

March 19, 2009

To: Pyramid Communications
Fr: Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall, Inc.
Re: Student Focus Groups – Summary Report

I. Introduction and Methodology

We conducted focus groups with eighth grade boys, eighth grade girls, high school boys, high school girls, high school dropout boys and high school dropout girls (a total of six focus group sessions). Almost all of the dropouts were in the Southeast Works program, working toward their GED. Each focus group had 5-8 people.

We asked students (and former students) a variety of questions: what they liked about school, what they didn't like, how school could be improved, what the elements of an ideal high school should be, and how to reduce the number of dropouts. Despite skilled facilitation, focus groups are sometimes dominated by certain individuals and others are uncomfortable talking in front of a group. For these reasons, the students were asked for written responses to questions before they discussed them in groups.

Although research of this type is not designed to measure with statistical reliability the attitudes of a particular group, it is valuable in giving a sense of the attitudes and opinions of the population from which the sample was drawn.

This memo highlights key findings from the discussions. Each section reviews a major topic from the group discussions and includes representative quotations as well as evaluative commentary. The quotes and commentary are drawn from both written exercises and group discussion.¹ The Appendixes provide complete responses to all written exercises.²

II. Summary and Observations

We heard a wide range of suggestions – from cleaner bathrooms to better food to being allowed to wear hats in school. We did not emerge with a detailed programmatic plan for reforming high schools. But there were certain aspects of the discussion that stood out as worthy of attention by decision-makers. In particular:

- **Students wanted “teachers who care” – especially, who care about students, but also, who care about their subjects.** The “teachers who care” theme was a dominant force throughout the discussion – whether we were talking about reasons for dropping out, designing the ideal high school, or simply what students liked or disliked about school.

¹ Quotations were selected to represent the range of opinions regarding a topic, and not to represent quantitatively the expressed attitudes.

² The Appendixes are divided into three sets: 8th Graders, A-1 to A-6; HS Students, B-1 to B-6; HS Dropouts, C-1 to C-6. Each set has the written responses for both the boys and girls groups.

- **Many students wanted smaller classes to increase the likelihood that they would get one-on-one attention when they needed it.** However, the discussion of class size was somewhat schizophrenic. In exercises where students were asked to rate its importance against other factors, class size did not dominate. One interpretation would be that class size is seen as a means to an end – getting needed personal attention – rather than an end in itself.
- **Students’ comments on what schools should do to prepare them for the future were diverse.** There wasn’t a consensus among the groups about what would be best. Suggestions ranged from smaller classes, more college preparation, and career specific training.
- **The dropout groups contrasted Southeast Works, and the Southeast Works teacher they referred to as “Annie,” with their high school experience.** At Southeast Works, they got personal attention, were respected, were paid to attend, and saw consequences for not showing up.

III. Teachers Who Care

“I would say that by having teachers who are enthusiastic and happy to teach are a must!” High school girl

“I think that my high school just needs some teachers that care, know what they’re doing, and know how to teach to an array of students.” High school boy

“The new global studies teacher is good, she seems like she WANTS to be there.” High school boy

“I think my education is going really well because my teachers are really good and teach really well.”
High school girl

“I like most that all the teachers know me.” Middle school girl

“Teachers who really care and are really willing to help.” Middle school girl

“Teachers did not seem like they cared.” Dropout girl

It was overwhelmingly clear that teachers are the most important factor in the educational experience, and that what the students want is teachers who care – care about the students, and care about the subject they are teaching. The word “care” was repeated about four hundred zillion times throughout the sessions. The most common compliment that students paid to their schools (at least the educational, as opposed to the social, aspect) was that the teachers – or a teacher – cared. The most common complaint was that teachers didn’t care. When asked to explain dropouts, both dropouts and non-dropouts said that there weren’t enough teachers who cared. (In the dropout groups, the word “care” appeared in seven of the ten responses to the question, “What is it about high school that didn’t work for you?”) When asked how to prevent dropouts, they recommended having more teachers who cared.

Students gave examples of what caring and uncaring teachers are or would be like. Caring teachers recognize when students need some one-on-one attention, and provide it. Caring teachers would notice the fact that a student has been missing assignments, come to the student and ask what's wrong. Caring teachers would recognize that students have different learning styles and ask a student how she or he learns best. Uncaring teachers play favorites, are disrespectful to students, and seem to be "only in it for the money."

Although the most frequent reference to "caring" referred to caring about students, students also emphasized that it was important for teachers to be enthusiastic about their subjects. If teachers were engaged, passionate and knowledgeable, if they told stories, if they had things to say that were "not in the book," they made the students care. Conversely, a number of students complained about teachers who seemed not to really know their subjects

Some students recognized the challenges teachers face. Some noted that it was impossible for a teacher to spend much one-on-one time with any student in a class of thirty. A student observed that one teacher tried to keep order in class by gently asking students to calm down, and another would call security every three seconds until only four students were left. "Neither way worked," said the student. One high school boy, when asked how to reduce the number of dropouts, wrote: "You just have to make students care and feel like they want to be at school. I sure don't know how you're supposed to do that though."

