Police Department, Philadelphia’s Department of Human Services and the School District of Philadelphia. It successfully tapped into a coalition of city agencies, school police, community partners, families and students. In its first year, arrests plummeted 54 percent. Behavioral incidents as a whole fell by 1,051 year over year.¹

As a partnership, the program works with school police to begin the diversions process, referring an incident to a diversion intake center. Within 72 hours, a social worker visits with the student and guardian to offer support and provide non-punitive options to help redirect behaviors and address the root cause. Options may include academic, social-emotional and mental health supports, among others

State of Police Diversion in Pittsburgh

Some community-based partner diversion programs exist in Pittsburgh, such as the successful Foundation of Hope program, though they function post-arrest. Moreover, the need for such programs is greater than one group may coordinate. Coordination of a city- or countywide program with the breadth of necessary diversion resources, such as mental health supports, mentorship and more, would require the city’s and Allegheny County’s weight behind bringing the relevant agencies together, as well as community partners, philanthropy, school police and educators, as was done in implementing the Philadelphia program.

Recommendations

1. Have the city of Pittsburgh and the Allegheny County executive convene a taskforce of relevant agencies and district, educator and nonprofit partners to structure and coordinate the logistical and staffing supports needed.
2. Provide PFT school police members the additional training, coordination and supports necessary for implementation.
3. Have the school police diversion taskforce set an urgent deadline for recommendations and implementations, preferably for the next school year.

We have a tremendous opportunity as a district to train our own police force to help support our vision as a district. Restorative practices are the tool we can use to get this done. They have always helped our kids in a caring, empathetic, and supportive way. Let’s help them help us carry out building that positive school culture that is part of our strategic plan! Remember we are All-In!

—Dorreen Allen, Learning Environment Specialist, Faison K-5



II. Strengthening and Expanding Restorative Justice Programs

Why It Matters

Restorative justice practices are “inclusive and non-punitive ways to respond to conflict and build community.”² Restorative practices replace harsh policies such as suspensions and expulsions by working with students and other stakeholders to address the causes behind the student’s negative behavior and implement strategies to help the student grow and learn more positive actions. Restorative practices help in fostering positive relationships between students and educators, improving school climate, supporting social and emotional learning, and improving open communication between students, parents and educators.³ When restorative practices are implemented, research shows that rates of suspensions decrease, school culture and climate improve, attendance rates increase, dropout rates decrease, academic performance improves, student engagement increases and graduation rates increase.⁴

While restorative practices have proven to be beneficial to students, punitive policies do not allow students to grow or learn from their mistakes, and instead support the school-to-prison pipeline. Students who receive suspensions or expulsions miss crucial instructional time, resulting in them falling behind academically and becoming isolated from school. When students do return to the classroom, they often feel lost and unable to keep up with what is being taught, sometimes resulting in them acting out or disrupting class, which can lead to further punitive disciplinary action. Students who are academically behind and isolated are also more likely to miss school and eventually drop out. Furthermore, punitive measures can be traumatizing to students and have severe negative effects on their psyche. When students are constantly being disciplined by punitive measures and are not receiving support to help them improve or get to the root of the problem, they may feel like no one cares, that adults are the enemy and that they are bad kids and incapable of accomplishing much in life.⁵

Zero-tolerance policies also disproportionately affect students of color and students with disabilities. According to data collected from the U.S. Government Accountability Office, 39 percent of students suspended from school are Black, despite the fact that Black students make up only 15.5 percent of students in the nation. Furthermore, the data also show that students with disabilities make up 25.9 percent of suspensions, while they represent only 13.7 percent of students. A research study that examined the effect of suspensions in Kentucky found that one-fifth of the Black-white achievement gap could be contributed to suspensions.⁶

With planning and whole school community’s involvement, these restorative justice programs have shown results. For example, it has changed the school climate and shown positive results at South Philadelphia High School. Through a “Teen Court” class, students learn about law and lead restorative justice conversations with their peers. The program is further buttressed through wraparound services, as the high school is a community school.

State of Restorative Practices in Pittsburgh

In October 2014, Pittsburgh Public Schools was awarded a \$3 million grant over three years from the Department of Justice through the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative. The grant was to be used to implement restorative practices in 22 randomly selected Pittsburgh public schools (See Appendix A). In order to do so, PPS adopted the International Institute for Restorative Practices’ Safer Safer Schools Whole-School Change program. The RAND Corporation then evaluated the effectiveness of the program during the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years, releasing its findings in the report, *Can Restorative Practices Improve School Climate and Curb Suspensions?: An Evaluation of the Impact of Restorative Practices in a Mid-Sized Urban School District*.⁷

The study found that through the implementation of restorative practices, the rate of suspensions decreased, particularly for female students, elementary school students, students from low-income families and Black students. However, the study also found that the restorative practices implemented in PPS did not result in improved academic outcomes, nor did it reduce the rate of suspensions for middle school students or for violent offenses.⁸

The district’s grant provided some evidence that restorative practices could make a difference in Pittsburgh, but once the program ended, so did the minimal supports. For restorative practices to work, a greater commitment is needed. Creating a sense of community in schools—where relationships are valued, individuals participate in their own accountability, trust is built and reconciliation replaces exclusion—requires resource investments and an ongoing commitment to restorative practices. The district’s attention and commitment to restorative practices has waned, squandering the potential for positive changes in school climate and culture. Creating a strong restorative justice program would entail a process in which the school community develops itself and ensures long-term investments.

