

YOUTH WEIGH IN

The Educational Priorities of
New York City High School Students

YouthAction NYC
April 2007



CITIZENS' COMMITTEE for CHILDREN
OF NEW YORK INC



YouthAction NYC

YouthAction NYC is a program of Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC) that brings the perspectives of young people to the issues that most affect them and challenges them to make the city a better place for children, youth and families. YouthAction NYC prepares young people for civic engagement by involving them directly in public policy and community life, training a new generation of advocates to carry on CCC's mission to Secure Every Child's Birthright to be healthy, housed, educated and safe.

Offered to aspiring young leaders each fall and spring, the YouthAction NYC Community Leadership Course (YCLC) introduces young people to the fundamentals of government and advocacy using City neighborhoods and City Hall as laboratories for learning. The YCLC meets weekly after school and is open to public and private high school students throughout New York City. Through polling, field visits, meetings with community leaders and elected and appointed officials, classroom discussions, and small group activities, participants learn to identify and research problems that affect their lives and the lives of other New Yorkers. YouthAction NYC helps young people not only understand social problems, but also develop well-supported recommendations for change, take action, and monitor accountability.

Graduates of the Youth Community Leadership Course are invited to join YouthAction NYC as a venue where they can continue putting their developing advocacy and leadership skills to practice in meaningful ways. YouthAction NYC members meet weekly after school during the academic year to research a particular issue area in depth and collaboratively design and execute a strategic advocacy campaign – working to resolve issues through teamwork, negotiation, peer and public education, and focused action with policymakers, service providers and influential community members. Through this process, members of YouthAction NYC learn how to effectively and responsibly address problems facing New York City's children, youth and families.

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INTRODUCTION

The New York City public school system includes over 1,400 schools (about 400 of which are high schools), making it the largest school system in the nation – serving more students than eight states have residents. In an effort to improve this vast system’s efficiency and effectiveness, in 2002, Mayor Michael Bloomberg lobbied the New York State legislature for “mayoral control” of the system, which had formerly been charged to the Board of Education, a panel of appointed members.

With a reorganized Department of Education, a broader span of control, more responsibility, and increased accountability, the Bloomberg Administration has taken a number of bold actions: implementing a citywide high school curriculum, creating a Leadership Academy to recruit and train principals, opening new charter schools, and engineering a grand-scale reorganization of large failing high schools into new community-based small schools. To finance these necessary and expansive undertakings, the Mayor has increased city funding for DOE by over \$3 billion since 2002.¹

A wave of discussion surrounding public school reform has emerged in recent years, foreshadowed by the landmark lawsuit, Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) v. State of New York, filed in May of 1993. In this case, the courts have upheld CFE’s assertion that New York City students were being shortchanged, relative to students in the rest of the state, and denied a “sound basic education” as a result of the state’s adherence to a school funding formula that is inequitable and unconstitutional. Through sustained litigation CFE has brought attention to the fact that the State must more equitably fund New York City public schools before its students can be fully granted their constitutional right to a *sound basic education*.

The Appellate Division, First Department, took a significant step toward heeding this call in March of 2006, ordering the State Legislature to provide New York City schools \$4.7 to \$5.63 billion in operating aid and \$9.2 billion in capital funding. Later that month, Mayor Bloomberg successfully lobbied the Governor and State Legislature to provide \$6.5 billion in aid and financing for

school construction, renovation, and upgrades, which resulted in the inclusion of court-mandated increases for capital construction costs in the State FY 2006-2007 Adopted Budget.

Later that year (November, 2006), the Court of Appeals issued an enforceable order, requiring that at least \$1.93 billion of additional school operating aid be spent each year on New York City’s public schools. In January, 2007, newly elected Governor Spitzer upheld his campaign promise to bring an increase in education funding for New York City schools within the previously court-ordered range of \$4.7 billion to \$5.6 billion. The Governor’s 2007-2008 Executive Budget phases a statewide increase of \$7 billion in school aid over a four-year period. For New York City, this proposal would result in a state contribution of \$3.2 billion over 4 years. As part of this state school aid proposal, Mayor Bloomberg has agreed and proposed to contribute \$2.2 billion over four years. In turn, combined state and city school aid contributions will bring \$5.4 billion in new resources to New York City schools.²

Another important outcome of the CFE lawsuit is the rich public discourse it has generated. Legislators, lawyers, judges, New York City Department of Education (DOE), school administration, teachers, parents, and students have been challenged to answer the central question underpinning the litigation: “What is a ‘sound basic education?’” In its 2003 opinion, the Court of Appeals defined a sound basic education, in part, as the “opportunity for a meaningful high school education.” Yet even this opinion left unanswered a fundamental question: “What does a meaningful high school education consist of?” YouthAction NYC’s work strives to explore and bring answers to this question, knowing that its importance will reverberate far beyond the CFE lawsuit itself. We understand that the decisions made now will affect the future of public schools and public school education for decades to come.

The Mayor and New York City Schools Chancellor, the New York City Council, the United Federation of Teachers, education advocates, and other civic and

¹Expense, Revenue, Contract Budget. *The City of New York Adopted Budget to Fiscal Year 2007 and Fiscal Year 2003*, July, 2006 and July 2002, and Sewell Chan and David M. Herszenhorn. “Mayor Says City Won’t Pay in School Financing Case,” *New York Times*, October 19, 2006.

²David M. Herszenhorn. “New York Court Cuts Aid Sought by City Schools.” *New York Times*, November 21, 2006.

community organizations have weighed in with their priorities and plans for allocating the new education aid that will result from the CFE lawsuit. In order to define and provide a meaningful high school education, it is necessary to determine what students need to reduce dropout rates, increase graduation rates, and prepare youth for college and/or work. By looking at the issue of high school education and thinking about how to educate, retain, and engage young people in learning and completing school, it was critically important to hear from and respond to students themselves.

Propelled by an interest in improving the quality of high school education in New York City and a desire to take advantage of unique and historic opportunities to weigh-in on high school reform, YouthAction NYC³ undertook a yearlong project to identify and address the gaps that stand between students' educational ideals and their everyday high school experiences. The primary goal of our education advocacy project was to contribute a youth perspective to the developing plans for high school in a post-CFE environment.

³The youth-led advocacy arm of Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past year, YouthAction NYC members conducted a small focus group and surveyed 102 high school students from 23 different schools across New York City – soliciting the voices of young people and listening closely to what they had to say. At the same time, YouthAction NYC invited parents, teachers, administrators, education advocates, elected officials, and DOE representatives to share their opinions and provide guidance about the issues and challenges ahead. By putting important points of view held by adult and youth stakeholders side by side, and considering them together, we gained a clearer picture of how New York City public high school students perceive and value their educational experiences and what they believe to be missing from their high school education.

YouthAction NYC used CCC's fact-finding model as a methodological framework for determining how additional resources, secured from the CFE lawsuit, could be used in high schools. The study model consists of five basic stages: research, observation and monitoring, gathering public opinion, analysis, and communication and presentation. Advocacy is defined as the pursuit of credible solutions to social challenges. CCC's model of fact-based advocacy starts from a basis of fact and is buttressed with empirical evidence. The process is cyclical – the more we learn, the more questions arise, requiring further research and deeper investigation.

Our research suggests, across New York City neighborhoods and schools, that New York City students surveyed share a common core of educational values. The students we spoke with and surveyed imagined and sought a high school community which includes: talented and responsive teachers, smaller class sizes, school buildings with sufficient space, modern equipment and current books and materials, an engaging curriculum, a safe and orderly environment, stronger bridges between school and home,

an inclusive school culture that promotes student/teacher collaboration and participation, and a stimulating regimen of after-school activities.

Yet, the high school students interviewed reported that too many of these shared values and educational goals are absent in their own school experiences. Students surveyed reported a continuing need for teachers to create closer connections between academic content and students' lives and solicit and incorporate student opinions; smaller class sizes that afford everyone in a class the opportunity to participate and receive personal help during class; library resources that are current and relevant; clean and well-lit school buildings that are large enough to accommodate students and teachers and are equipped with places to store their belongings; a curriculum that provides opportunities for experiential and cross-cultural learning; less reactive and more responsive and involved school safety agents and a better way to address violence and bullying; and more collaboration between students, teachers, and principals to build trust, improve communication, and engage students in learning.

Meeting many of these challenges (i.e. class size, materials and resources, professional development) will require additional funding envisioned in the CFE settlement, while addressing other issues (i.e. soliciting and incorporating students' experiences and ideas and developing greater trust between staff and students) will demand a renewed commitment to building a student-faculty-principal partnership.

This report offers fourteen policy recommendations, which represent the visions and hopes of youth surveyed and of YouthAction NYC members in collaboration with CCC staff. These recommendations are intended to fill the gaps between what students say they need and value and what they are currently getting (or not getting) in the schools they attend.

RECOMMENDATION HIGHLIGHTS:

Teachers:

- ◆ Principals should require that teachers elicit and analyze student feedback on content, classroom management, and teacher-student relations and discuss findings in an annual review each year.
- ◆ Principals should use students' evaluations of their teachers' practices as a factor in selecting and developing the content of annual professional development opportunities and training for teachers.

Class Size:

- ◆ DOE should cap high school class size at 25 students.

Resources:

- ◆ DOE should provide each high school with sufficient resources to expand and maintain up-to-date collections in school libraries and purchase electronic library databases.

Facilities:

- ◆ DOE should monitor the school construction, renovation, and repair plan for New York City high schools to ensure that facilities are repaired on time and meet the basic needs of students.
- ◆ Principals should elicit feedback on building maintenance and cleanliness from student members of School Leadership Teams.

Curriculum:

- ◆ Principals should provide teachers with professional development and training on multicultural education to meet the varied learning needs of New York City high school students.
- ◆ Principals should forge stronger connections between school and employment by offering all students workplace internships and related workplace skill-building courses.

Safety:

- ◆ Principals should promote safe and supportive relationships between staff and students by ensuring that safety-based training programs are continued throughout the school year, involve all staff, and are customized to meet the needs of individual high schools.
- ◆ DOE should require that principals include School Safety Agents (SSA) as members of School Leadership Teams and involve SSAs in regular school activities and professional development opportunities.

Parent and Community Support:

- ◆ Principals should work with Parent Coordinators to survey parents annually about what is needed to most effectively advance their child's learning and educational success. Data should be used to develop learning opportunities for parents.
- ◆ DOE should require that every student report card include teacher comments about student performance and information regarding available resources on how to obtain extra help for students who are in need of improvement.

School Culture:

- ◆ DOE should include "student engagement and involvement in governance" as a measure on the school progress report that is part of DOE's developing Children First accountability initiative.

After School:

- ◆ DOE should offer all high school students access to a quality SAT preparatory course.

What ties together the aspirations and perspectives of the high school students surveyed is a desire to learn in school environments that are *welcoming, challenging, safe, and collaborative*. Our policy recommendations stem from the belief that these principles strengthen relationships and promote mutual respect between youth, faculty, and administration and lead to greater educational achievement.

METHODOLOGY

Over the past year, YouthAction NYC solicited the voices of young people and listened closely to what they had to say. At the same time, YouthAction NYC invited adult leaders who are involved with or invested in the education of New York City's high school students to share their opinions and provide guidance about the issues and challenges ahead. By putting important points of view held by adult and youth stakeholders side-by-side, and considering them together, we gained a clearer picture of how New York City public high school students perceive and value their educational experiences and what they believe is missing from their high school education.

Forty YouthAction NYC members collaborated on the current project, putting CCC's fact-finding model to practice. This model consists of five basic stages: research, observation and monitoring, gathering public opinion, analysis, and communication and presentation. Advocacy is defined as the pursuit of credible solutions to social challenges. CCC's model of fact-based advocacy starts from a basis of facts and is buttressed with empirical evidence. The process is cyclical – the more we learn, the more questions arise, requiring further research and deeper investigation.