Fairness was an important sub-theme. Several of the high school boys and dropouts had "fairness" comments. "They teach to the kids who are like them." "They decide early whether they like you." (That came up more than once – the sense that a student had been "judged" early on, and had no opportunity to reverse the judgment.) "They like the best kids, or those who suck up."

IV. Class Size

"I would not have as many students at Grant because the classrooms are always so crowded." High school girl

"I would need smaller classes so teachers can pay attention to each student." High school boy

"Smaller classes, somewhere around 15 students, so that it is easier for students to get the kind of attention they need." High school boy

"15-20 people in one class." Dropout boy

"Teachers did not seem like they cared – they ignored you because you have 30 other kids ..." Dropout girl

The topic of class size came up quite frequently, in discussion and in written comments. For instance, as noted above, seven students – including five of the dropouts – listed limited class size as part their high school of the future.

However, for most students, class size was definitely in a different category than “teacher caring” – a means to an end, not an end in itself. Students thought that if classes were smaller, they would get more of the on-on-one attention they thought was sometimes needed.

When asked to rate “class size” against the quality of the teacher, high school girls chose “teacher” 6-2. When middle school boys and girls – choosing from a list - were asked to identify the three things that would be most important to have in high school, only one boy, and zero girls, listed “smaller class sizes.” (By contrast, three girls offered an “other” response of “soccer.”)

V. Preparing for Life After High School

“Ask every student what their goal is – start looking at the future.” High school boy

“More choices based on personal interest, for what you want to pursue.” Middle school girl

“I think the schools should have you choose a specific educational subject to specialize in and you can take lots of classes for that subject so you have somewhere to get a job with that education.” High school boy

“Offer career pathways like nursing – focus on after high school.” High school girl

“I would keep all the classes they have now, but add a few like automotive, auto body and construction.” Dropout boy

“I don’t think you find out what you want to do later in life unless you have choices.” Middle school girl

Although it sometimes took a little prodding to get them to focus on the issue, students were well aware that part of the purpose of high school should be to prepare them for life after high school. For instance, in the eighth grade boys’ group, for the first fifty-six minutes the students did not seem especially goal-oriented (asked what they were looking forward to in high school, only one mentioned any academic subject) – but at the end of the discussion, several revealed, not only that they had thought about college, but they had already chosen where to go. One observed that the choice young people have is to “go to college or flip burgers.”

Few of the students talked specifically about what courses they planned to take in order to prepare them for specific colleges or jobs. But many thought that high school should give them an opportunity to identify a possible career and start preparing for it. The boys tended to talk about this idea in start-preparing-for-a-job terms and the girls in more find-your-dream terms. The high school girls put greater emphasis on the idea that students need to have lots of possibilities to choose from in order to increase the odds of identifying what you really want to do, but some of the boys made a similar point.

When eighth graders were asked to identify the three things that were most important to have in their high school experience, four of the boys – but only one of the girls – said “more job training and work skills classes.” However, four of the girls – but only one of the boys – picked “special schools such as environmental studies, the arts, and foreign languages,” which could be seen as a

preparing-for-the-future sort of choice. Although it may be dangerous to read too much into any of this, this could be viewed as the eighth graders' parallel of the gender divide: the eighth grade girls liked the idea of specializing in a subject area they care about, while the boys thought in job-related terms. (Of course, the eighth grade girls' choice of special, focused schools could also be viewed as completely contradicting the high school girls' emphasis on options.)

3d. The Dropouts: High School vs. Southeast Works

As noted above, the most frequent explanation that the dropouts gave for dropping out was that school staff didn't seem to care. One girl said: "I had a lot of family issues that played a role in my dropping out, but I think that if I had all teachers that seemed like they cared, then I don't think I would have dropped out." One boy wrote: "The teachers mostly didn't care enough. I needed a sort of a push, but most of the teachers didn't care enough to remember."

Asked what kind of things could have made their experience different, or to design a high school that would work for them, the dropouts came back again to caring and personal attention. One of the high school boys summed it up this way: "It all boils down to if a student needs help they need to find a way to help that student."

Some did take on some personal responsibility. One boy wrote, "I could have asked for help"; one girl wrote, "I could have thought more about my future." But most seemed to think that in a better school – most of all, with more caring teachers – they might have stayed.

Interestingly, when the non-dropouts were asked what could be done to prevent dropouts, most of them thought the school could have done something, too. Only a couple said something to the effect that "you can't make people want to go." Nine of sixteen high school students, in written comments, suggested that more engaged teachers could help prevent dropouts. There were also scattered mentions of after-school classes, alternative schools, or "classes for kids who struggle."