Recommendations

1. Hire a restorative practices coordinator for every school.
2. Provide initial and periodic training in the advancements of restorative practices for every restorative practices coordinator.
3. Provide a monthly school-based professional development session on restorative practices to school staff, with a significant part of the facilitation done by the restorative practices coordinator.
4. Provide a restorative practices room at every school that serves as a de-escalation room for students who are disrupting learning and need to leave the classroom. (The restorative practices coordinator is often in this room.)
5. Appoint a district-union taskforce on restorative justice that will help support restorative justice implementation and gauge progress.
 - a. With PPS-allocated funding, school communities submit proposals of their restorative justice plan for whole school community implementation and appropriate staffing and scheduling, starting with a revamping of restorative justice programs in at least 10 schools.
 - b. This recommendation models the school buy-in necessary for the implementation of restorative justice with fidelity through a school-site restorative justice proposal team composed of a balance of educators, parents, students and administrators.

III. Fulfilling the Promise of Community Schools

Why It Matters

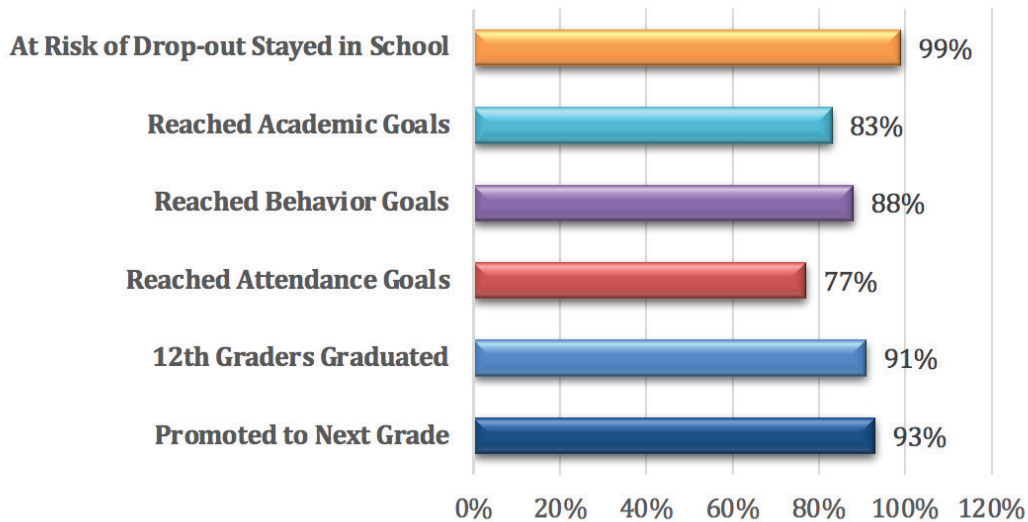
Community schools are places where teachers, families, community members and service providers can come together in coordinated, purposeful and results-focused partnerships. These schools have been established in urban, suburban and rural communities, with around 5,000 community schools currently reported nationwide.⁹ Community schools become the center of their communities by partnering with community organizations that provide an array of services to students, families and other community members, such as tutoring; community-based learning and other enrichment activities; medical services like primary, vision, dental, mental health and nutritional services; adult education classes; early childhood education; career and technical education; and restorative practices.

Effective community schools are governed at the local level. Decisions are made by consulting with all stakeholders, including teachers and other school personnel. Community schools work with students but also engage families and communities. Not only are families and communities the recipients of programs and support in these schools, they should also be seen as assets and become a fundamental part of the decision-making process in this strategy. When families and community members are a part of the process of planning and implementing a community school, they begin to have a deeper investment and ownership in the success of their own children and the school community. Research supports that the robust wraparound services that community schools provide often lead to higher rates of parent engagement, increased attendance, reduced disciplinary rates, improvement in grade progression and graduation rates, increased academic achievement and improvement in relationships among students and between students and adults in the school community.¹⁰

According to the Communities in Schools National Impact Report for the 2013-14 school year, students who were receiving Communities in Schools (CIS) intensive services greatly benefited, with 93 percent of students moving to the next grade, 91 percent of 12th-graders graduating, 77 percent of students reaching goals for attendance, 88 percent of students reaching their behavior goals, 83 percent of students reaching their academic goals and 99 percent of students identified as at risk for dropping out staying in school.¹¹

Additionally, a national study of CIS noted that 70 percent of the students who had low rates of attendance before CIS had improved attendance rates following the transition of their school to a community school.¹² The positive effects of community schools on students' outcomes can also be seen when looking at individual community schools. Philadelphia's Sayre High School had a graduation rate of 90 percent in its first year as a community school, compared with the citywide rate of 50 percent, and, due to its community school partnerships, was able to provide its graduates with more than \$50,000 in college scholarships.¹³ Not only are community schools beneficial to students, but they also benefit society as a whole. In 2013, the Finance Project published *Measuring Social Return on Investment for Community Schools*, which found that an investment of \$1 produced "a social return on investment of \$10.30 for an elementary school and \$14.80 for a middle school."¹⁴

Effects of CIS Intensive Services on Students



According to the Communities in Schools National Impact Report for the 2013-14 school year, students who were receiving Communities in Schools (CIS) intensive services greatly benefited, with 93 percent of students moving to the next grade, 91 percent of 12th-graders graduating, 77 percent of students reaching goals for attendance, 88 percent of students reaching their behavior goals, 83 percent of students reaching their academic goals and 99 percent of students identified as at risk for dropping out staying in school.