Starting Point: Our Visit to PS 161

In November, 2005, YouthAction NYC members traveled to PS 161 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn to hear a representative from the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) address parents and teachers regarding their concerns about the state of public education. The silver lining of the presentation was a discussion of the victory for CFE in its lawsuit against the State of New York and the anticipated resources that could address common challenges and concerns discussed that evening. It was inspiring to see students, teachers, and parents taking time together after school hours to better understand connections between their own challenges and those that face students, teachers, and parents citywide. YouthAction NYC members realized at this meeting that we were part of an exciting and pivotal moment in the history of public education in New York City. With committed and collaborative youth-led advocacy work, we decided that we could continue the cause, through YouthAction NYC, in our own schools – using this window of opportunity in history to make a place for youth at the table, have our voices heard, and advance our ideals.

I. RESEARCH:

Collecting Data

YouthAction NYC employed the fact-based model of advocacy that Citizens' Committee for Children has developed and honed over six decades. This approach trusts in the idea that strong policy recommendations come from a strong foundation of research. Therefore, we began our advocacy project by building a collection of two kinds of important information.

First (beginning in November, 2005), we gathered data describing the current state of high school education in New York City.⁴ In order to see the complete picture of successes and shortcomings, we looked to a variety of sources for a wide array of educational statistics, beginning with, and often returning to, CCC's encyclopedia of child well-being (which includes both community and school-level data), *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*.

Second, to gain a sense of where "influentials" and other respected parties are currently concentrating their attention, we reviewed a number of noteworthy reports and sets of policy recommendations. The two sets of recommendations we studied most closely were those of the Mayor and the New York City Council, each outlining distinctive visions for prioritizing and spending anticipated CFE capital and operating aid.⁵ To broaden our scope, we also reviewed the findings and recommendations of youth councils, parent groups, and think tanks.⁶

As advocates, we understand that research and fact-finding is a continuous process. Throughout our project we read a variety of research from the educational field, which helped us keep in mind proven practices and

⁴YouthAction NYC began exploring educational issues by examining the following statistics as they relate to New York City, surrounding suburbs, and New York State as a whole: attendance rate, facility utilization rate, percentage of students meeting math and reading standards, per pupil spending, numbers of schools under registration review, library books per student, computers per 100 students, class size, and suspension rates.

⁵Plan of the City of New York to Provide a Sound Basic Education to All Its Students; Report of the New York City Council Commission on the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Parts I and II.

⁶Reports reviewed include: "New York Adequacy Study" (Campaign for Fiscal Equity), "Turn Up the Volume" (Make the Road By Walking), "Report on the Effectiveness of New York City's High Schools: 2004-2005" (The Citywide Council on High Schools), "Agenda for High School Reform" (Urban Youth Collaborative), "Framing the 2005 Mayoral Debate: Issues and Proposals for the Candidates" (Regional Plan Association, Center for an Urban Future, The New School).

trusted theories as we explored the educational areas in which we are most interested.

Our research moved from broad to narrow in the later stages of our project. As we became increasingly confident that, via fact-finding, we had identified the most pressing needs and concerns of high school students, we gathered more specific information about what the New York City Department of Education (DOE) is currently doing to address these concerns. With this additional contextual knowledge, we put ourselves in a position to make credible, well-rounded, and well-supported policy recommendations.

Roundtable Discussions

To see the needs of New York City high schools from important vantage points to which youth are not typically exposed, YouthAction NYC members organized and conducted four “roundtable discussions.”⁷ Each of these forums (held between December, 2005 and January, 2006) provided us with opportunities to hear the unique experiences and perspectives of adults who are most invested and involved in high school education. Our diverse group of guests included parents, teachers, a principal, a school founder, the Chair of the New York City Council Education Committee, education advocates, and representatives of the Department of Education.⁸

Throughout the roundtable series, YouthAction NYC members shared and rotated facilitation duties as a means for establishing an inclusive, collaborative, and youth-led atmosphere. All the while, YouthAction NYC members took meticulous notes of developing themes as well as interesting new ideas gone previously unexamined. Together, we periodically reviewed records of our participants’ responses to our questions to broaden our knowledge and refine our questions moving forward.

⁷A list of roundtable discussion questions is included in Appendix A of this report.

⁸Our roundtable participants included: Hon. Robert Jackson, New York City Council Education Committee Chairman; Jessica Garcia, Community Outreach Coordinator, Campaign for Fiscal Equity; Richard Kahan, Founder, Urban Assembly; Lynnette Delgado, Principal, Urban Assembly School for Media Studies; Gabby Kreisler Sheely, Chief of Staff, Division of Youth Development, DOE; Brian Osborne, Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, DOE; Pamela Wheaton, Deputy Director of Insideschools.org, Advocates for Children; Paul Powell, Program Director, Teach For America; David C. Bloomfield, President, Citywide Council on High Schools, DOE; Benita Miller Johnston, PTA President, Brooklyn School for Collaborative Studies; Vicki Madden, Technology Coordinator, Brooklyn School for Collaborative Studies.

At the end of our roundtable series, we identified where the concerns of our various participants intersected and developed a plan to explore these areas in more detail.

II. OBSERVATION AND MONITORING

The second phase of the fact-based advocacy process involves monitoring firsthand how services make their way (or fail to make their way) to “target populations.” For our project, this meant paying close attention to how well the high schools of Youth Action NYC members meet the needs of their students. In order to determine whether schools are meeting students’ needs, we recognized that we first needed to figure out for ourselves what high school students’ greatest needs are.

At this point, we took a step back and spent some time exploring what YouthAction NYC students want out of high school. YouthAction NYC members shared what they value most and expect from their schools. Exchanging our ideals and philosophies helped us to identify some of the most basic components of a meaningful high school education. Following this discussion, we were prepared to observe and monitor these same areas in our own schools.

In truth, we were not beginning our observations at this stage, but rather continuing them in a more focused and conscious manner. After all, YouthAction NYC members have been closely observing how their high schools operate since the day they arrived at their doors. From day to day, we all take mental notes of the things that make us feel comfortable, safe, challenged and supported as well as those things that obstruct our learning and make us feel frustrated. Yet, during our study of high schools, YouthAction NYC members made a concerted effort to make more targeted and purposeful observations. While we examined these specific aspects of our schools on our own, we regularly discussed and made sense of our observations together.

As YouthAction NYC members continued sharing and comparing experiences, we noticed stories beginning to repeat themselves. It became clear that even very different-seeming schools faced similar challenges (though to different degrees) as well as similar consequences when these challenges went unaddressed. As a group, YouthAction NYC hypothesized why certain issues exist and brainstormed preliminary solutions to these problems based on what had been seen and learned to this point.

III. GATHERING PUBLIC OPINION

Reflecting on their own high school experiences helped YouthAction NYC members to identify the things they collectively value in a high school education. Yet, we know that YouthAction NYC is only a small sample of New York City high school students and what is true for us may or may not be true for the majority of high school students. In the next phase of our project we strove to collect a more representative sample of high school students' opinions. We utilized two instruments for gathering public opinion: a focus group and a survey.

Focus Group of High School Students

In its January, 2001 decision, the New York State Supreme Court outlined seven educational areas, which must be fully resourced if students are to receive a "sound basic education" (qualified teachers and personnel, appropriate class sizes, adequate and accessible school buildings, sufficient and up to date resources, suitable curricula, adequate resources for students with extraordinary needs, and a safe orderly environment). Yet, the courts did not go so far as to define the necessary qualities of these "resource areas" in great detail, leaving room for interpretation and many questions. For instance: What combination of skills and attributes makes a teacher qualified? What class size is most appropriate and conducive to teaching and learning? What characteristics make a learning environment safe and orderly? We believed that a focus group of youth would begin to bring answers to these questions.

After having gathered a variety of important views through our roundtable discussions, we wanted to create a forum that would give youth a chance to weigh in. Our aim was to learn more about how young people, outside of YouthAction NYC, see and experience high school. We hoped that including new youth voices would add insight to our discussion and broaden our understanding of what high school students value most.

Twelve incoming YouthAction NYC members, representing a wide range of public and private high schools, volunteered to serve as participants for our focus group, which was cooperatively facilitated by seven active YouthAction NYC members in January, 2006. The session began with a brief introduction and icebreaker, followed

by an explanation of the purpose and scope of our study of high schools (which participants would soon be invited to join as prospective YouthAction NYC members). Before discussion began, facilitators reminded participants that the four basic rules that govern YouthAction NYC activities – "one mic, safe space, take risks, and everyone participates" – apply and must be adhered to.

Our first set of focus group questions were broad, asking students what they want out of high school, what they would most like to change about their schools, what their schools provide best, and what they fail to provide.⁹ The second wave of questions focused on the seven "resource areas" that were identified by the New York State Supreme Court. These questions asked students to identify what works and what is needed in each respective area, whether their schools meet these standards, and what results when these standards are, or are not, met.

Our focus group left us with a clearer understanding of the big picture – what students want out of a high school education. It also provided us with a sense of how the major "resource areas" should look, according to youth opinion. Finally, our focus group simply brought to light the wide array of valuable ideas, opinions, and concerns that high school students hold.

Survey of High School Students

After analyzing the content of our focus group discussions (during February, 2006), we chose to include nine educational categories in a survey that we would administer to New York City high school students. Six of these categories were derived from the seven "resource areas" outlined by the State Supreme Court in the CFE lawsuit (qualified teachers and personnel, appropriate class sizes, adequate and accessible school buildings, sufficient and up to date resources, suitable curricula, and a safe orderly environment)¹⁰ and three additional categories emerged from our roundtable and focus group findings as being worthy of further exploration (after school activities, school culture, and parent and community engagement).

⁹Focus group questions are included in Appendix B of this report.

¹⁰The resource area, "Adequate resources for students with extraordinary needs," was omitted as an area of study in this report to ensure that students were asked only to comment on matters within their realm of experience and understanding.

The format of our survey was very similar to that of our focus group.¹¹ Essentially, we wanted high school students to tell us four things about each educational category:

What do you value? Are you getting what you value from your school? What is the impact of getting or not getting what you value? What do you think we can do to make things better?

To learn what students value most, we presented them with a number of attributes in each of our nine educational categories (which were highly regarded by YouthAction NYC members and focus group participants) and asked that they rate the importance of each on a 5-point scale. For instance, in defining a quality teacher, students were asked how important it is for a teacher to: demonstrate mastery of content knowledge, grade and return work promptly, relate learning to the lives of students, etc. In essence we sought to test whether what is of great value to a small sample of YouthAction NYC members and focus group participants is of equal value to a larger and wider sample of high school students.

We were interested in learning not only what students value most, but also which highly valued characteristics are most glaringly absent from their daily high school experiences. Once we identified “gaps,” we knew that we could use students’ descriptions of impacts and their proposed remedies (in combination with the data we collected from our research, roundtables, and focus group) to develop well-founded high-priority recommendations.

Because YouthAction NYC represents a wide range of high schools and communities, we decided to administer the surveys in our own schools. We compiled demographic data about our high schools (using DOE school report cards) and our survey participants to ensure we were in fact including the voices of a diverse pool of youth from a wide range of learning environments.¹² In total, we surveyed a cross-section of 102 high school students from 23 different high schools (5 private and 18 public schools) across New York City (representing Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx).

¹¹ The actual survey used is included in Appendix C of this report.

¹² Appendix D (School Data Chart) offers a list of the high schools participating in the survey and the variety of school characteristics considered in ensuring a diverse representation of high schools students.

While we planned to use our survey data to formulate recommendations for improving the quality of public high school education, we chose to include private high school students in our survey sampling because we have observed during YouthAction NYC discussions that private and public school students share many of the same educational values and experience similar results when their needs go unmet. Additionally, we believed there was much to gain from learning about the assets and obstacles that exist in different learning environments.