One non-dropout high school boy suggested, "they should get the parents more involved and have the student and his/her counselors and try to talk it out and figure out why the student wants to drop out and find a resolution." That was a far cry from what the dropouts said the current reality is. Asked in discussion what happened when they dropped out, three high school girls had these memories: "I had to fill out papers to do it – they said it was a good idea." "They left a message – I erased it." "They called my mom once – that was it."

The dropouts, boys and girls, felt that Southeast Works provided a stark contrast. One girl, in a written exercise, described the differences this way:

"If high school was more like SE Works, then I'm sure at least 90% of the students would stay in school. We get paid so that makes us want to go to school. Our teacher is like a normal teacher. She cares and our class is small so we can get more attention on things we need help on. Plus, we get breaks every 45 minutes."

All of these factors were mentioned by other dropouts: the pay, the class size, the personal attention, and the breaks.

Ironically, students who liked getting paid liked their teacher, Annie, because she was perceived as not being in it for the money. One of the girls said: “She’s not there just to get paid, she’s there to teach us,” and that seemed to be a general sentiment.

PPS Focus Groups—8th Graders—February 2009
Appendix A-1
Demographics

Two participants in the boy's group did not fill out background worksheets.

Age	Girls	Boys
13	4	4
14	3	0

Current/Last Grade Completed	Girls	Boys
8 th	7	4

School Name	
Girls	Boys
West Sylvan Middle School	Sunnyside Environmental School
DaVinci Arts Middle School	Sunnyside Environmental School
Sellwood Middle School	Metropolitan Learning Center
Hosford Middle School	Hosford Middle School
Hosford Middle School	
Metropolitan Learning Center	
Sunnyside Environmental School	

Ethnicity	Group 1	Group 2
White/Caucasian	6	2
Black/African American	0	1
Spanish/Hispanic	1	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0
Native American	0	0
Multiracial	0	0
Other	0	0

University/Workforce after Graduation	Girls	Boys
University/College	7	4
Workforce/Get a job	0	0

Appendix A-2

What do you like most about middle school?//What do you like least about middle school?

Girls:

- The things I like most about middle school is probably all the friends I have. The social experience. But, if I had to pick something academic it would be math and media arts. I love most of my teachers. //I least like the fact that all the teachers leave us homework at the same time. It's real unbalanced.
- Probably the different electives and teaching you have because you get more experience and can adapt better to change. //The groups of people who are rude to other people and also some teachers pick favorites.
- I really like being at school with my friends. In 6th grade it was really cool to meet new friends that I am still friends with today. I also like most of my teachers. //What I least like about middle school is all the drama. I mean you're friends with someone one day and the next you're not. It makes everything more complicated.
- Getting to spend time with people your own age. The experiences. //How you can tell one person something like a secret and the next day the entire schools knows. And people spreading rumors.
- You get a lot of help from the teachers and counselors because they are trying to get you ready for high school. //There is a lot of social drama and everyone is still worried about what people think of them.
- Middle school provides a chance for me to see my friends every day. I also enjoy the things we learn in class. //I hate drama and homework. Drama is particularly frustrating because you can't hang out with some people without other people getting mad.
- I like that my teachers all know me and how small my school is. //We don't get a choice about what classes we take or get to take any special classes.

Boys:

- The people, the teachers, at our school it's very open and you can get friends easily. //Homework, math.
- Girls, lunch, and seeing my friends, studio class. //Homework, math, Frank, my core teacher.
- The friends that I have. I like the social aspect of it. //Homework. I prefer doing other stuff.
- The fact that it doesn't last all day. //It's way too long, homework.
- I like hanging out with friends, getting things done like homework makes me feel accomplished. //I don't like when teachers put you down.
- Girls, lunch, and fights. //Teachers and work.

Appendix A-3

What have you heard about High School?

Girls:

- I've heard that it's really hard and you pretty much don't make it if you're just average and not exceeding. That it is so much fun. That you mostly can socialize. I've never heard that the older people are intimidating though.
- It's a step up in work, also the school's population is bigger and also its physical size. You have more class choices, but some you have to be a certain grade level.
- Well, my high school there is an IB program and I've heard that it's hard, but it also pays off. I've heard that the teachers at Cleveland are strict, but nice, though they can be kind of tough on you sometimes. I've heard that you have to make up days you miss.
- Off campus lunch. Larger selection of classes. A bigger school, so more people. Pecking order (Senior, Junior, Sophomores, and Freshman) sort of like middle school, but more important. Hard to balance social life and working.
- I have heard that it's really fun, but it's really hard too. Like the social part of it is great, but it's really hard to have a social life if you are going to work hard in school.
- From people I know, I've heard it can be really hard, and you get lots of homework. But the media portrays it as really fun. I'm sure there're still the same problems as in middle school with cliques and boys, but hopefully not as much.
- That you get more choices with what classes you take and that it's a lot bigger. That there're more cliques and people tend to group. That the schools have teams instead of areas.