State of Community Schools in Pittsburgh

The success of community schools across the nation led to the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers and Great Public Schools-Pittsburgh locking arms in 2012 in order to make the community school model a reality for the entire Pittsburgh school district.

Since committing to the community school model, PFT's Community Schools Taskforce has made slow but steady progress in implementing the community school model. Nine Pittsburgh public schools have been designated as community schools and assigned community school facilitators (non-union members):

1. Arlington (preK-8)
2. Arsenal Elementary (preK-5)/Arsenal Middle (6-8) (1 facilitator)
3. Faison (K-5)
4. Langley (K-8)
5. Lincoln (preK-5)
6. Martin Luther King (preK-8)
7. University Prep at Milliones (6-12)
8. Westinghouse (6-12)

Reports from school-based facilitators at steering committees and from teachers support that PPS community schools are positively impacting the lives of students and their families in many ways.

The best part of working in a community school is the involvement from the kids, parents and staff. Our teachers are excited for the programs that are offered and impact the students' education. A basic need that often arises is for clothing for different situations. Our community school provides clothes to kids and even parents at times. This builds relationships with our parents to learn that there are resources for them to rely on within the building. Another example is free vision screenings from a partner organization. When the kids need glasses, they receive them for free. Our school takes in organizations from the community and houses them within our building. This again builds the relationships within the community and the schools. The kids and community members enjoy seeing each other in different locations. The teachers see improvements with kids when they know the community cares about them. Working in a community school brings together many different pieces of the educational puzzle when we all work together.

—Kathy Monti-Triewel, Elementary Math Teacher, Langley K-8



Additionally, there has been some strong community school leadership. The current community school coordinator has proven to be a positive leader who is willing to work cooperatively with outside agencies and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers. He often attends and instructs school facilitators to also attend PFT Community Schools Taskforce meetings. Furthermore, PFT members have provided some strong and stable community school leadership, particularly at Langley and Arsenal. PFT community school leaders presented at the 2019 TEACH Conference, and four attended the Institute for Educational Leadership's 20-day virtual community school conference in June 2020.

While many gains have been made by these community schools, the true potential of the community school model has still not been fully tapped into. Therefore, it is time to examine what improvements can be made in order to glean the full benefits from what community schools can achieve. One area in need of improvement is in regard to inclusion in the decision-making and school planning processes. In order to fully embrace the community school model and develop a strong and clear vision for moving forward, it is essential that educators and community members are part of those processes. Additionally, many educators have not been educated on the community school model, which results in them not taking full advantage of the resources and services that are or could be available to them through community schools.

Recommendations

1. Reexamine and, in some cases, reinvigorate the community school efforts in Pittsburgh, with a focus on reengaging the wider community and educators so that the PPS community school model lives up to its promise.
2. Consider a targeted expansion of the community schools model, beginning in neighborhoods most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Provide dedicated time for community school site managers to report out at each staff meeting.
4. Develop and implement a post-high school graduation mentorship program for students entering college. Through mentorship, students will have support to help address challenges that may arise, thus decreasing the rate of college dropouts. Such a program could begin as a pilot funded by a foundation, and then later included in the district's financial and systematic plans to create a long-term, sustainable program.

IV. Increasing Mental Health Supports and Trauma Awareness

Why It Matters

Students' experience with a single traumatic event or chronic exposure to traumatic events can impair learning and cause physical and emotional distress. A traumatic event involves a person, activity or circumstance that introduces significant power differential. Traumatic events can include, but are not limited to, abuse, family separation, gang violence, gun violence, homelessness, the lack of a caring adult buffer, a natural disaster, neglect, personal conflict, police aggression, poverty, systemic oppression (e.g., homophobia, racism, sexism) and war.¹⁵

"Approximately 1 in 4 children have a traumatic experience: an adverse event fundamentally overwhelms their coping capacity, challenges their idea of their own power/control/agency and incites profound questioning about their risk of threat."¹⁶ Following a traumatic event, students may experience anger and irritability, betrayal, extreme fear and the development of new fears, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, reduced functioning of the cerebrum (brain "shutdown"), sadness and sleep disturbance and nightmares. "If not interrupted, such as by a healing and protective relationship with a healthy adult, the stress response that arises from a traumatic experience can become toxic."¹⁷

When children experience toxic stress, this may lead to traumatic effects. Traumatic effects include communication challenges, a compromised hippocampus, cultural isolation, delinquent behaviors, an enlarged amygdala, flashbacks, hypervigilance, poor self-esteem, poor mental health, post-traumatic stress disorder, mood swings, paranoia, reduced concentration, social isolation, separation anxiety and reduced cognition related to learning.¹⁸