Surveys were administered in April, 2006 – a point in the school year at which students had defined opinions on their classrooms and schools. In order to improve the quality of our survey data, YouthAction members conducted surveys personally to one or two students at a time, reading and clarifying questions to ensure students completely understood directions. The surveys took an average of twenty to thirty minutes to complete, which made the process somewhat tedious, but having YouthAction NYC members interview students from their own high schools helped maintain cooperation and openness.

IV. ANALYSIS

Survey Analysis

After collecting survey data, we calculated and reviewed percentages of responses to determine what students value most and whether their schools are adequately providing these things. Though we took note of what students perceive as being provided for, we decided to focus more of our attention on the “gaps” – the characteristics and elements of schools that are most highly-valued by students, but also most widely lacking from students’ high school experiences. Recognizing what is deemed by students as necessary but absent enabled YouthAction NYC to piece together an agenda for high school improvement (though it is surely not an exhaustive catalog of what a quality education should include). The gaps we identified in each of our nine educational categories became the focus of our recommendations.

Issue Analysis: Developing Recommendations

To work toward making focused and relevant recommendations, we assigned each YouthAction NYC member to one of our nine educational categories (in May of 2006). Each of the nine groups of students was responsible for breaking down the issues and proposing feasible solutions within its respective area of study. In order to accomplish this, YouthAction NYC members scoured the large collection of research and findings that we had accumulated to this point (through research, roundtables, focus group discussion, and our survey) and extracted only information that pertained to their assigned educational category.

We developed an “issue analysis worksheet” as a tool for organizing our information and structuring our arguments in each educational category.¹³ This worksheet required groups to sort information into three sections: 1.) description of the issue, 2.) what works (according to educational scholars and empirical research), and 3.) existing recommendations (from a variety of reports we reviewed). Using this worksheet allowed us to better understand the nature of issues by viewing them from different perspectives. Where we found overlap and agreement between the observations of people standing in different places is where we knew to focus the majority of our attention. Once we developed clearer pictures of existing problems, we used well-established educational principles, elements of existing proposals (which we felt had potential from the student perspective), and knowledge of what works for high schools students (from personal experience), to make recommendations of our own.

Refining Our Recommendations

After each small group produced a preliminary recommendation within its educational category, our whole group reconvened. Small groups then took turns presenting their ideas and explaining their reasoning. During presentations, YouthAction NYC members were responsible for checking that each group’s recommendations successfully “filled the gaps” we identified through our survey. The whole group tested the purpose and feasibility of recommendations by asking each small group

critical questions and calling for supporting evidence. These presentations provided us with constructive opportunities to bounce our ideas around and face criticism from other youth in a safe space, before sharing our work with the outside world. After our internal presentations, a set of revised recommendations was emailed to all YouthAction NYC members for review and further editing.

During the summer (July, 2006), YouthAction NYC members held a recommendation review session. Students in attendance considered recent feedback from peers and examined each recommendation closely, one at a time, for relevance, usefulness, and potential for affecting constructive change. What resulted from this session were more focused, realistic, and representative recommendations.

The final stage of our recommendation development involved vetting our recommendations to those most knowledgeable of ongoing efforts and initiatives in New York City public education. Through email and phone exchange we communicated with a number of important offices at New York City Department of Education. These conversations provided us with new details about the successes and shortcomings of current strategies, which helped us reshape and refine our recommendations and, most importantly, put them in context.

V. COMMUNICATION & PRESENTATION

The release of this report does not mark the end of our work. The next challenge we face is that of effectively communicating our findings and recommendations to those who possess the power and will to make change – elected representatives, DOE officials, principals, teachers, parents, and most important, students themselves. This phase will involve persistent outreach, education, and motivation toward action on two fronts – school communities and the offices of elected and appointed officials.

In November, 2006 YouthAction NYC invited high school students and adult New Yorkers to a high school education forum at CCC.¹⁴ In coming months, we will continue to communicate our findings through

¹³The Issue Analysis Worksheet is included in Appendix E of this report.

¹⁴The panelists at our forum included Michelle Cahill, Senior Counselor for Education Policy; Amy Cohen, Coordinator of the Urban Youth Collaborative (a program of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform); and Elisabeth Ortega, a youth activist and member of the Urban Youth Collaborative.

presentations to our high school communities, and meetings with notable elected and appointed officials, as well as education advocates, who influence the course of high school public education.

We hope through our meetings that these influential individuals will recognize the necessity of incorporating youth voice in school reform efforts and will collaborate with us to transform our ideas into real and sustainable school policies and procedures. At the same time, in reaching out to the classmates of YouthAction NYC members, we hope these peers will recognize that their experiences and concerns are shared by other youth, that practical youth-centered solutions to problems exist, and that youth participation as advocates in school reform can bring about real and lasting change.

Data Constraints

This study is intended to serve as a snapshot of the collective values, experiences, and perceptions of 102 high school students surveyed and 43 YouthAction NYC members. While students involved in our study represent a cross-section of New York City schools and communities, their voices – the findings of our study – are not intended to speak for all New York City high school students. The total student enrollment of the public schools from which

we sampled is close to 27,000,¹⁵ a fraction of the city's total of approximately 300,000 public high school students, and the 18 public high schools from which our data is derived is a small portion of the city's total of 400 public high schools.¹⁶

The fact that YouthAction NYC members surveyed only 3-7 classmates at each of their schools is likely to contribute to sample bias; because survey participants were handpicked, students who were not connected to YouthAction NYC members through acquaintanceship were not included in our survey sampling.

Lastly, it should be noted that while calculations of what students have or do not have at their schools were used to identify gaps, which later served as themes upon which to develop recommendations for improving public high schools, these percentages also include the experiences of private high school students who are classmates of YouthAction NYC members.

¹⁵ According to the New York City Department of Education's 2004-2005 Annual School Reports. This figure does not include the enrollment of the five private schools participating in this study.

¹⁶ "New York: Education and Research." <http://www.city-data.com/us-cities/The-Northeast/New-York-Education-and-Research.html>. Data is derived from the 2004-2005 school year. This statement does not reflect the proportion of private schools participating in our study in relation to the total number of private high schools in New York City.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In January of 2001 the New York State Supreme Court determined that in order to ensure a “sound basic education” for public school students, the state must fully provide schools with seven vital “resource areas”:

- i. Sufficient numbers of qualified teachers, principals and other personnel
- ii. Appropriate class sizes
- iii. Adequate and accessible school buildings with sufficient space to ensure appropriate class size and implementation of a sound curriculum
- iv. Sufficient and up to date books, supplies, libraries, educational technology and laboratories
- v. Suitable curricula, including an expanded platform of programs to help at risk students by giving them “more time on task”
- vi. Adequate resources for students with extraordinary needs
- vii. A safe orderly environment

The following nine categories, which YouthAction NYC chose to study, are derived from the above resource areas as well as the shared values of students, which emerged from our roundtable and focus group discussions. To avoid asking a majority of students to comment on matters outside of their experience and understanding, we chose to omit “adequate resources for students with extraordinary needs” as an area of study in this report. In addition to the remaining six resource areas, YouthAction NYC members chose to include three categories which were repeatedly identified by participants as important during discussions: “school culture,” “after school,” and “parent and community support.”

In this section we divide the results of our work into the nine categories YouthAction NYC studied using the following format: summary of findings, collated survey data, impact of unmet needs, and proposed recommendations. It is important to note that findings represent the opinions and experiences of the 102 high school students YouthAction NYC surveyed, while recommendations are a product of the collective ideas of youth surveyed and YouthAction NYC members in collaboration with CCC staff.

1. TEACHER QUALITY

Findings

Summary

- ▶ Our data suggest that all nine of the teacher characteristics presented in our survey (see table) are of significant value to the vast majority of high school students polled.
- ▶ The question of whether students’ teachers have or do not have these valued characteristics produced wide variation in agreement (ranging from 48%-88%).
- ▶ A large majority of students surveyed believe that their teachers are knowledgeable in their respective content areas.
- ▶ At least one out of four students surveyed report the following highly-regarded teacher characteristics absent in their own teachers:¹⁷
 - ✓ Promptly grade and return work
 - ✓ Connect academic content to students’ lives
 - ✓ Praise and recognize achievement
 - ✓ Solicit and incorporate student feedback

*Impact on Students*¹⁸

- ▶ When teachers don’t connect learning to students’ lives... students surveyed report a loss of interest and motivation. (5/16 responses)
“Classes can get tedious and annoying when thoughts of ‘when am I going to use this?’ come up.”
“I feel like school is not yet a part of my life.”
- ▶ When teachers don’t promptly return assignments... students surveyed report feeling somewhat lost without feedback and that their work is less valued. (5/16 responses)

¹⁷Check marked characteristics in the findings section represent identified “gaps” – elements of schools that are most highly-valued by students, but also most widely lacking from students’ high school experiences. The gaps we identified in each of our nine educational categories became targets for our recommendations.

¹⁸The Impact on Students section presents surveyed students’ free-response descriptions of how they are impacted by particular “gaps” (identified with check marks in the findings section) in their own school experiences.

Data¹⁹

Teacher Characteristics:	Teachers Must...				My School's Teachers...			
	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	n =	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	n =
a.) Available to provide feedback and extra help	92	3	5	99	79	12	9	102
b.) Knowledgeable in Content area	92	4	4	100	88	4	8	102
c.) Praise and recognize achievement	89	4	7	100	55	25	20	100
d.) Respect and be responsive to students	88	5	7	99	74	13	13	101
e.) Convey information and concepts clearly	86	3	11	99	69	18	13	101
f.) Connect academic content to students' lives	85	7	8	100	47	27	26	102
g.) Be enthusiastic	83	7	10	101	69	18	17	100
h.) Promptly grade and return work	75	8	17	100	48	35		
i.) Solicit and incorporate student feedback	73	7	20	101	54	24	22	101

"When they give us back our work late (it sometimes takes 2 weeks or more) our work seems unimportant."

"It's difficult at times when assignments aren't immediately returned because you don't learn your mistakes."

- When teachers don't praise appropriate behavior and achievement... students surveyed report feeling unappreciated and dejected. (3/16 responses)

"When teachers don't...kids are discouraged and may drop out..."

Recommendations:

In order to truly reach students, teachers must constantly self-reflect²⁰ and strive to better understand how their instructional approaches are working and not working from the perspective of students. Teachers can only see through the eyes of youth by seeking, valuing, and incorporating useful student feedback into their practice and working towards developing habits and qualities that students believe enrich their learning.

¹⁹In the data tables provided throughout the findings and recommendations section, the "agree" and "disagree" columns reflect the percentage of surveyed youth who agree or disagree, first, with the necessity of each characteristic in an educational setting, and second, with the presence of each characteristic in their own school setting.

²⁰Carol Rodgers. "Seeing Student Learning: Teacher Change and the Role of Reflection: Voices Inside Schools." *Harvard Educational Review* no.2. (2002): 230-253.

Principals should require that teachers elicit and analyze student feedback on content, classroom management, and teacher-student relations and discuss findings in an annual review each year.

DOE should include a new measure, "evidence of soliciting and incorporating student feedback into practice," on the form currently used to evaluate teacher quality.²¹ Teachers should be responsible for providing a plan for (and later evidence of) addressing and incorporating useful student feedback with the aim of better meeting the needs of students.

Principals should use students' evaluations of their teachers' practices as a factor in selecting and developing the content of annual professional development opportunities and training for teachers.

This policy would likely improve teaching and learning by helping teachers develop practices and qualities that students appreciate most. Professional development trainings should emphasize valuable teaching practices identified by students as currently most lacking (promptly grading and returning work, connecting academic content to students' lives, praising and recognizing achievement, and soliciting and incorporating student feedback).