Boys:

- It's awesome; parties are good, graduation, fun, girls, tests, drama, homework.
- Freshman Friday. Better looking girls. Cooler teachers but more homework. Just straight up better, less drama—well, for some schools.
- That it's fun. That there is a lot of homework. It's harder. More opportunities.
- You get a day off, you can go where you want to lunch, it's big.
- It's chill, you get way more freedom than middle school, but you need to wake up earlier. You can wear hats, lots more girls. Homework isn't mandatory
- Good things, fun, less rules, lots and lots of girls, more people you can listen to. I-pod, cell phones, and chewing gum. More homework and stricter teachers.

Appendix A-4

What are you most looking forward to about high school? //What are you least looking forward to?

Girls:

- All my friends and the people that I get to reunite with. Also, the chance to like actually study hard and not slack. Just like being there and a part of it. //Being in the same school as my sister. And the people that I already know there and how hard the counselors make it seem.
- Being with people I knew from grade school, more of a challenge project wise, and new people to get to know. //The possibility of not having as much free time. Also the bigger school.
- Meeting new people, the IB program, the electives, and new teachers. //Starting over with teachers and soccer, classes that have mean teachers, PE.
- The dances, social life, dating, prom, student government, drama and theatre. //All the work and stress about not passing since I'm doing a full IB diploma I'm really worried that I won't succeed. Being the little one again.
- I'm really looking forward to the freedom that will come like how we have off campus lunch and get more freedom in what classes I can choose from.// I'm nervous about being a freshman because I have heard that they are treated badly.
- I've gone to the same school for 9 years so I really want a change and to meet new people. Also, there are more choices about what types of classes you'd like to take so I can start to go in my own direction. //My school is extremely small, so I'm worried about suddenly transitioning to a school with a lot more kids that I don't know.
- Leaving the younger kids at my school and the school in general. And getting to separate myself from the drama-prone people. //Leaving my really good friends. Being the youngest.

Boys:

- Girls, driving, parties. //Tests, drama, homework.
- Girls, basketball team, driving. When I shadowed at Grant, the work looked easy so I'm looking forward to that. LUNCH. //Freshman Fridays.
- Learning a language, getting involved in a club, it's more convenient, big school. //It's not downtown.
- The day off, food. //The extra hard work.
- Hanging out with more girls, not getting into trouble for wearing hats or messing around. //More homework, getting in trouble more because of the freedom.
- Getting out of middle school, more of my friends. //More homework, more drama.

Appendix A-5

Place a star next to the three (3) that are most important to have in your high school experience.

	Girls	Boys
More job training and work skills classes	1	4
Better teachers	4	3
Small schools	0	0
Buildings in good repair	0	1
Special schools such as environmental studies, the arts, and foreign language	4	1
More discipline in schools	0	0
More learning through internships in businesses and government	1	1
Better technology in the schools	0	2
More challenging courses and programs—higher expectations for students	7	0
More hands-on learning	2	3
Smaller class sizes	0	1
Leadership	1	0
Bigger school	1	0
More freedom	0	1
Girls	0	1
Healthcare	0	1

Additional Comments

Girls:

- Math classes, breaks, dance team outside of school, art classes, film and media classes, Spanish classes, options.
- A good soccer program, black and white photography classes, more choices for science, smaller classes for math, better history teachers.
- Soccer, psychology classes, writing classes, challenging classes, study hall.
- Business programs, intro to politics class, Thespian club, drama, debate team, student government, small Chinese class, swim team.

- My perfect high school would be one that had teachers who really cared about your education and would give you all the help you need. Also, where you could choose your path throughout high schools that you could get the best education possible in what you are interested in.
- My perfect high school would have 500 kids and a really good arts program. There would be a nice theatre and dance studio. Small classes so that we could work closely with the teachers and find a way of learning that worked best for us personally.
- Soccer, better teachers with experience, large school, money, people.

Boys:

- Not asked for Boy's group

Appendix A-6

Considering everything we talked about today—what you heard, read, and what you think—what is the most important thing to you regarding your high school experience?

Girls:

- That I do positive things and I think generally making good decisions. I want to do things that will pay off when I'm done with high school. Socialize, because I think that is an actual skill that school gives you.
- Courses that are exactly at your level of ability. Not just required classes but arts and sports too.
- What is important to me is that there are classes to fit where you are in learning and how fast you excel. It's important to only have classes that are hard for you.
- Succeeding and getting into my dream course and being very successful! I think the most important thing is to challenge myself and get really good grades.
- Being able to choose my own path through high school. Getting to take classes that I am interested in and at the difficulty level that I feel comfortable with.
- That I get the best possible education in a positive environment.
- To surround myself with people who will help me, make a good team, and take classes that will challenge me and help me choose a career.

Boys:

- Good education because it can lead you to a good college and a better life.
- EDUCATION because girls are super important to me, but I can live without them. Education is the key to life so I really need that. And basketball!
- Good teachers, after school activities, languages, good building and atmosphere, lots of classes to choose, lunch.
- A movie program and a great education.
- High school is very important to me because I think you would need so much experience for college, and high school can give that to you with extra classes.
- Good education and stuff.