State of Mental Health and Trauma Awareness Supports

When Act 18 of 2019 was passed by the Pennsylvania General Assembly in June 2019, it amended the Public School Code of 1949. One change was adding a subsection under Section 1205.1 that states, "The professional education plan of each school entity shall include a minimum of one (1) hour of required training in trauma-informed approaches." Trauma-informed approaches was defined as: "Includes a school-wide approach to education and a classroom-based approach to student learning that recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, professional learning, procedures and

practices for the purposes of recognizing the presence and onset of trauma, resisting the reoccurrence of trauma and promoting resiliency tailored to a school entity's culture, climate and demographics and the community as a whole."¹⁹

While there is much discussion over the behavioral and mental health supports in place in PPS to support students, educators report that these supports are difficult to secure and are inconsistently provided.

Additionally, supports for educator mental health are lacking. While numerous districts have begun to focus on resiliency support for educators in order to increase teacher retention rates and improve their mental health, PPS has been lagging in providing the necessary supports for improved educator emotional health and resiliency.

The LifeSolutions Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to employees in the district. EAP provides numerous supports to educators to help them in handling life challenges, such as financial and legal consultation services; mental health services to help with stress, depression, anxiety and substance abuse; skill development trainings; and help locating child care and elder care services.²⁰ Currently, only 3 percent of PFT members take advantage of the program yearly. With the district's support in promoting LifeSolutions EAP, more educators can become aware of the program and be provided with the support they need to stay mentally, emotionally and physically healthy.

Recommendations

1. Educate teachers and school staff fully on trauma-informed practices and the trauma-informed systems that are/will be in place.
2. Institute full- or part-time resiliency coaches/rooms in the most challenging schools, and make them available to educators.
3. Improve schools so that they function in a coordinated way across initiatives of restorative practices, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, discipline committees, the Student Assistance Program and referral systems.
4. Initiate a modest resiliency incentive awards budget at every school that is to be used for the health, welfare and well-being of staff in order to increase the positive working and learning environment of the school.
5. Increase promotion of the Employee Assistance Program to educators in the district. Currently, many employees are not taking advantage of the program due to lack of awareness.

V. Expanding Specialized Instructional Support Personnel

Why It Matters

Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP) include, to name a few, counselors, social workers, nurses, psychologists, occupational and physical therapists and speech-language pathologists. SISP provide supports that help students overcome obstacles and are essential to ensuring that students are able to succeed in school. SISP support students' mental health challenges, help students work through trauma and deal with family issues, and provide medical and diagnostic services.²¹ The National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel identified seven roles that SISP perform in schools that are essential to student development:

1. *Supporting effective teaching and improved student learning and facilitating collaboration among school staff, families, and the community.*
2. *Providing a variety of prevention and intervention services in schools that promote effective classroom learning and teaching.*
3. *Working with teachers and administrators to develop a positive school climate, improving classroom management skills, providing behavioral interventions to reduce discipline infractions, improving school safety, and removing barriers to learning.*
4. *Providing educational programs and activities that support student learning and teaching, including consultation with teachers and families, assessments linked to instruction, individual and group counseling, problem-solving instruction, and remedial interventions.*
5. *Collaborating with teachers and school staff to ensure students receive high quality instruction responsive to the diverse and developmental needs of all students, creating a continuum of support services for all students, and providing various instructional strategies to facilitate learning in all classrooms.*
6. *Participating, as members of the school team, in professional development to ensure high quality learning.*
7. *Fostering collaboration not only between general and special education, but also between community and schools and schools and parents.*²²

State of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel

PPS must commit to the hiring of more SISP in order to support the healthy development of students. Every school has a nurse and a counselor or social worker. Larger schools have multiple SISP, while smaller schools may share SISP between schools. Currently, the district has 20 psychologists, 46 social workers, 70 counselors (including transition counselors and career and technical education counselors) and 61 nurses providing services in all of PPS as well as more than 40 private and parochial schools. There are 54 PPS schools educating approximately 23,000 students.

The roles of SISP are not made explicit, resulting in SISP being utilized for tasks outside their training or for only specific tasks, thus limiting their ability to provide vital services to students. For example, psychologists are most utilized to test students for special education services and are severely limited in the time they are able to help students with depression, anxiety or other mental health areas.

Finally, at the school level, the role of student services needs to be integrated into the implementation of academic and social-emotional learning programs.

Recommendations

1. Improve the centralization of the district's Student Support Services Department to coordinate, evaluate, align and communicate mental health and trauma supports and resources to ensure equitable access and appropriate resources and tools to meet student needs.
2. Institute a district-union taskforce to determine the correct ratios of SISP to students, with a lens for equity and need in the district.²³
3. Empower the district's Student Support Services Department to coordinate services and work with schools to equitably determine staffing at schools.
4. Define and differentiate the roles of SISP explicitly, including the work that overlaps.
5. Provide and protect the time needed for whole-staff trainings conducted by counselors and social workers.
6. Create time in classrooms for counselors and social workers to help implement social and emotional learning.

