

April 2, 2009

To: Portland Public Schools

From: Davis, Hibbitts and Midghall, Inc.
Pyramid Communications

Re: Portland Public Schools Opinion Research – High School Student Summary Report

In February 2009, we conducted an online survey of Portland Public School District high school students (N=2,352). Principals and other school administrators promoted the survey and provided students with a URL that linked them to the survey, hosted on a secure website.

We asked respondents' opinions on the performance of Portland high schools, what criteria they would use to measure the success of high schools, what they see as the biggest obstacles to success, and the goals that high schools should try to achieve.

Earlier this year, similar surveys with PPS staff and the general public were conducted. A previous report to PPS noted that staff and the general public were remarkably similar on a wide variety of issues. In this report, we show that high school students were consistently more satisfied with their schools and viewed a wide variety of potential reforms as less urgent.

Statement of limitations: The student survey was not a random sample of high school students in the District. Rather students were encouraged by principals, teachers, and other staff to complete the survey. This sort of design can lead to a sample that is qualitatively different than population at large. Fortunately, the survey attracted a good mix of students, including by gender, age, class, and high school.

The results of this survey are largely positive, but we know from experience working with PPS students in other studies, including the 2007 School Choice Study, that some subgroups of students hold different views than are expressed here. This should be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

Here are some of the highlights of the surveys. Whenever possible, comparisons are made between the student survey and the PPS staff and general public surveys.

The highlights:

Overall, high school students feel good about their high school experience. More than three-fourths of students rated their high school experience as somewhat good (45%) or very good (33%).

Most students believe that their school will need some changes over time. To assess whether they thought their school needs to change, we asked them choose from three statements: 1) the school is just fine at this time and doesn't need any changes; 2) some changes are needed over time

to improve the school; and 3) major changes are needed now to improve the school. Nearly two-thirds of students (63%) said “some changes are needed over time.” This was comparable to what PPS staff (65%) and the general public said (57%). However, 20% of students said their “school is working just fine” compared to 1% of PPS staff and 5% of the general public.

Across a variety of measures, high school students are satisfied with their school. We asked the students to rate their feelings as very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied for eight dimensions of high school life. For all eight, more than 70% of students said they were satisfied or very satisfied.

- After school events—71%
- Academic program and curriculum—77%
- Communication with school staff—77%
- School climate and culture—79%
- Feeling attended to by teachers—80%
- Getting to and from school—80%
- General learning experience—83%
- Feeling safe—85%

The students rated a lack of money and predictable or stable funding as the two biggest obstacles to their high school being more successful at educating students. We asked the students about twelve obstacles to successfully educating students. The two that scored the highest concerned funding. Two-thirds (67%) of students said “not enough money” was a big or very big problem. This was lower than PPS staff (86%) and the general public (78%), but higher than any other issue we measured. The next highest was a “lack of predictable or stable funding,” which 59% of students said was a big or very big problem. This was about as high as PPS staff (63%) and higher than the general public (43%)

Most students don’t think that teachers are an obstacle to student success. Teachers are critical to student success and a majority of students reported that they have effective teachers. Five-nine percent (59%) of students said a “lack of effective teachers” is a small or very small problem. However, a significant minority of students disagreed and 34% said that a “lack of effective teachers” is a big or very big problem

Students are more confident than PPS staff and general public that school programs and curriculums are preparing them for the workplace. Slightly more than one-half (53%) of students said that this is a small or very small problem compared to 72% of PPS staff and 59% of the public who said it was a big or very big problem.

Students are not overly concerned about the equity of course and program options. We asked that it’s a problem if “some students have lots of course and program options while others don’t.” Slightly more than one-half (52%) said it is only very small or small problem. On the other hand, 78% of PPS staff and 55% of the public said it is a big or very big problem.

Compared to PPS staff and the general public, students don't feel that a parental involvement is a problem. Less than one-third (29%) of students said “not enough parental involvement” was a big or very big problem compared to 70% of PPS staff and 39% of the public.

Students give the highest priority to making certain students in the most need of help get it. The survey asked the students rank 12 goals for the District. The two ranked highest were “assure that struggling students have access to the best teaching” and “closely monitor and support students who are at risk of dropping out of high school.”

Overall, students don't feel it's necessary to change school environments to spend more time with the same teacher. They rated this as the second lowest priority.

Closing the achievement gap between different socio-economic and ethnic groups was a low priority for students. Just over one-third (38%) of students said that this should be a high or urgent priority for the District. This is at odds with PPS staff and the public. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of staff and 63% of the public said it should be high or urgent priority.