PPS Focus Groups—HS Students—February 2009
Appendix B-1
Demographics

Age	Girls	Boys
14	2	1
15	2	2
16	1	3
17	2	2
18/19	1	0

Current/Last Grade Completed	Girls	Boys
9 th	2	2
10 th	3	2
11 th	2	3
12 th	1	1

School Name	
Girls	Boys
Marshall High School/Renaissance Arts Academy	Marshall High School
Lincoln High School	Wilson High School
Wilson High School	Metropolitan Learning Center
Metropolitan Learning Center	Benson High School
Grant High School	Grant High School
Jefferson High School	Franklin High School
Benson High School	Lincoln High School
Cleveland High School	Madison High School

Ethnicity	Group 1	Group 2
White/Caucasian	1	3
Black/African American	1	4
Spanish/Hispanic	4	0
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0
Native American	1	0
Multiracial	1	1
Other	0	0

University/Workforce after Graduation	Girls	Boys
University/College	8	8
Workforce/Get a job	0	0

Appendix B-2

How satisfied are you with the following at your high school: very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, or very satisfied?

Services	Level of Satisfaction				
	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	DK
School Climate and Culture					
Girls	0	0	4	4	0
Boys	0	0	8	0	0
Feeling attended by teachers					
Girls	0	0	4	4	0
Boys	0	1	7	0	0
Academic program					
Girls	0	0	2	6	0
Boys	0	3	3	2	0
Feeling safe					
Girls	0	0	3	4	1
Boys	1	0	4	2	1
Getting to and from the school (transportation)					
Girls	0	0	5	3	0
Boys	0	1	2	4	1
After school events					
Girls	0	0	4	4	0
Boys	1	2	3	2	0
Communication with staff					
Girls	0	0	4	4	0
Boys	0	1	7	0	0
General learning experience					
Girls	0	1	3	4	0
Boys	1	2	5	0	0

Appendix B-3

What is the most important thing to change about your high school to make the education better for you as a student? //What would you change? (Girls only)

Girls:

- Learning more of the actual content of the class—for example, we have humanities and I don't think we get taught what they should be teaching us. //The way our schedule is set up because not everyone goes on Wednesdays because there is no control of classes and not much to do.
- I think a break needs to be added to our school day. This way we will have time to rest. //I would change the fluorescent lights and the dirty floors.
- I think something that could be changed is the attitude of the students. I think a lot more people at Wilson would get better grades if they had a positive attitude about learning and school in general.
- I think I would like to change some of the teacher that don't really take themselves seriously in the classroom and be more on top of what they are doing. //Sometimes some of the staff can be a little unfair towards people, but overall we have a very tight knit community and I am very happy with it.
- I go to Grant and it's a really good school. The academic program is great and the teachers are great as well. The only problem is there are so many students at Grant, so if I want to have more one-on-one time with one of my teachers it is a problem. //I would not have as many students at Grant because the classrooms are always so crowded and there is a rising gang problem at Grant. Also, the school could use some remodeling. It's really old.
- Well, if we get more help education-wise, then we will be much better. A majority of our students are failing tests, skipping classes, and feeling rejected by teachers. So we need more teachers who can teach students. //Besides academics, our school should get a choir/open up a choir room because we have a lot of great singers.
- What I would like to change to make my education would be to have more one-on-one help with homework or just stuff that's challenging. //I would change some of the students—they cause too much drama at times.
- I would say feeling comfortable and in a safe environment is the biggest and most important thing at my high school. //I think my education is going really well because my teachers are really good and teach really well.

Boys:

- I would need smaller classes so teachers can pay attention to each student.
- There are a few good teachers but most suck. I think that my high school just needs some teachers that care, know what they're doing, and know how to teach to an array of students. I know that at least half of my teachers are not qualified to do their jobs or they are just a--holes.
- I think that our school doesn't offer enough variety in the classes that it teaches. We don't offer languages besides French and Spanish, but I don't want to learn those.
- I think that the teachers should find better ways to control kids during class other than kicking them out and sending them to detention and things like that.

- Change the way the teachers look at the students. Have more options for what classes you want to take.
- Some of the teachers at my school really don't focus on how you are doing in class and I think they should improve on that.
- The thing to change to make my education better would probably be that it is required for all my teachers to post their grades online on a staff website so that it would be easier for me to figure out what work I am missing and what I need to finish to raise my grade.
- They should give us less homework, have the gym open every day, and wear hats in school.

Appendix B-4

What should be done to reduce the number of students who drop out of school?