VI. Investing in Pittsburgh's Teacher Diversity Pipeline

Why It Matters

All students benefit from a more diverse teaching force. Research indicates that students, educators and the public school system all benefit from students having the opportunity to learn from a wide array of perspectives represented by teachers from different backgrounds.

More specifically, teachers of color have a positive effect not only on students of color, but students of all backgrounds, providing academic, social and emotional benefits. The research bears out that nonwhite students are more likely to be prepared for the rigors of advanced courses and are more likely to graduate from high school when they have had at least one nonwhite teacher in their K-12 experience. Teachers of color are vital to the academic and social success of all students, yet according to the U.S. Department of Education's most recent Schools and Staffing Survey, they represent only 18 percent of public school teachers. The world students are growing up in is rich with diverse cultures and languages.²⁴ Their schools should also represent this diversity and seek to not only recruit a more diverse workforce but also develop an inclusive and sustainable environment.

State of Workforce Diversity in Pittsburgh

The Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers is funding a Para2Teacher program that helps paraprofessionals on their journey to becoming certified teachers in Pittsburgh Public Schools. In the first cohort, 22 individuals have been selected. They all possess a bachelor's degree, have gone through a rigorous selection process and have been accepted by either Carlow University or Point Park University. Following the completion of two years of coursework and student teaching, they will earn a master's degree and a Pennsylvania teaching certification, and will be given the opportunity to teach in PPS. The program can prove useful in increasing the diversity of the teacher workforce. In the first cohort, 16 of the 22 individuals (73 percent) are Black.

Additionally, Pittsburgh's Brashear Teaching Academy is a wonderful teaching program that has garnered attention from universities and districts across the country. The teaching academy is integral to increasing the diversity in the teacher workforce in PPS, as it provides encouragement, direction and support to students to pursue a career in teaching when they may not have considered it otherwise. The teaching academy has attracted many young PPS students into the teaching program, including numerous young Black men. PFT has signed a memorandum of understanding that allows graduates who

maintain good grades to return to the district for an ensured teaching position. The district and teachers union have proven to be strong supporters of the program. However, in order to continue to grow and improve the program, there must be additional steps taken to support students on their pathway to teacher certification. Currently, students in the academy are only receiving a .5 dual credit a semester instead of the 1.5 dual credits they should be receiving for their student teaching work, since it covers three of their courses. Also, college visits and summer camps for future teachers at universities have proven useful in helping prepare students to succeed in college, but support in connecting students to these opportunities is lacking.

Further, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers provides the African American Teacher Mentoring Program to PFT members. The program recruits and mentors young African American teachers in order to help them feel more connected to the district and retain them as teachers. The program pairs newer teachers with more seasoned teachers in order to help provide them with support and guidance to grow as educators. The program also provides numerous membership activities and events to members. Such events include Jazz on the Patio, which allows newer and seasoned teachers to connect, a line dancing event and educational book and movie clubs. While the program is geared toward African American teachers, teachers of all races are invited to participate and take part in the program.

The mission of the African American Teacher Mentoring Program (AATMP) is to recruit, retain and support all teachers, with a particular focus on African American teachers. According to the Albert Shanker Institute, in the 2003-04 school year, 7.9 percent of teachers were African American. Eight years later, they made up just 6.8 percent of the teaching force, a decrease of 26,000 teachers. From 2002 to 2012, the number of African American teachers declined at rates ranging from 15 percent in New York to 62 percent in New Orleans. Minority teachers have been leaving the profession at a rate higher than other teachers. The main reasons cited are teaching conditions, lack of voice in decision making and lack of autonomy. In the meantime, across Pennsylvania and nationwide, a severe decline in students entering teacher education programs has threatened to derail our efforts to support students and grow the profession. Our role as PFT leaders then—and my particular work as a co-chair of the PFT AATMP—has come into sharper focus. Improving teaching and learning conditions and amplifying teacher voice has remained at the forefront of PFT objectives throughout my 25-year career. As a union, we are duty-bound to do our part to assist the PFT AATMP in its mission. Supporting and retaining all teachers, with a particular focus on our African American teacher force, must guide our work going forward.

—Rob Mitchell, Spanish-Language Teacher, Pittsburgh Classical Academy



Finally, PPS staff and faculty are required to attend the Equity Department's two-day Courageous Conversations professional development experience in order to develop a greater awareness of how race impacts students' experiences. However, following this professional development, there has been an unfortunate lack of follow-up or support in incorporating that newfound knowledge into the classroom.

As presented above, PPS has multiple programs in place that can lead to increasing the level of teacher diversity in the district, but these programs must be properly invested in and provided with sustained and continuous support in order to grow and for there to be

positive change in workforce diversity at significant rates. This work does not have to be done by PPS alone though, as the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers believes in collaboration on every front and commits to being a continued partner in the development of a more diverse teacher workforce.