²¹A version of such a rating form – *Annual Professional Performance Review and Report On Probationary Service of Pedagogical Employee* – can be found as appendix I of a Board of Education publication entitled, "Rating Pedagogical Employees."

2. CLASS SIZE

Findings

Summary

- ▶ While 87% of students surveyed believe that a class size of 25 students or fewer is most conducive to teaching and learning, the majority of students surveyed (53%) report that their current class sizes are larger than 25 (with one in five students reporting that their classes exceed 30 students).
- ▶ In addition to commenting on class size, students surveyed described the dynamics of their classroom environments. It is important to note that our data analysis does not include calculations of correlation between classroom dynamics and class size. However, we believe that the data collected on classroom environments highlights a number of challenges that are at least to some degree a function of class size and can likely be remedied (at least in part) by class size reduction.
- ▶ Our survey reveals the following five troubling classroom characteristics as most prevalent in the schools of students surveyed:

- ✓ Not all students who need personal help receive it during class
- ✓ Classrooms are noisy and distracting
- ✓ Classrooms lack order and students are not on task
- ✓ Not all students are being provided necessary materials for class.
- ✓ Many students do not share ideas and participate each day

Impact on Students

- ▶ When it is noisy and distracting... students surveyed report experiencing disruption and becoming off-task (12/27 responses)
"...creates distraction and disruptions in class..."
"Some students can not finish their work"
- ▶ When there's a lack of personal attention... students surveyed report feeling ignored and discouraged. (7/27 responses)
"When students don't get the individual help they need, their grades could start or continue slipping"
"Students are discouraged from learning by not receiving personal attention during class due to large class sizes"

Data

Which of the following class sizes do you think is most conducive to teaching and learning?	What is the average class size at your school?			
a.) 15-19 (54%) b.) 20-25 (33%) c.) 26-30 (11%) d.) 31-35 (1%) (n=100)	a.) 15-19 (19%) b.) 20-25 (24%) c.) 26-30 (35%) d.) 31-35 (18%) e.) Other (3%) (n=100)			
	In my classes...			
Classroom characteristics	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	N =
a.) Students all know each other's names	70	22	8	100
b.) Most students share ideas and participate each day	62	24	14	99
c.) Every student is provided necessary materials for class	57	24	19	98
d.) There is order and students are on task	57	25	18	100
e.) It is noisy and distracting	35	46	19	99
f.) All students who need personal help receive it during class	42	40	18	96

- D When there's a lack of materials... students surveyed report having to find their own (4/27 responses)
"Materials needed for class is left up to the students to bring to school"
"They [students] have to buy them"

Recommendation:

Research suggests that smaller class size allows for more individualized instruction and additional time on task and makes a significant difference in student achievement (especially for high-needs students), with gains especially pronounced in upper grades.²² Class size reduction is also believed to foster social engagement, reduce disciplinary problems, and contribute to a decrease in dropout rates.²³

DOE should cap high school class size at 25 students.

According to state data, the average high school class size in the rest of the state is close to 20, while the average high school class size in New York City is closer to 30 students.²⁴

The City's 2005-2009 Capital Plan allocates \$4.4 billion to "new capacity projects" over five years, aiming to produce over 63,000 new seats Citywide. New high schools seats will come from the creation of 30 Intermediate/High Schools (many of which will be Grades

6-12).²⁵ While this plan commendably seeks to alleviate overcrowding system-wide, including on the high school level, it does not offer clear-cut class size reduction targets. The Mayor and Chancellor have also suggested that they would allocate 2% of supplementary aid, awarded through the CFE lawsuit, to class size reduction. However, these efforts would focus on k-3 and completely exclude high schools.²⁶

We believe that additional funding is needed to hire more teachers and set 25 students per class as a class size ceiling.²⁷

3. RESOURCES (BOOKS, LIBRARIES, LABS, AND TECHNOLOGY)

Findings

Summary

- D A sizable majority of high school students surveyed believe that libraries, internet access, laboratories, textbooks, and computers and technology are generally available for students to use when needed.
- D Students surveyed also report that internet access, laboratories, textbooks, and computers and technology are kept up-to-date at their schools. However, about one out of every four students surveyed reported that at their schools:

 - ✓ Library resources are not up-to-date

²²U.S. Department of Education, "School-Level Correlates of Academic Achievement," 2000, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/2000303.pdf>.

²³Russell W. Rumberger, "Why Students Drop Out of School and What Can Be Done," (Keynote address, Conference on Dropouts in America, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA), 2001, www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/rumberger.pdf.

²⁴New York: Statewide Profile of the Educational System, "The State of Learning: A Report to the Governor and the Legislature on the Educational Status of the State's Schools," October, 2006, <http://www.regents.nysed.gov/2006Meetings/October2006/1006bra3a.pdf>.

²⁵Children First 2005-2009 Five-Year Capital Plan Proposed 2006 Amendment, November 2006, http://source.nycsca.org/pdf/11_06_plan_amendment_comprehensive_region_base.pdf.

²⁶New York City Department of Education. "Plan of the City of New York to Provide a Sound Basic Education to All Its Students," August 25, 2004, <http://www.cfequity.org/CityCompliance%20Plan8.26.04.pdf>.

²⁷This class size ceiling supports the New York City Council Commission on the Campaign for Fiscal Equity's recommendation that class size be capped at 25 students per class in low-performing target high schools. YouthAction NYC believes a class size cap of 25 would benefit students and teachers in all New York City public high schools. http://www.nycouncil.info/pdf_files/reports/05_11_cferreport.pdf

Data

Resources:	The following school resources are up-to-date at my school:				The following school resources are available at my school when I need to use them:			
	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	n =	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	n =
a.) Internet Access	87	10	3	101	84	14	2	98
b.) Laboratories	86	9	5	101	79	16	5	98
c.) Textbooks	83	13	4	101	93	6	1	99
d.) Computers/technology	82	16	2	101	85	14	1	99
e.) Libraries	70	23	7	101	83	13	4	99

Impact on Students

- When library materials are not up-to-date... students surveyed experience difficulties conducting research and must look elsewhere for useful information. (9/15 responses)

"There is a lack of resources to use to find research."

"Sometimes we don't get the information we need."

"I find them [library materials] at home or other places."

Recommendations:

Research suggests that outdated reading materials can do harm – spreading misinformation and perpetuating myths (especially in content areas such as history, science, and sexual education).²⁸ If high schools are to inspire students to think critically and globally and develop a sense of multicultural sensitivity, it is necessary that they provide students with information that is current, accurate, and credible. It has been demonstrated that students at schools with access to stronger media centers score significantly higher on standardized tests than students at schools with ill-equipped libraries.²⁹

DOE should provide each high school with sufficient resources to expand and maintain up-to-date collections in school libraries and purchase electronic library databases.

²⁸Mary Daniels Brown, "Outdated School Libraries: What Can You Do to Update Yours?" *Education World*, February 3, 2006, http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin/admin181.shtml.

²⁹Don Dickenson, "How Academic Libraries Help Faculty Teach and Students Learn. The 2005 Colorado Academic Library Impact Study," *Library Research Service*, 2006, www.lrs.org/documents/academic/ALIS_final.pdf.

Library collections must be constantly renewed and replenished to keep up with the times. Yet, the State of New York mandates that a mere \$6 per student be spent on school library materials and the New York City DOE does not provide additional money to help schools improve their collections.³⁰ To demonstrate the insufficiency of this funding, consider that in 2004 the average cost of a reference book was \$73.64.³¹ Based on the above figures, a high school of 500 students would exhaust its entire budget with purchase of only 41 reference books (and this does not consider needed expenditure for magazines and databases).

Substantially increasing the base funding that is allocated to all high school libraries for resources is the first step toward sufficiently updating resources and expanding collections.

Electronic databases provide students with exceptionally current and reliable information because they are renewed yearly and updated regularly. Yet, these databases are expensive because they require annual subscription renewals – the cost of which individual schools often cannot bear alone. A larger and more consistent budget for high school libraries would better enable schools to meet these expenses.

³⁰The University of the State of New York, State Education Department, State Aid Unit, "State Formula Aids and Entitlements for Schools in New York State," October 2005, <http://stateaid.nysed.gov/hndbk05.pdf>.

³¹Evan St. Lifer, "Average Book Prices 2004: Stop the Insanity," *School Library Journal*, March 1, 2004, <http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA386702.html>.

4. SCHOOL FACILITIES

Findings

Summary

- ▶ There is very strong agreement among high school students surveyed that the twelve characteristics of facilities presented (see table) are essential components of school buildings.
- ▶ Yet, at least one out of three students surveyed report each of the following highly-valued characteristics to be missing from their schools:
 - ✓ Hallways with enough space to accommodate students
 - ✓ Clean and free of pests and rodents
 - ✓ Well-lit and a comfortable temperature year-round
 - ✓ Sufficient supply of locker space
 - ✓ Access to clean drinking water

Impact on Students

- ▶ Facility issues evoked the greatest response from students surveyed, prompting more write-in remarks (46) than any other section.
- ▶ When hallways do not leave enough space to accommodate students...
Students surveyed report that there is friction and delay. (15/46 responses)
“Accidents occur because the hallways are too crowded...it makes it difficult to get to class on time”
“...causes conflicts among the students.”
“Crowded hallways lead to traffic jams and heightened tensions.”
“Crowded hallway make students late.”
- ▶ When schools are not clean...
Students surveyed report that pests appear and express feeling “grossed out” and concerned for their health. (13/46 responses)

Data

School Facilities:	School Buildings Must Have/Be...				My School Building Has/Is...			
	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	n =	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	n =
a.) Desks and chairs for each student	97	1	2	102	78	18	4	101
b.) Adequate cafeteria space	93	2	5	100	74	25	1	102
c.) Sanitary and functioning bathrooms	93	4	3	102	61	35	4	102
d.) Classrooms with enough space for each student	93	5	2	98	73	24	3	101
e.) Working windows, no leaks, no exposed wires	92	3	5	100	70	23	7	102
f.) Clean and free of pests/rodents	91	3	6	101	48	42	10	101
g.) Access to clean drinking water	91	4	5	101	58	33	9	101
h.) Well-lit and comfortable temperature year-round	90	2	8	102	50	44	6	102
i.) Accessible to handicapped/disabled students	90	4	6	101	66	24	10	101
j.) Hallways with enough space to accommodate students	90	6	4	101	42	53	5	102
k.) Sufficient gym space	88	5	7	100	69	28	3	102
l.) A sufficient supply of locker space	86	4	10	102	54	37	9	102

“Roaches still roam the floors”

“Bathroom should be kept cleaner because the unsanitary conditions are dangerous to students’ health”

“We have rats and it’s nasty...makes you not want to eat lunch in school”

“Mice and sometimes bugs...freaks out some people”

“We need to go to a clean school so that we can feel safe and feel like we are at home.”

- When schools are not well-lit and do not maintain proper temperature... students surveyed report feeling uncomfortable and becoming distracted from learning. (7/46 responses)

“It could get really hot during the summer which makes it harder to focus on your school work.”

“...can’t concentrate”

- When there are not enough desks and chairs... Students surveyed report finding themselves in positions and arrangements that are not well-suited for learning. (6/46 responses)

“Limited amount of desks results in students standing next to the windows (or chairs) and taking notes”

“People are forced to sit on the floor because there is no space in the cafeteria”

Recommendations:

In 2005, 70% of New York City high schools were classified as overcrowded.³² Studies reveal that this vast over-utilization of New York City high school buildings has severely reduced available space – diminishing access to facilities and impeding efforts to reduce class size.³³

Research suggests that, with exceedingly high enrollment, many overcrowded schools cannot provide locker space for all students. This shortage places on students the undue burden of having to carry their belongings for the

course of each day. Under these conditions, students are likely to feel unsettled and experience physical and psychological strain.³⁴

In overcrowded schools, students face the challenge of making their way through densely populated hallways on a daily basis. Students report that this predicament requires additional time to move from class to class, causing disorder and tardiness.