PPS HIGH SCHOOL DESIGN ONLINE SURVEY
N=2352 (PPS Students)*, N=1322 (PPS Staff)*, N=400 (Public)
Davis, Hibbitts, & Midghall Inc

**Sample size may vary due per question due to skip logic and responses to questions being optional.*

Welcome to our online survey. Your school district values your opinion as a student and this short survey will help the District gather ideas and opinions about public high schools from your perspective.

This is a research study conducted by Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall, Inc., an independent research firm. You may be assured of confidentiality—your name will not be associated with your responses to the following questions.

PPS Student Survey: An online survey administered to PPS students. Principals and other school administrators promoted the survey and provided students with a URL that linked them to the survey, hosted on a secure website.

PPS Staff Survey: An online survey administered to PPS staff. The PPS superintendent promoted the survey and provided staff with a URL that linked them to the survey, hosted on a secure website.

Public Telephone Survey: A scientific telephone survey administered to a random sample of 400 residents ages 18 and older living in the Portland Public Schools boundaries.

** Indicates comparative question between PPS students, PPS staff, and the public.*

1. Overall, how would you rate your *high school education experience*: very good, somewhat good, neutral, somewhat bad, very bad?

Response Category	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very good	33%	n/a	n/a
Somewhat good	45%	n/a	n/a
Neutral	15%	n/a	n/a
Somewhat bad	6%	n/a	n/a
Very bad	1%	n/a	n/a
Don't know	0%	n/a	n/a

2. (IF VERY/SOMEWHAT POOR TO Q1) Why?

“Our schools have a lot of problems that are not being dealt with.”

“Because small schools don't have enough choices.”

“Because I attended a High School that is not my neighborhood high school, and it was not what I had expected. So I am planning to transfer back to my neighborhood school. I didn't achieve much at a school I did not want to be.”

“I never took my opportunities to do my best in school.”

SEE VERBATIM FILE FOR ALL RESPONSES

3. (IF VERY/SOMEWHAT GOOD TO 1) Why?

“Mainly because the teachers interact with the students well, and it has a welcoming feeling because of that. Also it is a very friendly place that creates lots of opportunities in academic and sports/interests, offering many extra-curricular activities.”

“I'm learning a lot but I feel like I could still be taught more. Overall I am still learning and open-minded to what is around me.”

“I have loved my high school experience. I have made wonderful friends and have had amazing teachers! Franklin has pushed me and has now I am achieving goals I thought I wouldn't ever do.”

“Very nice teachers and a very supportive environment. But some class overcrowding makes it less than an excellent rating.”

“While there are some amazing classes and teachers, I still had classes, especially in Freshman and Sophomore year, that were dull, easy, and pointless.”

SEE VERBATIM FILE FOR ALL RESPONSES

***4. (ASK ALL) Which statement comes closest to how you feel about your high school?**

Response Category	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
The school is working just fine at this time and doesn't need any changes	20%	1%	5%
Some changes are needed over time to improve the school	63%	65%	57%
Major changes are needed now to improve the school	13%	28%	30%
Don't know	5%	6%	8%

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

Response Category			
5. School climate and culture	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very dissatisfied	3%	n/a	n/a
Dissatisfied	12%	n/a	n/a
Satisfied	51%	n/a	n/a
Very satisfied	28%	n/a	n/a
Don't know	5%	n/a	n/a
6. Feeling attended to by teachers	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very dissatisfied	3%	n/a	n/a
Dissatisfied	12%	n/a	n/a
Satisfied	50%	n/a	n/a
Very satisfied	30%	n/a	n/a
Don't know	4%	n/a	n/a
7. Academic program and curriculum	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very dissatisfied	3%	n/a	n/a
Dissatisfied	16%	n/a	n/a
Satisfied	51%	n/a	n/a
Very satisfied	26%	n/a	n/a
Don't know	4%	n/a	n/a
8. Feeling safe	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very dissatisfied	4%	n/a	n/a
Dissatisfied	8%	n/a	n/a
Satisfied	46%	n/a	n/a
Very satisfied	39%	n/a	n/a
Don't know	3%	n/a	n/a

9. Getting to and from school (transportation)	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very dissatisfied	5%	n/a	n/a
Dissatisfied	11%	n/a	n/a
Satisfied	44%	n/a	n/a
Very satisfied	36%	n/a	n/a
Don't know	4%	n/a	n/a
10. After school events	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very dissatisfied	5%	n/a	n/a
Dissatisfied	13%	n/a	n/a
Satisfied	46%	n/a	n/a
Very satisfied	25%	n/a	n/a
Don't know	11%	n/a	n/a
11. Communications with school staff	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very dissatisfied	5%	n/a	n/a
Dissatisfied	14%	n/a	n/a
Satisfied	50%	n/a	n/a
Very satisfied	27%	n/a	n/a
Don't know	4%	n/a	n/a
12. General learning experience	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very dissatisfied	3%	n/a	n/a
Dissatisfied	11%	n/a	n/a
Satisfied	55%	n/a	n/a
Very satisfied	28%	n/a	n/a
Don't know	3%	n/a	n/a

How big an obstacle are the following to your high school being more successful *educating students*: a very small problem, a small problem, a big problem, or a very big problem?