Recommendations

1. Increase the involvement of PFT in improving diversity in the teacher workforce. PFT is committed to finding the funds necessary to hire a teacher diversity organizer/director as part of the PFT staff whose primary function would be to:
 - a. Recruit a more diverse teaching workforce by working directly with the Brashear Teaching Academy lead and helping track these students through college and shepherd them back to the PPS district. Recruitment efforts should also be made through PFT teacher leaders, PFT executive board members and Educational Research & Dissemination candidates.
 - b. Strategize on how to positively support members struggling with diversity sensitivity and tone.
 - c. Work with the PFT Diversity Committee and the PFT African American Teacher Mentoring Program to promote and support diversity in the PFT teaching force.
 - d. Work as a liaison with the city government as it expands its Equity Taskforce to include an education equity component.
2. Provide district support to the Brashear Teaching Academy through mentorships and advising services for student participants. At least two district personnel should be actively involved in the teaching academy in order to ensure students are prepared to be successful upon graduating from the academy and entering the classroom as teachers.
3. Increase the dual credit hours that students receive for partaking in the program from .5 a semester to 1.5 a semester.
4. Provide additional funding to the teaching academy program. The Brashear Teaching Academy has proven to be successful, so additional funding should be diverted to the program in order to increase awareness of the program and expand it to other schools in a different geographical location. (e.g., east and west teaching academies).
5. Convene stakeholders to think together on current and future pathways for teacher diversity in Pittsburgh.

VII. Guaranteeing High-Quality Early Childhood Education for Every Student

Why It Matters

Research has consistently supported that there are significant short-term and long-term positive effects of high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs. Positive outcomes of ECE programs include, to name a few, increased academic and social-emotional learning, a narrowing in the achievement gap between students of color and their white peers, a reduction in dropout and crime rates, increased graduation rates, improved physical health, preparedness for future schooling and future financial and social success.²⁵

Children's early years are the most important time for brain development. Research studies—such as the Abecedarian Project, the Chicago Longitudinal Study, the Perry Preschool Study and the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study—support that when students receive a high-quality early childhood education, they are more likely to be successful as students and citizens, especially when students are from low-income families.²⁶ Unfortunately, the very students who are shown to benefit the most are the ones least likely to attend high-quality early childhood education programs, due to the lack of affordability.²⁷

Increasing the number of children attending high-quality early childhood education programs by creating greater access to affordable high-quality programs also benefits society as a whole. In 2015, the Council of Economic Advisers found that "expanding early learning initiatives would provide benefits to society of roughly \$8.60 for every \$1 spent, about half of which comes from increased earnings for children when they grow up."²⁸ Additionally, it found that:

- *High-quality early education for all would narrow the achievement gap. Dozens of preschool programs have been rigorously examined since the 1960s.*
- *Early childhood education can boost children's earnings later in life.*
- *Earnings gains from increased enrollment in early childhood education would provide benefits that outweigh the costs of the program.*
- *High-quality, affordable child care can help parents balance work and family responsibilities.*
- *Early childhood education can lower involvement with the criminal justice system.*
- *Early childhood interventions can reduce the need for remedial education.²⁹*

High-quality early childhood education programs provide students with supportive and nurturing relationships with educators and enriching learning opportunities that help them prepare for future schooling. Students are provided with opportunities to develop language and literacy skills; positive behaviors and social skills; cognitive skills; listening and communication skills; good nutrition and hygiene and healthy habits; positive relationships with adults; and the ability to follow directions. The guidance and facilitation in developing these skills prepare students for entering formal education. "Young children are capable learners, and having these types of educational experiences during their preschool years makes it possible for them to learn at a faster rate, become better readers and, consequently, become better students."³⁰

State of Early Childhood Programs in Pittsburgh

The district's ECE program is built around the federal Head Start program. The Office of Head Start describes its program as "designed to help break the cycle of poverty, providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs."³¹ The district's ECE program gets high marks, but it is not reaching all the families and children it should. In the 2015-16 academic year, there were 340 students on the waitlist for ECE programs, and this number was close to 500 in previous years. The number of children from low-income families enrolled in early childhood education programs is strikingly low, and even lower when looking specifically at students of color. Ultimately, one-fourth of pre-K-aged children in Pittsburgh lack access to ECE programs.³²

Technology has proven to be a growing barrier to reaching children of low-income families. Information and applications for ECE programs are provided via technology, but many families do not have access to the internet or tech devices. It is crucial that in-person contact is made with families in order to ensure that the most vulnerable children are able to access and enroll in high-quality early childhood education services.



I have been an early childhood teacher at Pittsburgh Public Schools for 12 years. I believe that our early childhood programs provide a high-quality preschool education. We help children develop appropriate literacy, math, critical-thinking and social skills, and our curriculum focuses on promoting STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) learning. We also provide screenings and services that focus on the well-being of the whole child, complete assessments throughout the school year, offer several parent-teacher conferences or home visits and ensure kindergarten readiness. In addition, there are educational field trips and various visitors throughout the school year. All of the teachers are certified and highly qualified, and all teaching assistants have training and/or certification. Early childhood has become a passion of mine, and I cannot imagine teaching any other age group.

—Molly Juliussen, Pre-K Educator



Recommendations

1. Commit resources to ensure that high-quality early childhood education programs reach every child and family that needs it.
2. Commit resources (e.g., advertising and staff) to recruiting families and their 3- and 4-year-old children into the program. The district's ECE program needs to meet families where they are—both in location and in technology.
3. Make the transition from ECE to kindergarten seamless, from streamlining the double-step application process to ensuring progress notes are shared with kindergarten teachers.
4. Train ECE teachers in social-emotional learning through professional development so they can better serve the needs of students and families.
5. Invest in extended-day wraparound services and programs at school sites to meet the needs of families.

