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Public Schools



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Community Schools Steering Committee Presents Phased, Tiered Plan to Pittsburgh Public Schools Board

Committee with members from organizations, foundations, PPS Board and staff represents concept of community partnerships, starts the 'smart schools' process; District accepts applications for Designated Community Schools, with Board vote on selections scheduled for Legislative Meeting in March

PITTSBURGH (Feb. 9, 2017) – District representatives from the 26-member Community Schools Steering Committee tonight presented to the Board its report and timeline for establishing community schools in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, using a national best-practices model. Under a phased approach to implementing community schools, PPS will invest in all schools to increase holistic support for all students. In addition, the District is accepting applications to gauge the interest, readiness and commitment of schools to become a Designated Community School or ultimately a Full-Service Community School.

Under this tiered plan, all PPS schools will be effective schools that support the overall well-being of students. Among the services to be offered are expanded nurse services, positive behavioral intervention and supports, and restorative practices. Designated Community Schools will also engage community organizations to provide intensive support, based on a needs assessment, and will have a person on site to coordinate programs and services. Full-Service Community Schools would be a hub for the community, offering services such as adult education and medical/dental services in addition to traditional school functions and activities.

“Many of our children face complex issues that prevent them from fully engaging in school. As educators, we’re meeting this challenge the head-on by helping them develop into successful, engaged learners.” said Superintendent Dr. Anthony Hamlet. “The Community Schools Policy recently adopted by our Board aims to enhance connections between schools, families and the community. I’m grateful to the committee of PPS Board members, staff, parents, and a wealth of community partners for their hard work to launch the application process. This will help us to understand the supports each school may need, and each team’s vision for their school.”

Applications are due by Feb. 17 and site visits to schools will begin in March. The Board will vote on Designated Community Schools at its March 21 Legislative Meeting. All Community Schools staff will receive professional development training in June as the committee continues its work during summer on school-based needs assessments and an implementation plan.

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Page 2 - Community Schools Steering Committee Presents Phased, Tiered Plan to Pittsburgh Public Schools Board

Schools vying to become Designated Community Schools must explain their academic offerings; services for students, parents and community members; top strengths and assets; as well as areas where the Community School strategy could more effectively address the school community's needs.

Schools are asked to provide data on absenteeism, suspensions, students with disabilities, percentage of students who are English Language Learners, and key partners who provide the schools with services. The application also gauges how violence, poverty and health conditions in the community where the school is located might affect students and their families.

"The essence of Community Schools is recognizing the importance of meeting non-academic needs so that students can focus on and enjoy learning. Through strategic partnerships, community schools promote student achievement, positive conditions for learning, and the well-being of families and communities," said LouAnn Ross, who was hired in December as the District's Community Schools Coordinator. "Our goal is to maintain the core focus on student outcomes, while recognizing that children grow up in families who are integral parts of communities. Some families may need health and social supports, and the Community School model provides a base for transformative parent engagement on behalf of children and schools."

Nationally, community schools are recognized as "smart schools" that improve students' learning by combining traditional approaches with community-based resources on site. They can help build stronger communities by engaging parents and families to address barriers to learning. Many teachers say they feel that they are more effective in community schools.

"Establishing community schools has been a major goal of this Board," said PPS Board President Regina Holley. "It is important that our Community School model is created with input from a wide-ranging group of stakeholders, including the PFT, funders, and community partners and advocates. We look forward to establishing effective, long-term partnerships with community members and organizations who can help the District provide our children with the holistic support they truly need."

In addition to PPS Board members and staff, the Community Schools Steering Committee includes representation from the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Communities in Schools, Early Childhood, Education Rights Network, Allegheny County Health Department, The Heinz Endowments, Homewood Children's Village, Pittsburgh Mayor's Office, One Pittsburgh, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network, Pittsburgh Promise, and The Pittsburgh Foundation.

In other news

This evening, consultant Martha Greenway provided an update on the work of "Strategy Teams" charged with developing initiatives within the four Strategic Themes of the District's Five-Year Strategic Plan Framework. The update included suggested objectives and initiatives for each Strategic Theme. Tomorrow, initiative sponsors and owners will receive training for the development of action plans and measurements for each initiative. To ensure implementation success, initiatives will be phased in over time to effectively manage resources and sequence related work. To learn more about the recommended initiatives, objectives and phases view the full presentation at <http://www.ppsstrategicplan.org/strategic-plan-update>.

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