Response Category			
*13. Not enough money	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very small	7%	1%	4%
Small	17%	7%	12%
Big	30%	28%	36%
Very big	37%	58% 86	42% 78
Don't know	9%	5%	5%
*14. Buildings in ill repair and needing renovation	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very small	17%	2%	4%
Small	34%	21%	28%
Big	26%	36%	43%
Very big	14%	37%	18%
Don't know	9%	4%	7%
*15. Lack of predictable or stable funding	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very small	7%	1%	3%
Small	19%	6%	14%
Big	32%	26%	36%
Very big	27%	63%	43%
Don't know	15%	4%	7%
*16. Students aren't learning good values, what it means to be a responsible citizen	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very small	21%	5%	3%
Small	34%	25%	14%
Big	24%	35%	36%
Very big	12%	28%	43%
Don't know	8%	8%	4%

*17. Not enough parental involvement	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very small	25%	2%	3%
Small	34%	21%	31%
Big	20%	40%	4%
Very big	9%	30%	30%
Don't know	11%	6%	7%
*18. Lack of effective principals	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very small	25%	7%	7%
Small	32%	30%	38%
Big	19%	28%	21%
Very big	11%	21%	10%
Don't know	12%	14%	24%
*19. Some students having lots of course and program options while others don't	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very small	20%	2%	6%
Small	32%	13%	26%
Big	22%	32%	39%
Very big	12%	46%	16%
Don't know	13%	7%	14%
*20. Classrooms not equipped with the technology to prepare students for the 21st Century	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very small	18%	2%	5%
Small	31%	16%	26%
Big	28%	33%	38%
Very big	17%	44%	16%
Don't know	7%	5%	14%

*21. Programs/curriculum not preparing students for the workplace after graduation	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very small	20%	3%	3%
Small	33%	18%	27%
Big	22%	39%	40%
Very big	12%	33%	19%
Don't know	13%	8%	11%
*22. Inadequate health and other human services support for students and families	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very small	26%	5%	8%
Small	33%	26%	34%
Big	18%	36%	34%
Very big	7%	23%	13%
Don't know	17%	10%	12%
*23. Programs/curriculum not preparing students for college (life for staff/public) after graduation	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very small	24%	4%	4%
Small	33%	29%	33%
Big	21%	37%	34%
Very big	12%	22%	17%
Don't know	11%	8%	12%
*24. Lack of effective teachers	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Very small	23%	13%	9%
Small	36%	40%	35%
Big	22%	24%	28%
Very big	12%	15%	15%
Don't know	7%	9%	13%

What priority should the District give to the following goals for your high school: a low priority, medium priority, high priority, or an urgent priority? Try not to indicate urgent for all the goals.

Response Category			
*25. Improve principal effectiveness	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Low	26%	10%	21%
Medium	32%	29%	39%
High	20%	33%	26%
Urgent	12%	22%	8%
Don't know	10%	7%	7%
*26. Close the achievement gap between different socio-economic and ethnic groups of students	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Low	17%	3%	9%
Medium	31%	17%	25%
High	25%	34%	36%
Urgent	13%	43%	27%
Don't know	14%	3%	3%
*27. Improve teacher effectiveness	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Low	17%	9%	9%
Medium	33%	31%	26%
High	30%	36%	41%
Urgent	14%	20%	19%
Don't know	5%	4%	5%
*28. Provide more programs for high achieving students	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Low	15%	10%	12%
Medium	32%	37%	40%
High	30%	35%	36%
Urgent	15%	16%	10%
Don't know	7%	3%	3%

*29. Strengthen technical and or career oriented education options for students	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Low	13%	2%	7%
Medium	32%	18%	30%
High	32%	42%	49%
Urgent	14%	36%	13%
Don't know	9%	2%	2%
*30. Increase program options so more students can earn college credit while they are in high school	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Low	12%	3%	3%
Medium	27%	12%	12%
High	35%	51%	51%
Urgent	20%	28%	28%
Don't know	6%	5%	5%
*31. Closely monitor and support students who are at risk of dropping out of high school	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Low	10%	2%	6%
Medium	27%	10%	15%
High	32%	37%	45%
Urgent	24%	49%	32%
Don't know	7%	2%	1%
*32. Assure that struggling students have access to the best teaching	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Low	9%	4%	6%
Medium	27%	14%	18%
High	36%	43%	51%
Urgent	22%	37%	24%
Don't know	6%	2%	1%