VIII. Promoting Career and Technical Education

Why It Matters

Career and technical education (CTE) provides students with opportunities to move from the theoretical to working hands-on to develop skills needed to move into careers post-graduation. Students strengthen skills in critical thinking, collaboration, communication, problem solving, adaptability and how to apply the knowledge they are taught.³³ The myriad vocational programs available provide a pipeline for well-paying jobs for students, jobs our economy relies on. CTE programs can be a great conduit for building partnerships in a city between the school district, labor and employers.

Career and technical education programming has taken different approaches, ranging from the many examples nationally inside traditional high schools, to regional vocational schools and in-district CTE schools. However, they rely on similar pillars to be effective:

1. Greater individualized attention built into programs, with smaller class sizes and close career guidance.
2. Updated and relevant facilities and equipment for hands-on learning, with the latest equipment for preparing for the realities of the job market now.
3. Partnerships with employers, labor unions and higher education to provide the most seamless transitions and to support students from K-12 to careers or postsecondary options, from certifications to two- and four-year colleges.
4. Weaving quality academics and vocational training, requiring collaboration and coordination between all parties within the school system.³⁴

State of Career and Technical Education in Pittsburgh

As part of the American Federation of Teachers' Promising Pathways initiative launched in 2015, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers was awarded an AFT Innovation Fund grant to expand career and technical education opportunities, in collaboration with Pittsburgh Public Schools, throughout the school system, and to change public awareness about what CTE can mean for students.³⁵ The grant provided needed funds for the district and PFT to collaborate to achieve multiple goals: to develop strong CTE programming that included pathways to certification, higher education and careers; to strengthen the recruitment methods of students into CTE; and to educate parents, students and the broader community on the benefits of CTE programs.³⁶

Today, PPS offers 16 CTE programs that prepare students for jobs in healthcare, first responder fields, food service, child care, information technology, banking, business, construction, internet management, entertainment technology, heating/cooling, machining, automobile repair and personal care services.³⁷ Pittsburgh's CTE program is comprehensive and robust, supporting students with uniforms, certification fees and bus passes, among other supports.

The three years of the AFT Innovation Fund grant established positive partnerships, relationships and events that have continued well past the sunset date of the grant.

Through the grant, the position of Innovation Fund manager was developed. PPS recognized the value of this position and still continues to fund this type of position today. The role of the Innovation Fund manager consists of coordinating events, serving as a liaison between PFT and the CTE program, promoting the CTE program and serving as a special support to CTE staff. However, upon staff transitions, the position shifted to more of an administrative role that works more with the community and less with members, both pivotal components of the program that need targeted attention.

Additionally, the large CTE Community Steering Committee continues to convene twice each year at PFT and includes labor leaders, state representatives and senators, members of the business community, foundation leaders and others. While the CTE program has always been mandated to convene this type of group, it has expanded greatly from the benefit of the contacts and relationships held by PFT. Ultimately, PPS students and teachers have benefited from the greater circle of partnerships, internships and donations.

I can honestly say that the CTE Innovation Fund initiative has definitely been the most satisfying, most creative and most joyful project for me in my nine years as president—without a doubt. It provided us with the resources to do great things for members by utilizing some exciting partnerships and events that filled needs and opened untapped opportunities.

—Nina Esposito-Visgitis, PFT President



During the grant, the first-ever CTE graduation celebration was held at PFT, a tradition that still continues. CTE students come in their finest with their parents and are treated to a catered dinner, music, speakers and an award ceremony. PFT has also been proud to sponsor an essay contest on what CTE has meant to students, with \$100 and \$500 winners.

Recommendations

1. Continue and evaluate opportunities to expand partnerships and align job and career opportunities, such as the one established with Allegheny Health Network.
2. Continue and evaluate ways to increase student exposure to partnerships with Pittsburgh-area labor unions and apprenticeships, such as through the successful Build On districtwide fairs.
3. Work collaboratively with stakeholders across the district to share available CTE options, beginning in middle schools, such as through the district's new CTE video program series.³⁸ Stakeholders could convene to think creatively about what other strategies can be pursued.
4. Evaluate additional staffing needs for the district's CTE Department to ensure the best balance of internal and external engagement needs to best recruit and retain students and staff.