Girls:

- Have different levels of classes and have more than one teacher who can teach that subject. Also, maybe reduce the number of credits classes needed.
- At my school the dropout number is very low. I think that's because of how great and attentive our counselors and all the teachers and staff are. Also, the school is very friendly. All schools should be like this.
- I think that teachers should be more encouraging. Sometimes kids don't care because they don't have a good teacher. A teacher makes all the difference in class. If kids enjoy learning then they won't choose to drop out. I also think administration could be more encouraging if it seems like a kid is having a hard time. All they need is confidence.
- I think smaller groups work.
- For some kids dropping out is caused by falling behind due to family issues or even just personal responsibility. I knew this one girl who didn't do so well her freshman year and her sophomore year she tried to take an AP class so she could be more responsible, but her counselor wouldn't let her. So maybe the teachers and staff at school could care more.
- We need more support systems in our schools. Like makeup work classes, teachers who understand the student situation. Some kids dropout because they already think they have nothing and believe school doesn't matter anymore.
- I think that we should have more time to talk to counselors every two weeks or so. That way the students don't feel like they are alone or stuck in something they don't understand.
- I would say make a special class or classes for kids who struggle and just don't like school and want to drop out. So they get special attention and lots of help. Also, the teachers should make it fun for them while being there.

Boys:

- I think they shouldn't allow anybody under 18 to drop out. It should be a law.
- You just have to make students care and feel like they want to be at school. I sure don't know how you're supposed to do that though.
- Offer more summer/night classes so the students who don't pass classes can make up the credits.
- I think that the students who drop out should try harder and that is not the school's fault.
- I think there needs to be better communication between the teachers and staff at the school with the students.
- I think there should be more programs after school because the kids would have something to do.
- They should get the parents more involved and have the student and his/her family sit down with all of his/her teachers and counselors and try to talk it out and figure out why the student wants to drop out and find a resolution.
- To go to an alternative school.

Appendix B-5

How do you feel the high school of the future should look and run to assure students get the kind of education that prepares them for college or the workplace?

Girls:

- Have different levels of classes that we can choose to take, make the credit standards be more focused on having equal amount of years in one subject like math and science be 4 years because it's just as important as English and will help prepare people for school in the future and work life.
- There needs to be many different classes and electives. I think the school staff members should all be of different ethnic groups. The whole school should have many different groups of people. The students should have many different club choices and be involved with many different school activities.
- I think this high school should have a lot of support. A way that could let every student know they were capable of passing a class or graduating. It should have very encouraging teachers that care about what they're teaching, therefore making their students care about what they're learning. This high school should also have diversity so that people don't become in huge cliques. I also think it should have a good after-school program and fun events that people actually enjoy going to programs that fit everyone.
- I would have many electives and options to choose so they can get inspired to pursue something that they want to do, or something interesting to them thinking about life after high school and start thinking of what they want to do. I think if someone is inspired towards a goal, they will reach it no matter what.
- I think that you should have a "major" so you would take core classes like English and Math; rather than have a whole burden of electives you could take classes that would help you with what you want to do in the future after high school. I think Benson has a program like that. But I think that would be way more beneficial than some of the things that are happening now. Because a lot of kids take classes just to get credits, not because they are interested.
- I think the perfect future high school would be a high school that is multi-race. With black, white, Hispanic, Asians, etc. The classes should be no bigger than 20 and the teachers must teach the classes they studied/majored in at college. The school must have athletic programs, arts programs, choir, dance, etc. The teachers should have the patience and understanding for all students.
- I would say that by having teachers that are enthusiastic and happy to teach are a must! Some students decide to not go to class because they think it's boring. Also, one-on-one help during and after school or before will help students that are struggling. After school activities would help also because it motivates students to be in school.
- I would just say focus more on education and all your school work. Plus all your outside activities and hobbies rather than gangs, drugs, and thinking you are cool by skipping class. Just staying out of trouble. Be in a good environment and have people support you 100%.

Boys:

- The high school should prepare their students by giving each student a goal for every year and have students choose their career.
- I think they need big open comfortable classrooms that you can't hear outside noise from. Just a building that's nice and people want to go to. My school smells bad, there's trash everywhere, and it's just nasty. It's not a good learning environment.

- I think the schools should have you choose a specific educational subject to specialize in and you can take lots of classes for that subject so you have somewhere to get a job with that education.
- I think all you can do is find out who really wants to go and learn at school and for those who don't shape up or don't go.
- Take consideration of what the students could have at school to help them do better.
- I think there should be college classes in the school and fast food restaurants in the school so kids don't go out and do drugs and what not.
- Classes that focus on what the student wants to do in the future as a job, etc. Smaller classes, somewhere around 15 students, so that it is easier for the students to get the kind of attention they need. More breaks during the day so that all the information the students are being taught isn't just jammed into their minds super fast.
- I think in the future they should build a big, better school because our schools now are getting too old. And I think they should hire better teachers that can teach us and not be restricted at all and then I think everybody else could learn better.