*33. Increase the amount of course offerings that provide hands-on learning opportunities	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Low	10%	2%	9%
Medium	29%	18%	31%
High	35%	46%	47%
Urgent	19%	31%	11%
Don't know	7%	2%	2%
*34. Develop school environments where students spend more time with the same teachers, so there's more of a one-on-one relationship	PPS Students	PPS Staff	Public
Low	25%	17%	21%
Medium	32%	33%	33%
High	26%	32%	31%
Urgent	10%	13%	11%
Don't know	8%	6%	4%

35. What is the most important thing to change about your high school to make the education better for you as a student?

"Smaller classes. Also, doing away with the fact that the teachers with the most seniority get to keep their job over the newer ones. They should be judged more on merit."

"Get the funding so that school doesn't close 3 weeks early. More technology integration would be good. Honors classes for freshmen would make freshman year more challenging. I believe we should have more hands on learning opportunities. Personally it's easier for me to learn by doing and not being lectured at."

"I think the most important issue is the funding. For as long as I've been at PPS budget cuts have negatively impacted my learning experience. For example, if we lose twenty days off the end of the school year I heard there's a possibility that our credits won't count. That's unacceptable, especially to students may want to attend college out of state."

"They need to liven up the classroom. By this, I mean that they need to make classes more interesting and relevant to our lives, so kids are actually interested in what they're learning."

"I believe that the most important change in my high school should be bringing my school as well as faculty into the 21st century. I am tired of using text books and computers older than I am, as well as seeing very nice technology go to waste on teachers that do not know how to use it, such as smart boards and laptop computers."

“Keep classes small, provide better learning experiences in the community, make connections to college coursework and vocational options, and update technology.”

“The most important thing that needs to be changed, in my opinion, is the curriculum of the teachers and how they teach the students. There needs to be more of a close relationship with the students to help them grasp what they're trying to learn.”

SEE VERBATIM FILE FOR ALL RESPONSES

36. What advice do you have for decreasing the number of students who drop out of high school?

“Better community mentoring. When I went to school in S. Oregon the Kiwanis and other groups got involved with the schools and students.”

“My advice is take the opportunity you have of learning something new in high school and don't drop out of high school because that will waste your whole future you would basically through it in the trash.”

“I would say put them in a class small in number with an encouraging teacher that will help them with work and gives them a lot of attention.”

“Try your hardest and if you don't understand the work get help from your teachers. Don't be afraid to ask questions because that is why teachers are there.”

“Encourage them, and make them feel wanted at school. Like they do belong, and let them know how big of a difference it makes in their life.”

“High school is the one place where achievement matters for the rest of your life. You learn everything in high school that will mean everything for the rest of your life and if you can prove that you can get through this, you can prove that you can get through life. If you drop out, that is the pattern you will fall back on in normal life and you will get nowhere and feel worthless.”

“Principles need to change. Staff needs to get more in depth with their students, see it through their eyes. To better understand the struggle the students are having to make them drop out. Encouragement would help. Not just telling them it's their choice.”

SEE VERBATIM FILE FOR ALL RESPONSES

These last questions are for statistical purposes only.

37. Name of your high school. **(DROP DOWN MENU WITH HIGH SCHOOL NAMES)**

Jefferson H.S. -----	14%
Lincoln H.S. -----	14%
Benson H.S. -----	10%
Renaissance Arts Academy -----	8%
Grant H.S. -----	7%
Madison H.S. -----	6%
Wilson H.S.-----	6%
ACT H.S. -----	5%
Cleveland H.S.-----	5%
SEIS H.S. -----	4%
P.O.W.E.R Academy Roosevelt -----	4%
Franklin H.S. -----	4%
Pauling Academy of Int. Sci. -----	2%
Metropolitan Learning Ctr. H.S. -----	1%
Jefferson Women’s Academy -----	1%
Alliance H.S. -----	1%
Mt Scott Park H.S. Learning Center-----	1%
Open Meadow H.S. -----	1%
P.C.C.H.S. Completion-----	*
Clinton Street School-----	*
Albina Youth Opportunity School -----	*
LEP Charter H.S. -----	*
NAYA Early college Academy-----	*
P.C.C. GED-----	*
Trillium Public Charter K-12 -----	*
Other-----	1%

38. Are you a:

Freshman -----	26%
Sophomore -----	25%
Junior -----	25%
Senior -----	23%
Recent graduate-----	1%
In middle school -----	*

39. Age?

13	-----	*
14	-----	12%
15	-----	24%
16	-----	25%
17	-----	24%
18	-----	13%
19	-----	1%
Other	-----	1%

40. Gender?

Female	-----	52%
Male	-----	48%