Sustainable Revenue for Sustainable Solutions

While many of the recommendations made in this report do not require additional funds, there are some that do require a monetary investment in order to be successfully implemented. Pittsburgh has been growing, and with the proximity of wealthy neighbors, it is critical that Pittsburgh considers progressive taxation measures in order to ensure that PPS is meeting the educational, emotional, social, mental health and physical health needs of students. The aggressive taxation measures that Pittsburgh should consider include:

1. **Real estate tax** collections are the largest single source of revenue in the school district's budget. The school district lowered the rate in 2013 from 13.92 mills to 9.65 mills, which reduced revenues by \$12.4 million.³⁹ The district subsequently raised the rate to 9.84 mills in 2014 to recoup lost revenue. The district raised the rate again to 9.95 in 2020, but it has the capacity to raise it more. A 1 mill increase (one-tenth of a cent), still below the 2012 rate, could increase annual revenue by approximately \$18 million.
2. Make **nonprofits pay their fair share** in property taxes to support schools and other public services. Nonprofit entities in Pittsburgh, such as the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh, are exempt from paying real estate (and most other) taxes. Municipalities have begun to challenge these tax exemptions. In Illinois, the state Supreme Court upheld a decision to revoke a hospital's tax exemption for failing to provide enough charity care to low-income residents. In New Jersey, a hospital lost its tax-exempt status after a judge ruled it operated like a for-profit entity. In Boston, many of the city's universities and hospitals make a voluntary contribution to the city to support the cost of the public services they use. The Pittsburgh City Council approved a similar arrangement with the city's nonprofits in 2012 that would have raised an estimated \$5.4 million.⁴⁰
3. The **payroll expense tax** is levied by the city of Pittsburgh at the rate of 0.55 percent on the gross payroll of business activity in the city. Nonprofit entities—including major employers and users of city services that, as we have previously mentioned, enjoy numerous tax benefits—are exempt. If nonprofits had been required to pay the tax in 2016, it was estimated that the city would have raised an additional \$20 million.⁴¹

4. Finally, the Pittsburgh City Council and school board have approved numerous **tax incentive deals** that have been promoted as essential for job creation and economic development. However, there has been little accountability to ensure that these abatements deliver on the promise of new jobs or new revenues, or that recipients honor their legal commitments. In fact, a 2019 Comptroller's Audit of the city's Tax Abatement and Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) programs identified a \$70,260 missed payment in 2016 for the Mellon Client Service Center-Parking TIF.⁴² The school district is losing millions of dollars in revenue that could be used to fund schools because of these tax-break deals. According to the school district's most recent financial report, the Pittsburgh school district lost \$3.9 million to tax abatements and \$3.3 million to TIF deals in 2019.⁴³ The city of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh school district should evaluate these tax incentives and consider eliminating those that don't work.

While this list of progressive taxation measures may not be exhaustive, PFT is committed to working with city, county and state agencies as well as foundations to ensure that PPS has the sustainable revenue necessary to implement the recommendations included in this report with fidelity.



Conclusion

Through Pittsburgh's many metamorphoses, this city has continued to remake itself for the better. As our country and city face the triple crisis of a public health pandemic, an economic downturn and a reckoning with systemic racism, we—nearly 3,000 educators in Pittsburgh—continue to be ready to be part of the changes needed in our city for equity and justice.

To reimagine school safety and set high standards for what that means in Pittsburgh, we must look for the systemic solutions that will break vicious cycles we cannot accept in Pittsburgh Public Schools. PFT continues to stand with our school police members and the important job they do on our campuses keeping schools safe. And we recognize changes are needed in enforcement and policies, both inside and outside of school, and in the criminal justice system. Echoing many in our community, we call for:

- Working with school administrators, parents, educators and school police officers on strategies and alternative discipline to significantly reduce and refrain from use of low-level summary citations in schools.
- Instituting a robust citywide or countywide school police diversion program, following successful peer models.
- Advocating to reform and improve local Pennsylvania magistrate systems that are a tool too broad and unforgiving for so many young people and families.

We hope Pittsburgh can come back stronger and better than before—we always have. Setting high standards for school safety must go beyond a debate about school police and include conversations on what creating a welcoming, supportive environment for staff, students and families would really look like.

What the COVID-19 public health emergency has proven to us beyond a doubt is the centrality of the school community for the functioning of our city. We all care deeply about our students and commit to fight for the resources and research-backed policies needed to make sure the fight for equity is not just a slogan. We commit to keep fighting for:

1. Implementing a Robust, Citywide Pre-Arrest School Police Diversion Program
2. Strengthening and Expanding Restorative Justice Programs
3. Fulfilling the Promise of Community Schools
4. Increasing Mental Health Supports and Trauma Awareness
5. Expanding Specialized Instructional Support Personnel
6. Investing in Pittsburgh's Teacher Diversity Pipeline
7. Guaranteeing High-Quality Early Childhood Education for Every Student
8. Promoting Career and Technical Education

This report is a beginning of a campaign that the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers hopes to continue with our members, parents, students, community members, legislators, labor partners, city officials and school administration. We hope to bring it with us as we participate in further dialogue, working groups and negotiations, among other spaces. We know we can accomplish this and much more, and one thing is for sure: We're not going back.

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Schools Selected to Implement Restorative Practices

K-5 and K-8 Schools

- Arsenal preK-5
- Banksville K-5
- Beechwood preK-5
- Concord K-5
- Faison K-5
- Greenfield preK-8
- Langley K-8
- Linden K-5
- Mifflin preK-8
- Minadeo K-5
- Morrow preK-8
- Phillips K-5
- Spring Hill K-5
- West Liberty preK-5
- Westwood K-5

6-8 Schools

- Allegheny 6-8
- South Brook 6-8
- South Hills 6-8
- Sterrett 6-8

6-12 Schools

- CAPA 6-12
- Science and Technology Academy 6-12

High School

- Brashear High School



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