Most alarming is evidence suggesting that students confined to cramped spaces experience higher levels of stress and may, as a result, be more likely to exhibit withdrawal and/or aggression as coping mechanisms – behaviors that contribute to conflict and encumber the learning process.³⁵

DOE should monitor the school construction, renovation, and repair plan for New York City high schools to ensure that facilities are repaired on time and meet the basic needs of students.

DOE’s capital plan allocates \$3.8 billion for restructuring school space (i.e. school improvement, opening new charter schools, specialized capital investments), \$4.4 billion for addressing new capacity (i.e. constructing new facilities), and \$5.3 billion for investing in existing assets (i.e. building upgrades and repairs). Projects for building and/or upgrading schools should make sure to provide characteristics of high value to students surveyed (desks and chairs for each student, adequate cafeteria space, classrooms and hallways with enough space to accommodate students, well-lit spaces and comfortable temperature year-round, accessibility for physically disabled students, sufficient gym space, sanitary and functioning bathrooms, working windows, no leaks or exposed wires, clean and free of pests/rodents, access to clean drinking water, a sufficient supply of locker space.)

Special attention should be paid to the five highly-valued facility characteristics identified by students surveyed as most lacking or in greatest disrepair: a sufficient supply of locker space, hallways with enough

³²Partnership for New York City, “Progress Report on New York City School Reform,” 2005, www.nycp.org/publications/2006_09_education_report.pdf.

³³Mark Green, Public Advocate for the City of New York. “Still No Room To Learn: Crowded New York City Schools Continue To Jeopardize Smaller Class Size Plans,” (A Follow-Up Report to “No Room To Learn” and to the Class Size Summit Working Papers.) December, 2000.

³⁴Pica, V. Joseph, “Locker Rebirth,” *School Planning & Management* p.48-49, v.40 n.11, (2001), <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-80950686.html>.

³⁵Glen I. Earthman. *School Facility Conditions and Student Academic Achievement*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA’s Institute for Democracy, Education, & Access (IDEA), 2002.

space to accommodate students, a clean and pest-free environment, access to clean drinking water and well-lit and a comfortable temperature year-round.

According to the accounts of students surveyed, a number of high schools in New York City are in or are approaching a dilapidated state. One reason for this dilemma is that facility maintenance has a tendency to slip to the bottom of school improvement priority lists when tight budgets force hard decisions. Yet, rundown physical conditions can adversely affect the morale, health, and learning of students. For instance, research suggests that unregulated temperature can inhibit student learning while good lighting can contribute positively to a learner's mood, mental attitude, and performance.³⁶ Ultimately, when facilities are taken care of, students receive signals that the school environment is an appreciated place for learning.

Principals should elicit feedback on building maintenance and cleanliness from student members of School Leadership Teams.³⁷

Currently, principals and custodial engineers work together to draft an annual plan, which outlines how available capital resources will be allocated for school maintenance. Because students regularly utilize all aspects of school facilities, we believe they are most aware of their conditions and how these conditions affect safety, comfort, and learning. It would therefore make sense to incorporate the observations, concerns, and priorities of students into the design of the annual plan. Encouraging collaboration between students, principals, and custodial engineers

³⁶Mark Schneider, "Do School Facilities Affect Academic Outcomes?" *National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities*, November 2002, <http://www.edfacilities.org/pubs/outcomes.pdf>.

³⁷School Leadership Teams are the collaborative decision-making structures of school community stakeholders. Chancellor's Regulation A-655 explains, "Teams are the primary vehicles for developing school-based educational policies and ensuring that resources are aligned to implement those policies...SLTs assist in the evaluation and assessment of a school's educational programs and their effect on student achievement." SLTs must have a minimum of ten members and may not exceed a maximum of seventeen. Every SLT has three mandatory members: the school's principal, the Parent Association/Parent-Teacher Association (PA/PTA) President, and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) chapter leader. In addition to the three core members, SLTs must include an equal number of parents and staff. It is required that high school SLTs include a minimum of two students.

would improve communication and establish mutual respect. Involving students in addressing maintenance issues would also encourage students to be vigilant and develop a sense of responsibility over the condition of their physical environment.

It is also important to note that schools currently receive merely \$1.00 per square foot for maintenance, which is about a quarter of what is reported to be necessary for proper maintenance.³⁸ So, there too is a serious need to increase expense funding for ongoing maintenance and repairs.

5. CURRICULUM

Findings

Summary

- ▶ Our survey asked students which courses they most wish were available at their schools. Of 80 responses, the following five course types were mentioned most:
 - Foreign Language (14)
 - The Arts (11)
 - Home Economics: (10)
 - Advanced Placement (AP) courses (10)
 - Physical Education (7)
- ▶ All six curriculum characteristics presented in our survey (see table) appear to be of high-value to students responding.
- ▶ A significant majority of students surveyed feel that their schools are providing opportunities to take AP classes and preparing them for college and/or work.
- ▶ Yet, more than 1 out of every 4 students surveyed report that the academic curricula used at their schools do not adequately:
 - ✓ Provide opportunities for cross-cultural learning
 - ✓ Offer experiential learning through internships, trade practice, and/or work experience
 - ✓ Present history from a variety of perspectives

³⁸Citizens Budget Commission. *The Three Cs: Crowding, Crumbling and Computers*, Background on Priority Concerns for the 1999-2000 School Year in New York City. These figures have been confirmed by a DOE analysis of "State of Good Repair: Maintenance and Operations Adjusted for Inflation."

Data

Curriculum Characteristics:	A Curriculum Must ...				My Curriculum does...			
	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	n =	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	n =
a.) Prepare students academically for college/work	97	2	1	102	86	9	5	101
b.) Offer the ability to choose interesting electives	91	6	3	102	73	21	6	101
c.) Provide opportunities to take AP classes	90	1	9	102	80	15	5	100
d.) Present history from a variety of perspectives	85	3	12	100	63	28	9	101
e.) Offer experiential learning through internships, trade practice, and/or work experience	85	7	8	102	63	29	8	102
f.) Provide opportunities for cross-cultural learning	82	7	11	101	56	27	17	101

Impact on Students

- When cross-cultural learning is not infused into the curriculum... students surveyed report that they are not exposed to a robust variety of experiences and perspectives. (5/11 responses)

“You miss out on learning about other cultures”

“...less diversity of ideas”

Recommendations:

In the world of education, cultural diversity is an immensely valuable resource which, when fully embraced and utilized, has the potential to transform and enrich learning opportunities for young adults.

Research characterizes multicultural education as a humanistic philosophy, which promotes a respect for individual identity and cultural pluralism by using the personal and cultural experiences of students as the starting point for learning throughout the curriculum. Recognizing that different students have different frames of reference (and thus have unique learning styles and views to offer) a multicultural curriculum employs dialogue, reflection, and a range of other individualized strategies to explore a multiplicity of perspectives and connect students’ lives to lessons. Multicultural education has been shown to improve literacy

and mathematical proficiency and sharpen skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and conflict resolution.³⁹ When students are afforded opportunities to explore diversity and work cooperatively, they become more knowledgeable, culturally competent, and better equipped to empathize, relate, and communicate in an increasingly interdependent and multicultural world.

Principals should provide teachers with professional development and training on multicultural education to meet the varied learning needs of New York City high school students.

In order to provide students surveyed with what they value most from curriculum – opportunities for cross-cultural learning from multiple perspectives – teachers must learn effective strategies for weaving multi-cultural education across learning standards. By offering relevant workshops, instructional models, and discussion, trainings can introduce teachers to a variety of pedagogical approaches. Trainings can also be used to introduce teachers to supplemental texts and readings that are representative of a wide array of worldviews. Through multicultural professional development, teachers would be afforded the

³⁹Geneva Gay. *A Synthesis of Scholarship in Multicultural Education*. North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/le0gay.htm>

opportunity to become better equipped to explore multiple realities and promote empathy and understanding in their own classrooms.

Knowledge of academic content is of limited value without meaningful opportunities for real-world application. It is therefore vital that high school students be regularly immersed in community affairs and exposed to working world settings. This sort of experiential learning inherently engages students, allowing them to more clearly see the relevance of their studies. Through first-hand experience, students gain a sense of perspective and practical skill sets.

Principals should forge stronger connections between school and employment by offering all students workplace internships and related workplace skill-building courses.

Mayor Bloomberg affirms the need to “expand the horizons of...young people, give them an alternative vision of themselves and their futures, and expose them to career paths they might not have considered.”⁴⁰ YouthAction NYC agrees with this philosophy. We believe that experiential learning through workplace internships is an important vehicle for achieving this ideal.

DOE’s Learning to Work initiative currently offers a large number of “at-risk students” (enrolled in transfer schools, GED programs, or Young Adult Borough Centers) comprehensive work preparation, skill development, and internships across a variety of fields and work settings.

Building from this promising model, DOE should extend internship opportunities to all interested students at a wide array of nonprofit, public, and private agencies where young people can take part in furthering public good while also acquiring tangible skills and invaluable exposure to workplace dynamics.

In addition, principals should offer related elective classes, which help students begin to develop the skills that they will need for their internship placements.

⁴⁰New York City Commission for Economic Opportunity, “Increasing Opportunity and Reducing Poverty in New York City; Report to Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg,” 2006, http://www.nyc.gov/html/om/pdf/ceo_report2006.pdf.

6. SCHOOL SAFETY

Findings

Summary

- ▶ Of the ten safety characteristics presented, our data reveals that nine are of high value to students surveyed. “Using metal detectors to detect weapons” is the only safety strategy that evoked significantly less support from students (20% of students disagreed with the idea that they are a necessary safety measure and 20% more expressed uncertainty).
- ▶ A significant majority of students surveyed believe that students feel safe in their classes and schools.
- ▶ Yet, a significant number of students surveyed report the following safety problems at their schools:
 - ✓ Violence and bullying
 - ✓ Weapons
 - ✓ Employment of security personnel that are not respectful and fail to maintain order

Impact on Students

- ▶ When security guards do not behave professionally... students surveyed report diminished respect for their authority and feel that they have to look out for their own safety.
(8/16 responses)
“Security guards for the most part are cold and unfeeling”
“Kids act how they want and the security doesn’t really do anything to stop it and if they do, the students may not listen”
“Whatever happens after school happens”
“Constantly watching my back”
“I feel very concerned about my safety and always watching my back constantly”
- ▶ When schools do not use metal detectors... students surveyed report feeling more trusted.
(4/16 responses)
“I think it shows trust that our school doesn’t have metal detectors”
“It promotes a trusting environment”

Ideas for Improving School Safety:

- ▶ Add and improve quality of school security personnel (15/34 responses)

“Hire more polite and responsible security guards”

“New security guards and more security guards patrolling all perimeters...aware of everything”

- ▶ Promote shared values (4/34 responses)

“Positive atmosphere”

“Put power into the hands of students”

Recommendations:

Many consider the first responsibility of a high school to be providing a safe space for young adults to learn. Yet, the testimony that we have collected from students surveyed suggests that violence in and around high schools continues to be alarmingly widespread.

Schools often respond to safety concerns by making sweeping efforts to assert authority and “take control”

externally – beefing up security, installing scanning machines, and restricting entrances and exits.⁴¹ In addition, high school administrators often feel a need to crack down on disciplinary infractions using sanctions and methods, which can be seen through the eyes of students as threatening and punitive. Though school safety responses are intended to bring peace and calm, they more often than necessary fail to address the roots of problems and lead to students feeling further antagonized, marginalized, and unsupported.⁴²

In reality, the most effective and promising school safety solutions are those, which are preventative and proactive – placing more weight on developing healthy and supportive human relationships than on solely firming up security measures.⁴³ Violence occurs most often in schools where students feel disconnected, anonymous, and unhappy.