Appendix B-6

What do you like most about high school? //What is the biggest problem? (Girls only)

Girls:

- My teachers and I can talk to them about anything and how caring they are to all their students and they will even try to help with things that are not related to school topics. //The biggest problem would be the social groups between all the schools. The name calling, disagreements, and racism.
- I love the different classes and all the different people you get to meet. I also like all the different clubs and dances there are at school. Most of all high school is just so much fun and that adds to the whole learning experience. //The biggest problem is the beginning of the year because so many people slack.
- There's more freedom than middle school. I love that you meet so many new people the first year and are able to take more classes. But meeting new people I think is one of the best qualities of a high school experience. //I think the biggest problem, or one of them is the drama. People get caught up in what parties there are and cliques. But I think a bigger problem is the want to learn. Not enough kids want to learn.
- The environment and everyone in that school is caring and loving, but they don't hold your hand. You can get personal with the teachers and just let your feelings go through on an assignment or anything and they let you express yourself. //People take advantage of teachers and staff not holding their hand and redirecting them, but that is just how each individual is.
- I like the environment. I'm very involved in my school sports. I play lacrosse and I'm a cheerleader. When we cheer we cheer at all kinds of events. Swimming, wrestling, and of course, basketball and football and it's just fun to see everybody unite in one common interest. //I'm easily stressed, but I work through it usually.
- I like my social life. Everybody at my high school knows almost everybody and I say that's great, because you meet friends that aren't just in your grade level, but higher. Besides all the rumors and gossip you find out how great people are. //The biggest problem is our test scores/Student's GPA.
- I like how we have so many choices for a career. My school is a technology and health occupation school. Freshman and sophomore year we just learn about the classes so that in junior and senior year we know what we want to major in. //Biggest problem would be that there are too many students and money.
- All of the fun assembly's upperclassmen vs. underclassmen. The fun spirited part. All the sports, even though the sports aren't the best at my school. Getting to know who you truly are and your friends. Discovering what you are really passionate about—just finding your inner self. //Money, and support of our school.

Boys:

- High school is nice because you're with mature kids and you're almost done with school after college.
- I like being with all my friends and learning stuff when I can. I think some of my classes are a waste of time, but I do enjoy the few good classes.
- The freedom.
- I like socializing and making friends, playing sports, riding skateboards and bikes, and talking to girls.

- Sports, new friends, new experiences, achieving.
- I like to hang out with my friends at school.
- I like the sense of freedom I have compared to elementary and middle school. I like having the ability of eating off campus because it's laid back in a way and I can do whatever I like.
- Females, education, having fun, and basketball.

PPS Focus Groups—HS Dropouts—February 2009
Appendix C-1
Demographics

Age	Girls	Boys
14	0	0
15	0	0
16	1	0
17	3	0
18/19	1	4

Current/Last Grade Completed	Girls	Boys
8 th	0	1
9 th	0	1
10 th	3	2
11 th	1	1
12 th	1	0

School Name	
Girls	Boys
David Douglas High School	Jefferson High School
Franklin High School	Milwaukie High School
SE Works	McCoy Academy
Benson High School	Madison High School
Franklin High School	Cleveland High School

Ethnicity	Group 1	Group 2
White/Caucasian	2	3
Black/African American	1	1
Spanish/Hispanic	1	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0
Native American	0	0
Multiracial	1	0
Other	0	0

University/Workforce after Graduation	Girls	Boys
University/College	5	2
Workforce/Get a job	0	3

Appendix C-2

How satisfied are you with the following at your high school: very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, or very satisfied?

Services	Level of Satisfaction				
	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	DK
School Climate and Culture					
Girls	0	0	5	0	0
Boys	0	1	3	0	1
Feeling attended by teachers					
Girls	0	3	2	0	0
Boys	0	0	3	2	0
Academic program					
Girls	1	1	3	0	0
Boys	1	2	2	0	0
Feeling safe					
Girls	0	1	2	2	0
Boys	0	1	0	4	0
Getting to and from the school (transportation)					
Girls	0	2	1	2	0
Boys	0	1	3	1	0
After school events					
Girls	0	0	3	1	1
Boys	1	0	2	0	2
Communication with staff					
Girls	1	3	1	0	0
Boys	0	1	4	0	0
General learning experience					
Girls	1	1	3	0	0
Boys	1	2	1	1	0

Appendix C-3

What is it about high school that didn't work for you?

Girls:

- I didn't like going to school because I thought I had better things to do than waste my time doing nothing at school and I didn't like the fact that people could tell me what to do that were not my family. I didn't like waking up early.
- I left high school because of drama. The way the school was set up, just by how when you needed someone to talk to no one seemed to care. It was hard for me to get up and go to school. I was more dedicated to school than myself and even though I tried to do good, I wouldn't do good and no one tried to help.
- What didn't work for me is mostly the teachers. I think they need to be more hands on. I think classes should be smaller. I had a lot of family issues that played a roll in my dropping out, but I think that if I had all teachers that seemed like they cared, then I don't think I would have dropped out.
- Some teachers didn't seem like they cared if I went to school or did the work. And when the students would get loud or not do their work, the teachers just sat at their desks and it was getting hard to focus on my work.
- The reason why high school didn't work for me was because I felt that when I go to school every day that the teachers and staff didn't care too much for the students. I would get into trouble for stuff I didn't do or one of my friends would get into trouble for something they did and I would get into trouble too, but had nothing to do with anything.