⁴¹Pedro A. Noguera, “Listen First: How Student Perspectives on Violence Can Be Used to Create Safer Schools,” *In Motion Magazine*, November 11, 1999, <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/pnlist1.html>.

⁴²Ibid

⁴³Ibid

Data

Safe Environment:	A Safe Environment Must ...				My School does...			
	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	n =	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	n =
a.) Ensure that students feel safe in the school building	96	2	2	101	86	10	4	101
b.) Not have weapons	96	3	1	101	71	22	7	101
c.) Ensure that students feel safe in class	94	1	5	101	87	9	4	101
d.) Employ security personnel/police that are respectful and maintain order	94	2	4	101	66	25	9	101
e.) Not have physical violence and bullying	93	3	4	101	59	32	9	101
f.) Ensure that students feel safe going/coming from school	92	2	6	101	75	19	6	101
g.) Promote tolerance (addresses bigotry and discrimination)	85	7	8	99	73	15	12	100
h.) Offer students opportunities to mediate peer conflicts	84	4	12	100	72	18	10	100
i.) Use metal detectors to detect weapons	60	20	20	99	30	60	10	100

To reduce violence, schools must aim to reduce the number of troubled students and foster a sense of community.⁴⁴ This can only be accomplished by making early and regular efforts to reach out to students, making sure that they feel known and cared for and that their most basic needs are being met.

Principals should promote safe and supportive relationships between staff and students by ensuring that safety-based training programs are continued throughout the school year, involve all staff, and are customized to meet the needs of individual high schools.

The New York City Department of Education is currently offering teachers and administrators training in bias reduction, bullying prevention, conflict resolution, peer education, and leadership through a number of promising programs. The philosophies that underlie these programs are in line with what YouthAction NYC believes – a safe school is one that communicates well, develops positive relationships, identifies and addresses problems early and appropriately, and works hard to maintain a close-knit community in a culture of tolerance and respect.

DOE’s intervention programs typically train a handful of teachers at a particular school, with the expectation that trained teachers will return to their respective schools and relay what they have learned to their colleagues. Consequently, there has been mixed results with implementation.

We recommend that school safety staff developers work *on-site* at schools, periodically training all teachers, modeling strategies in classrooms, and working closely with principals to ensure that efforts aimed at transforming school culture are visible, school-wide, and sustainable.

In many schools, security personnel are seldom given opportunities to positively interact with students. As a result, students often see them as peripheral and detached and lacking in credibility and authority. A number of students report that their school security officers are not responsive and do not behave professionally. There is a

need to more closely connect security personnel to the school community so they are better known and respected. If we expect security personnel to exhibit professionalism, we must treat them as professionals by integrating them into school affairs in meaningful ways.

DOE should require that principals include School Safety Agents (SSA) as members of School Leadership Teams and involve SSAs in regular school activities and professional development opportunities.

Through a focus group discussion, we found that students who experience higher levels of safety, comfort, and satisfaction with the conduct of their schools’ SSAs more often attend high schools that succeed in promoting positive and regular interactions between students and safety agents. Making school safety agents a part of “the little things” (events, activities, meetings, etc.) can increase familiarity and improve relationships between students and SSAs.

School Safety Agents are more likely to feel even more invested in school dynamics and responsible for safety outcomes when they are empowered and afforded authority. YouthAction NYC believes that there should be a School Safety Agent on every School Leadership Team to offer inside perspectives on student safety needs and informed ideas for school improvement.

7. PARENT AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Findings

Summary

- ▶ With regard to parent and community support, our data suggest that students surveyed strongly believe teachers should be available to discuss student progress and performance with parents and that schools should distribute to families a wide array of information on available school and community resources.
- ▶ A significant majority of students surveyed feel that teachers are in fact available to discuss student progress and performance with parents.
- ▶ Students surveyed responded inconsistently to the ideas that schools must: connect families to resources and learning opportunities in the community, engage and

⁴⁴William Glasser M.D., “School Violence from the Perspective of William Glasser,” *Journal of the ASCA, Professional School Counseling* 77-80, no. 4 (2000), <http://www.wglasser.com/violence.htm>.

Data

Parent and Community Support Efforts:	A school must ...				My school does...			
	% Agree	% Disagree	% Don't Know/No Opinion	n =	% Agree	% Disagree	% Don't Know/No Opinion	n =
a.) Have teachers who are available to discuss student progress and performance with parents	81	2	17	102	83	7	10	102
b.) Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, and social resources in community	74	5	21	101	46	25	28	102
c.) Connect families to resources and learning opportunities in the community	68	8	24	100	50	22	29	101
d.) Engage and involve parents in setting goals and evaluating programs and policies	63	12	25	102	67	14	20	102
e.) Provide parents with workshops on the college prep process and advancing learning at home	60	8	32	100	46	25	29	102
f.) Refer parents who have limited English language skills to adult classes	56	8	36	100	27	35	37	102

involve parents in setting goals and evaluating programs and policies, provide parents with workshops on the college prep process and advancing learning at home, and refer parents who have limited English language skills to adult classes. While a significant number of students surveyed expressed that they do not know about or have no opinion on these matters, they should not be disregarded as unimportant.

- ▶ At least 1 out of every 4 students surveyed reports that his/her school does not offer the following parent and community support efforts:
 - ✔ Referring parents who have limited English language skills to adult classes
 - ✔ Distributing information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, and social resources in the community
 - ✔ Providing parents with workshops on the college preparatory process and advancing learning at home
 - ✔ Connecting families to resources & learning opportunities in the community

Ideas for Improving Support From/For Parents and Community

- ▶ Direct and Regular Communication Between Parents and Teachers (9/42 responses)

“There is a link between parents and school, schools and students and students and parents. But each relationship should be informed of how the other 2 are going”

“Build connection – cooperation amongst parents and school...it can go a long way”

“Phone call should also be made to ensure a students’ well-being and education”

“Have more parent and teacher interaction”

- ▶ Hold Workshops, Conferences, and Community Meetings to Keep Parents Informed and Involved (8/42 responses)

“More workshops that concern them more”

“Allow honest open input from everyone and taking it seriously”

“There can be community meetings to discuss all the issues”

“I think more open houses should be held to inform parents on students’ progress and ways to improve”

“More programs for parents to participate in”

“Have more seminars to help parents know how to deal with difficult situations at home that affect a student’s grades in school.”

“Make parent-child days”

- ▶ Improve Parent and Community Outreach and Dissemination of Information to Families (8/42 responses)

“Provide parents with information on what the students are learning so that parents may help with the activities”

“Send more information about activities and opportunities to homes and have parents participate”

“The school could mail out a newsletter informing parents”

- ▶ Organize More Social Events (7/42 responses)

“More social meetings”

“Invite parents to a lot more events”

Recommendations:

Many students experience their high school years as emotionally and academically trying. Without sufficient support and encouragement from important figures outside of school, students are likely to struggle staying afloat. Evidence suggests that when parents are meaningfully involved and empowered within school settings, students experience improvements in attitude, behavior, and academic performance.⁴⁵

Parents know their children (their personalities, strengths, and experiences) in ways that teachers often do not. This knowledge can help teachers more fully understand their students as whole people and can be used by teachers to better connect with students and more effectively individualize instruction. Teacher-parent dialogue and partnership is necessary if educators are to truly reach the students they teach.

⁴⁵A.T. Henderson & N. Berla, “A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement,” *Center for Law and Education*, 1994, http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/23/60/0b.pdf.

When detached from school affairs, parents can see high schools as unwelcoming and intimidating places. Yet, when schools work to break down these barriers and attract wide-ranging involvement and support from families, parents and guardians perceive schools as more familiar and less hostile.⁴⁶ Parents who have not themselves graduated high school or attended college and/or who grapple with the trials and tribulations of poverty might feel isolated, powerless, and unequipped to adequately support their children. Yet, when parents and families find opportunities to network and unite, schools become invaluable assets for uplifting communities. Parents who regularly participate in school affairs gain confidence in their own abilities to help their children achieve and do a better job of creating opportunities for their children and themselves.⁴⁷

Principals should work with Parent Coordinators to survey parents annually about what is needed to most effectively advance their child’s learning and educational success.⁴⁸ Data should be used to develop learning opportunities for parents.

As part of the Chancellor’s new accountability initiatives, the DOE promises to gather more parent survey data. We believe this is a move in the right direction. To make sure that these efforts lead to real and tangible progress, principals should be held responsible for analyzing data, highlighting the most pronounced needs and concerns of parents, and attending to these priorities by offering related workshops for parents at convenient hours.

⁴⁶Pedro A. Noguera, “Transforming Urban Schools Through Investments in the Social Capital of Parents,” *In Motion Magazine*, October 17, 2004, http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/er/pn_parents.html.

⁴⁷Family Strengthening Policy Center, “An Initiative of the National Human Services Assembly,” 2004, Parental Involvement in Education, Policy Brief #3. <http://www.nydic.org/fspc/practice/documents/Brief3.pdf>

⁴⁸Parent Coordinators are staff professionals who serve as liaisons between schools and parents. They are responsible for providing parents with information about the school system and their child’s school and are expected to gather and share concerns. It is also the job of the Parent Coordinators to support existing parent organizations, such as the Parent Association and the School Leadership Team.

DOE should require that every student report card include teacher comments and information regarding available resources on how to obtain extra help for students who are in need of improvement.

In order to provide meaningful support, parents rely on detailed and regular feedback from teachers and schools on their child’s performance. While report cards currently display grades, they do not offer information on how students can improve and only sometimes include teacher comments. Therefore, we believe that every teacher should be required to share comments with students and parents on every report card. Most importantly, report cards should include extra help hours as well as important upcoming dates and available academic and community resources. This information would make report cards more useful and progress-oriented and would keep parents informed of what they can do to reinforce academic excellence or get their child appropriate assistance.

8. SCHOOL CULTURE

Findings

Summary

- ▶ Data suggest that all five school culture attributes presented (see table) on our survey are very highly valued by students surveyed.
- ▶ A significant majority of students surveyed feel that their school’s culture promotes personal responsibility.

- ▶ Yet, students surveyed perceive two highly-valued attributes of school culture to be missing at their schools:
 - ✓ Empathy
 - ✓ Trust between students, teachers, and administration
- ▶ Little more than half of students surveyed report that their schools promote trust. Yet, when personal issues do arise, most students surveyed choose to share their concerns with a trusted teacher (especially advisory teachers). Students also appear to feel comfortable talking to friends and guidance counselors about personal matters.

When you have issues or concerns to resolve at school, who do you feel most comfortable speaking to?

Teacher = 40 (advisor = 16)
 Friends = 32
 Guidance = 22
 Principal = 6
 Other = 11

(There was a total of 111 responses; students were permitted to offer multiple responses)

Impact on Students

- ▶ When schools do not nurture healthy relationships between students and teachers... students surveyed feel that their ideas and opinions are dismissed and they lose trust in school staff. (6/8 responses)

Data

School Culture:	A High School’s Culture should promote ...				My school’s culture promotes...			
	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	n =	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion	n =
a.) Personal responsibility	92	2	6	102	84	11	5	102
b.) Trust between students, teachers, and administration	92	4	4	102	58	25	17	102
c.) Negotiation, compromise, problem-solving	91	4	5	102	73	16	11	102
d.) Empathy (seeing through others’ eyes)	89	3	8	102	57	24	19	101
e.) Personal independence	88	4	8	102	76	13	11	102

“Teachers may take their authority to the extreme”
“The administration does not give enough power to students to solve problems”
“Students’ concerns often get swept under the rug”
“There is no trust between students, teachers and administration which causes conflict; Cliques and stereotypes all over — people don’t care about others”

Recommendations:

In essence, culture is the sum of a school’s collective attitudes and beliefs, norms and expectations, and interpersonal relationships. Though it is difficult to describe, school culture is easy to recognize, because it offers participants and observers a lasting impression of what is and what is not valued. Failing schools, for instance, often convey a sense of indifference, anonymity, and low expectations. However, more successful schools, where students demonstrate high levels of investment, critical thinking, and achievement, typically promote a culture of shared decision-making.⁴⁹ This sort of culture affords students opportunities to translate their common visions into meaningful actions and serve as agents of positive change.

When schools genuinely offer students trust and solicit and respect their ideas and opinions, students feel empowered and are more likely to take responsibility for their own actions.⁵⁰ While some schools view criticism from students as inappropriate and threatening, research suggests that schools that invite critique from students in a constructive and inclusive atmosphere are more likely to reduce negative resistance and dropping out. Ultimately, “the success of school improvement efforts hinges on participation in decision-making by those affected directly or indirectly by the school improvement effort.”⁵¹

DOE should include “student engagement and involvement in governance” as a measure on the school progress report that is part of DOE’s developing Children First accountability initiative.

⁴⁹Victoria Boyd. *School Context: Bridge or Barrier to Change*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. <http://www.sedl.org/change/school/culture.html>

⁵⁰Ibid

⁵¹Ibid

The Chancellor is in the beginning stages of implementing plans to comprehensively evaluate all New York City schools as part of the City’s Children First school reform accountability initiatives. In this effort, schools will be graded using progress reports and quality reviews.

As the Chancellor’s office continues developing a system for calculating overall school grades, we recommend that he consider including a measurement of how well schools engage youth in governance and decision-making. While traditional methods of assessment, which measure the end products of learning, are vital, we feel that the learning process itself should be regarded as of equal importance. Schools that listen closely to the ideas, opinions, and concerns of youth and make them valued partners in decision-making unfailingly succeed at empowering students as authentic and trusted leaders. It is important that we evaluate how well our high schools are engaging youth because the consequences of disengagement are disastrous and the rewards are great.

9. AFTER SCHOOL

Findings:

Summary

- ▶ The majority of students surveyed attend schools that offer the following four activities after school: the arts, academic extra help, athletics, and clubs.
- ▶ A significant number of students surveyed have access to SAT preparation after school (74%). Yet, considering the fact that all students aspiring to attend four-year institutions are in need of quality SAT preparation to ensure meeting admissions criteria, it is cause for concern that almost 1 in 5 students do not have SAT services available to them. It is also important to recognize that our data does not offer information on the quality of SAT preparation currently being provided students.

Recommendations:

After school programming is no longer considered a time for filling time. Parents, youth, educational professionals, and youth development experts have come to imagine after school hours instead as a time for enriching

Data

After School Activities	My school's after school activities include...			
	% Agree	% Disagree	% Don't Know	n =
a.) Art, Drama, Music, Dance	92	4	4	101
b.) Academic Extra Help	92	5	3	100
c.) Athletics	89	9	2	101
d.) Clubs	78	12	10	101
e.) SAT Prep	74	17	9	101
f.) Mentoring	60	22	18	99
g.) Cultural Affinity Group	48	31	21	100
h.) Cross-Cultural Affinity Group	43	33	23	99

the lives of young adults, through innovative activities not typically made available during the school day. Such programs are designed to facilitate the social, emotional, physical, and/or academic growth of young adults. It is believed that effective after school programming has the potential to lower rates of juvenile crime, drug use, and teen pregnancy. Studies demonstrate too that after school programming (not only academic in nature) contribute to improved student achievement.⁵²

SAT preparation is one after school offering that has become relatively more widespread in recent years as high schools continue to recognize the weight of SAT scores in college admission considerations. Research suggests that SAT coaching can raise students' scores considerably, giving clear advantage to students who can afford (or gain

access to) such courses over those who cannot.⁵³

DOE should offer all high school students access to a quality SAT preparatory course.

This year, the New York City Department of Education took a great leap forward, announcing that it would be offering the PSAT (preliminary SAT exam) to all 10th and 11th grade students free of charge. Providing students with this opportunity is but a starting point, as the purpose of obtaining a preliminary score is to inform students of where they need additional practice. The next logical step would be providing high school students with universal access to high-quality SAT preparatory instruction, so students can take advantage of their PSAT data, using it as a guide for seeking knowledge and test-taking skills in areas where they are most needed.

⁵²Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, "New Study Shows High-Performing After-School Programs Share Five Common Characteristics," 2006, http://www.sedl.org/new/pressrelease/20060215_101.html.

⁵³Jack Kaplan, "An SAT Coaching Program That Works," 2002, <http://www.fairtest.org/examarts/Spring%2002/SAT%20Coaching.html>

10. PRIORITIES

Findings

Summary

- ▶ Students surveyed consider the nine issue areas explored in this report as significant high school reform priorities. At least three out of four students classified each category as at least a medium-level priority.

In prioritizing high school reform efforts, YouthAction NYC believes it is most sensible to begin addressing issue areas that are of greatest concern to students surveyed:

- ▶ Teachers
- ▶ Resources
- ▶ Safety
- ▶ Curriculum
- ▶ Facilities

Data

Issue Areas	Priority Level				
	% High Priority	% Medium Priority	% Low Priority	% Not a Priority	n =
1.) Teachers	82	18	0	0	100
2.) Resources	80	18	1	1	101
3.) Safety	80	15	5	0	99
4.) Curriculum	80	15	4	1	101
5.) Facilities	71	21	8	0	101
6.) After School	61	34	5	0	101
7.) School Culture	58	26	11	5	101
8.) Small Class Size	57	29	12	2	100
9.) Parent and Community Involvement	35	41	18	6	101

CONCLUSION

A goal of YouthAction NYC's work has been to identify and better understand the values, experiences, and unmet needs that are common to New York City high school students. Our research suggests, across New York City neighborhoods and schools, that students surveyed share a common core of educational values. The students we spoke with and surveyed imagine and seek a high school community which includes: talented and responsive teachers, smaller class sizes, school buildings with sufficient space, modern equipment and current books and materials, an engaging curriculum, a safe and orderly environment, stronger bridges between school and home, an inclusive school culture that promotes student/teacher collaboration and participation, and a stimulating regimen of after school activities.

Yet, the high school students interviewed report that too many of these shared values and educational goals are absent in their own school experiences. Students surveyed report a continuing need for: teachers to create greater connections between content and students' lives and solicit and incorporate student opinions; smaller class sizes that afford everyone in a class the opportunity to participate and receive personal help during class; library resources that are current and relevant; clean and well-lit school buildings that are large enough to accommodate students and teachers with places to store their belongings; a curriculum that provides opportunities for experiential and cross-cultural learning; less reactive and more responsive and involved school safety agents and a better way to address violence and bullying; and more collaboration between students, teachers, and principals to improve trust, build communication, and engage students in learning.

Meeting many of these challenges (i.e. class size, materials and resources, professional development) will require additional funding envisioned in the CFE settlement, while addressing other issues (i.e. soliciting and incorporating students' experiences and ideas and developing greater trust between staff and students) will demand a renewed commitment to building a student-faculty-principal partnership.

Researchers know that when students – those most directly affected by educational policies – are afforded meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making, they gain confidence in the democratic process, adults gain a better grasp of youth needs and issues, and the likelihood increases that responsive policies and practices will be embraced by those they seek to serve.⁵⁴

A second goal of YouthAction NYC's work has been to demonstrate how high school students can uniquely devise solutions to the challenges they face when made equal partners in the process of school reform. In our work, the model YouthAction NYC uses is quite simple and adaptable. It involves students asking themselves a series of straightforward questions, which can be applied to any issue area of interest: 1.) What do I want from my high school experience? 2.) What do I need most in order to reach my objectives? 3.) What am I getting and not getting of those things I need and value most? 4.) What specific consequences result from my needs going unmet? 5.) What strategies have I observed bringing positive results in this area? 6.) What do I think can be done to better meet my needs? 7.) What role can I play in the improvement process?

These questions are designed to encourage youth to identify their broader ambitions, think logically, observe keenly and think critically, see personal change as a prerequisite for institutional change, and reason in a solution-oriented manner that reflects a sense of personal responsibility. Using this model, YouthAction NYC illustrates that when students are afforded opportunities to meaningfully address the educational issues that impact their lives, they add to critical debate what educational policy needs most – the experiences and perspectives of youth.

Across educational issue areas, students surveyed have expressed a fundamental desire to learn in climates that are *welcoming, challenging, safe, and collaborative*. This kind of environment, which strengthens relationships and creates mutual respect and interdependencies between youth and adults, can only be achieved through authentic and sustained student involvement in high school reform.

⁵⁴Shepherd Zeldin. *Youth as Agents of Adult and Community Development: Mapping the Process and Outcomes of Youth Engaged in Organizational Governance*. Applied Developmental Science, 2004.

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APPENDIX A: Roundtable Discussion Questions

YOUTHACTION NYC

I. What they do & see

1. Can you describe the work you do/role you play in the field of education?
2. What interests/concerns inspired you to take on this work?
3. What successes have you observed since you began your work? From your perspective, what's working today in New York City public high school education?

II. Defining a “Sound Basic Education” & Identifying Top Priorities

4. The CFE v. NY State lawsuit raised the question: “what is a sound basic education?” How would YOU define a “sound basic education?” (What are the elements? What do students need in order to attain a sound basic education?)
3. From your perspective, what areas of HS education are in greatest need of attention and improvement?
4. If you were given complete control over additional money earned through the CFE lawsuit, how would YOU prioritize spending for high schools?
5. What challenges have you faced in your efforts to address the high priority issues you've described?

III. Our Survey & the Youth Voice

6. Have you consulted with HS youth about their greatest needs & priorities? What are the HS kids you speak to most concerned about?
7. We'll soon be conducting a poll of our peers, regarding their educational experiences and perspectives. Do you have any suggestions about how we should go about conducting our poll?
8. What important questions do you suggest we ask students in our survey?

APPENDIX B: Focus Group Guide for Facilitators

YOUTHACTION NYC

Primer: *In this focus group we ask you to consider the wide range of students that schools must provide for — students from different neighborhoods, ethnicities, races and cultures, different learning modalities and abilities, first languages, genders, and different interests. Think of issues that are obvious to you, but also issues you think are often ignored.*

I. Broad Opening Questions

1. We'll begin by talking about the best parts of your school experience. What are the most important things that *your HS* provides?
2. Now for the most challenging parts. What are the most important things that *your HS fails to* provide?
3. If you were in charge of your school, what are the most important changes that you would make?
4. What do you want to get out of high school?
5. When you graduate, what do you think your high school education should have prepared you to be and do?

II. Resource Area Questions

In CFE v. State of New York, the New York Supreme Court declared on January 10, 2001 that the State must take steps to ensure at least the following seven resources. We are now going to ask you for your opinions and your experiences in each of these resource areas.

1. *(The first is...)* Qualified teachers, principals and other personnel.
 - What are the characteristics of a quality teacher and quality principal?
 - Do the majority of your teachers and principals meet these standards?
 - For those of you who said yes, what benefits do you see? For those of you who answered no, what negative consequences do you see?

2. *(The second is...)* Appropriate class sizes.
 - In your opinion, what is an “appropriate class size?”
 - Do your classes meet these standards?
 - For those of you who said yes, what benefits do you see? For those of you who answered no, what negative consequences do you see?
3. *(The third resource is...)* Adequate school facilities
 - How would you define an “adequate school facility?”
 - Does your school facility meet these standards?
 - For those of you who said yes, what benefits do you see? For those of you who answered no, what negative consequences do you see?
4. *(The fourth is...)* Sufficient and up to date books, supplies, libraries, educational technology and laboratories.
 - Does your school have up-to-date books, supplies, libraries, technology, & labs?
 - For those of you who said yes and have these things, what benefits do you see? For those of you who answered no, what negative consequences do you see?
5. *(The fifth is...)* A suitable curriculum. Considering that a curriculum is a set of learning standards (courses, activities, content and skills offered):
 - What do you think a “suitable curriculum” for high school students should include?
 - Does your school provide a suitable curriculum?
 - For those of you who said yes, what are the benefits of having a suitable curriculum? For those of you who answered no, what negative consequences come from not having a suitable curriculum?