Boys:

- Teachers asking if someone needs help. Classes are too big and kids are loud. Kids talking and using phones during class. Fights.
- Closed campus. Strict rules about tobacco use. Drama from immature kids. Staff that doesn't care about anything. Punishment over BS. Dress code (no gloves, or headbands???)
- Waking up in the morning. Feeling that I would never get an equation or study. Someone in the class, besides the teacher bothering me.
- The Madison High School staff did not show that they cared for the students or even wan them there and they had too much fear of the students.
- The teachers mostly didn't care enough, I needed a sort of push, but most of the teachers didn't care enough to remember. Teaching style is completely monotonous. No charisma for people to learn, just boredom.

Appendix C-4

What is the most important thing that could have been changed that would have persuaded you to finish your education at the high school you attended? //
Anything else?

Girls:

- I could have thought more about my future and the steps it takes to get to where I want to be in my life. //I could have pushed myself harder and cared more about myself.
- The teachers caring more about the students than getting things done. The teachers could've put more effort to helping the students. //Spread homework out better.
- Smaller class sizes and more friendly teachers. More hands on projects for everyone to do. We are not robots. We learn at different rates.
- I would most want to see the teachers act like they cared. //If they act like they cared, then I wouldn't want to drop out because I would feel like I let them down.
- What could I have done to stay in school—I should have chosen my friends more carefully and not followed my friends and did what I needed to get done to go on to bigger and better things.

Boys:

- I could have asked for help. Push myself. Do my homework. Finish school reports. Communicate with the teachers.
- One of my teachers disappearing—she was a horrible witch that ruined everything. //Still staying around. Mrs. Marchant as a teacher again. More exciting curriculum.
- The way some teachers pick their favorites to get on or say something to. //The way I was easily bothered.
- I could have not made a bad reputation for myself before I got that far.
- No charisma from the teachers, definitely. They need social skills training—ASAP!

Appendix C-5

How do you feel the high school of the future should look and run to assure students get the kind of education that prepares them for college or the workplace?

Girls:

- Friendly staff, understanding, better transportation, smaller classes, more time out of class, and better lunch.
- I think smaller classrooms, teachers caring and helping students, homework spread out evenly, a little time to relax instead of it being so hectic. Teachers asking students how they learn best and try to do it.
- It would have small classes. It would be all day in one class, not 8 classes. The teachers would do one-on-one time with each student.
- If high school was more like SE Works, then I'm sure at least 90% of the students would stay in school. We get paid so that makes us want to go to school. Our teacher is like a normal teacher. She cares and our class is small so we can get more attention on things we need help on. Plus, we get breaks every 45 minutes.
- Things that I think are missing in high school would probably be just the teachers showing the students that they are there to teach us and be happy to do it. That would be it.

Boys:

- A good environment. 15-20 people in one class. Responsible teachers who care about their students. After-school programs. A good principal. Try to put kids in college. Protecting the school. Get kids safely to school and home.
- Personal education styled programs. More money towards sports, music, and other programs. No class is really more important than another—that's all based on opinion. Open campus. No harassment of students from the administration. No blacklisting (except for federal crimes).
- Classes that students would want to do and teachers willing to help. Libraries that are open for you even if you don't have a school ID. Better lunches and breakfasts. Hands on teachers. More physical education. Comfortable classrooms.
- I would keep all the classes they have now, but add a few like automotive, hair style, auto body, and construction, plus more safety from the staff.
- There should be more government funding specifically for education. More social skills training for teachers. More teachers hired for their enthusiasm to teach, not their next paycheck. There should be more programs like SE Works. I would try to hire more counselors so that more students could be individual education plans.

Appendix C-6

Considering everything we talked about today—what you heard, wrote, read, and what you think—what is the one thing you would like to tell teachers, principals, and other administrators to help students while they are in school?

Girls:

- Remind them (students) that they will need an education to be successful in life.
- I think they should pay more attention to the students and their academics and care more.
- Pay attention to your students. You can learn a lot about your students if you just try.
- Act like they cared if we did our work or not. If my teachers cared I would have cared.
- To be there with a great attitude and to have more control over a class.

Boys:

- Help the students. Make school better. More respectful teachers. A good environment. Help all the students you can.
- Please care and don't spend money on needless things. You could try harder to make things interesting. You could introduce music to your classes.
- Be there for students. Teachers—don't push them away even if you're afraid of them. Students should meet teachers halfway—you think it's not worth it, but it is.
- To pay attention to the students and their education.
- To care more about their students. To try to make the general learning atmosphere more enthusiastic. To get involved.