6. *(The sixth is...)* Adequate resources.

- What *additional* resources and supports do students need to achieve and succeed in high school?
- *Now...think of the range of challenges that many students face: learning disabilities, physical disabilities, emotional issues, family issues, & learning English as a second language.*
- Again...what *additional* resources and supports do students need to achieve and succeed in high school?
- Does your school provide the range of additional resources and supports that we've described for *all* students to achieve and succeed in high school?
- For those of you who said yes, what benefits do you see? For those of you who answered no, what negative consequences do you see?

7. *(Finally, the seventh resource is...)* A safe orderly envi-

ronment.

- Describe a “safe and orderly environment.”
- Does your school have a “safe & orderly environment” by these standards?
- For those of you who said yes, what are the benefits of going to school in a safe and orderly environment? For those of you who answered no, what negative consequences do you see at a school that is not safe & orderly?

III. Are We Forgetting Anything?

We asked you in the beginning to consider in this focus group the wide range of students that schools must provide for — students from different neighborhoods, ethnicities, races and cultures, different learning modalities and abilities, first languages, genders, and different interests. We asked you to consider both issues that are obvious AND those that are often looked over.

Can you think of any remaining concerns you have about New York City high schools in general, or about your high school in particular, that we have not yet addressed in this focus group?

APPENDIX C: A Survey of the Educational Experiences & Priorities of New York City High School Students

DEVELOPED BY YOUTH ACTION NYC

YouthAction NYC unites public and private high school students in an effort to identify and address social issues and improve the lives of children and families. This spring, YouthAction NYC members are focused on education — studying what students and schools have and need most. Our goal is to capture the voices of youth, as a means of generating meaningful youth-lead high school reform. We greatly value your perspective and hope you will share with us your education-related observations, opinions, and creative solutions. Your responses will be collected, recorded, and used to shape youth-centered policy recommendations. However, your name will be kept anonymous and you will not be identified in any way. Thank you so much for your time.

Demographics

- What grade are you in? (Circle one) 9th 10th 11th 12th
- What high school do you attend? _____
- Do you attend a New York City public or private school? (Circle one) Public Private
- How old are you? (Circle one) 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
- Your race (optional): (Circle one) African-American/Black Latino/Hispanic White/Non-Hispanic
Asian-American Other Race:
- Where do you live? (Circle one): Manhattan Bronx Brooklyn
Staten Island Queens Other:

I. Characteristics of Teachers:

- Teachers must: (please circle one choice for each below)

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat No Opinion	Strongly Agree	Agree
a.) Be knowledgeable in his/her content area	1	2	3	4	5
b.) Be Enthusiastic	1	2	3	4	5
c.) Respect and be responsive to students	1	2	3	4	5
d.) Convey information and concepts well	1	2	3	4	5
e.) Make class interesting and connect academic content to students' lives	1	2	3	4	5
f.) Be available to give students feedback on their performance and provide extra academic help	1	2	3	4	5
g.) Ask for & incorporate students' feedback into curriculum and planning	1	2	3	4	5
h.) Promptly grade and return assignments	1	2	3	4	5
i.) Praise and recognize outstanding achievement	1	2	3	4	5
j.) OTHER: _____					

- Now, please answer based on what you experience at your school.
My school's teachers: (please put an "x" in the appropriate box for each below)

- | | YES | NO | NO OPINION |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a.) Are knowledgeable in their content areas | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b.) Are enthusiastic | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c.) Respect and are responsive to students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d.) Convey information & concepts well | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e.) Make class interesting and connect academic content to students' lives | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f.) Are available to give students feedback on their performance and provide extra academic help | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

	YES	NO	NO OPINION
g.) Ask for & incorporate students' feedback into curriculum and planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h.) Promptly grade and return assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i.) Praise and recognize outstanding achievement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j.) If NO, describe the impact: _____			

II. Class Size

- Which of the following class sizes do you think is most conducive to teaching and learning?
a.) 15-19 b.) 20-25 c.) 26-30 d.) 31-35
 - What is the average class size at your school? a.) 15-19 b.) 20-25 c.) 26-30 d.) 31-35 e.) Other: _____
 - Please answer based on your own experiences at school.
In my classes:

	YES	NO	NO OPINION
a.) There is order and students are on task	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b.) Students all know each other's names	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c.) It is noisy and distracting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d.) Most students share ideas & participate each day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e.) All students who need personal help receive it from teachers during class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f.) Every student is provided necessary materials for class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g.) If NO, describe the impact: _____			
-

III. Books, Libraries, Labs, & Technology

- Please answer below based on what you experience at your school.
The following school resources are up-to-date at my school:

	YES	NO	NOT APPLICABLE
a.) Books/reading materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b.) Libraries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c.) Laboratories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d.) Computers/technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e.) Internet Access	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f.) If NO, the impact: _____			
 - The following school resources are available at my school when I need to use them:

	YES	NO	NOT APPLICABLE
a.) Books/reading materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b.) Libraries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c.) Laboratories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d.) Computers/technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e.) Internet Access	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f.) If NO, the impact: _____			
-

IV. School Facilities

- Please answer below. School buildings must:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	No Opinion	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
a.) Have classrooms w/ enough space for each student	1	2	3	4	5
b.) Have hallways with enough space to accommodate students	1	2	3	4	5
c.) Be clean & free of pests/rodents	1	2	3	4	5
d.) Have working windows, no leaks, no exposed wires	1	2	3	4	5
e.) Be accessible to handicapped/disabled students	1	2	3	4	5
f.) Be well-lit & a comfortable temperature year-round	1	2	3	4	5
g.) Have a sufficient supply of locker space	1	2	3	4	5
h.) Have sufficient gym space	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	No Opinion	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
i.) Have adequate cafeteria space	1	2	3	4	5
j.) Have sanitary and functioning bathrooms	1	2	3	4	5
k.) Have desks and chairs for each student	1	2	3	4	5
l.) Have access to clean drinking water	1	2	3	4	5
m.) OTHER: _____					

2. Now, please answer below based on what you experience at your school.

My school:	YES	NO	NOT APPLICABLE
a.) Has classrooms w/ enough space for each student	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b.) Has hallways w/ enough space to accommodate students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c.) Is clean & free of pests/rodents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d.) Has working windows, no leaks, no exposed wires	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e.) Is accessible to handicapped/disabled students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f.) Is well-lit & a comfortable temperature year-round	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g.) Has a sufficient supply of locker space	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h.) Has sufficient gym space	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i.) Has adequate cafeteria space	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j.) Has sanitary and functioning bathrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
k.) Has desks and chairs for each student	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
l.) Has access to clean drinking water	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
n.) If NO, describe impact: _____			

V. Curriculum

1. Please answer below based on what you think a curriculum should include.

A curriculum (course offerings & learning objectives) must:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	No Opinion	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
a.) Offer experiential learning through internships, trade practice, and/or work experience	1	2	3	4	5
b.) Offer the ability to choose interesting electives	1	2	3	4	5
c.) Present history from a variety of perspectives	1	2	3	4	5
d.) Prepare students academically for college/work	1	2	3	4	5
e.) Provide opportunities to take AP classes	1	2	3	4	5
f.) Provide opportunities for cross-cultural learning	1	2	3	4	5
g.) OTHER: _____					

2. Please answer based on what you experience at your school.

MY school curriculum:

	YES	NO	NOT APPLICABLE
a.) Offers experiential learning through internships, trade practice, and work experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b.) Offers the ability to choose interesting electives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c.) Presents history from a variety of perspectives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d.) Prepares students academically for college/work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e.) Provides opportunities to take AP classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f.) Provides opportunities for cross-cultural learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g.) OTHER: _____			

3. What courses do you wish were available to you at your school?

VI. Safe Environment

1. Please answer below based on your idea of a safe school environment.

A safe school must:	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	No Opinion	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
a.) Be free of physical violence and bullying	1	2	3	4	5
b.) Be free of weapons	1	2	3	4	5
c.) Offer students opportunities to mediate peer conflicts	1	2	3	4	5
d.) Employ security personnel/police that are respectful and maintain order	1	2	3	4	5
e.) Promote tolerance (addresses bigotry and discrimination)	1	2	3	4	5
f.) Use metal detectors to detect weapons	1	2	3	4	5
g.) Ensure that students feel safe in class	1	2	3	4	5
h.) Ensure that students feel safe in the school building	1	2	3	4	5
i.) Ensure that students feel safe going/coming from school	1	2	3	4	5
j.) OTHER: _____					

2. Now, please answer below based on your experiences at school.

MY school:	YES	NO	NOT APPLICABLE
a.) Is free of physical violence and bullying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b.) Is free of weapons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c.) Offers students opportunities to mediate peer conflicts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d.) Employs security personnel/police that are respectful and maintain order	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e.) Promotes tolerance (addresses bigotry and discrimination)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f.) Uses metal detectors to detect weapons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g.) Allows me to feel safe in class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h.) Allows me to feel safe in the school building	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i.) Allows me to feel safe going/coming from school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j.) OTHER: _____			

3. What do you think can be done at your school to improve safety? (Be specific)

VII. Parent & Community Support

1. Please answer below based on what you think schools should do to develop relationships with parents and community.

Schools must:	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	No Opinion	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
a.) Engage and involve parents in setting goals and evaluating programs and policies	1	2	3	4	5	DK
b.) Connect families to resources & learning opportunities in the community	1	2	3	4	5	DK
c.) Refer parents who have limited English language skills to adult classes	1	2	3	4	5	DK
d.) Provide parents with workshops on the college prep process and advancing learning at home	1	2	3	4	5	DK
e.) Distribute info. regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, & social resources in community	1	2	3	4	5	DK
f.) Have teachers who are available to discuss student progress & performance with parents	1	2	3	4	5	DK
g.) OTHER: _____						

2. Now, please answer based on what you experience at your school.

My school:	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
a.) Engage and involve parents in setting goals and evaluating programs and policies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| b.) Connect families to resources & learning opportunities in the community | YES
<input type="checkbox"/> | NO
<input type="checkbox"/> | DON'T KNOW
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| c.) Refer parents who have limited English language skills to adult classes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d.) Provide parents with workshops on the college prep process and advancing learning at home | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e.) Distribute info. regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, & social resources in community | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f.) Have teachers who are available to discuss student progress with parents | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g.) If NO, describe impact: _____ | | | |
-
3. What do you think can be done at your school to increase support for and from parents and the community? (Be specific)
-

VIII. School Culture

1. Please answer below.
A high school's culture should promote:
- | | Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | No Opinion | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|------------|----------------|----------------|
| a.) Personal independence | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b.) Personal responsibility | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c.) Empathy (seeing through others' eyes) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d.) Negotiation, compromise, problem-solving | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e.) Trust between students, teachers, and administration | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f.) OTHER: _____ | | | | | |
-
2. Now, please answer based on what you experience at your school.
MY high school's programs and curriculum promotes:
- | | YES | NO | NO OPINION |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a.) Personal independence | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b.) Personal responsibility | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c.) Empathy (seeing through others' eyes) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d.) Negotiation, compromise, problem-solving | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e.) Trust between students, teachers, and administration | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f.) OTHER: _____ | | | |
-
3. When you have issues or concerns to resolve at school, who do you feel most comfortable speaking to?
-

IX. After School Activities

1. Please rate how important you feel it is that each of the following after school activities be offered to high school students.
- | | Not Important | Somewhat Important | Important | Very Important | Extremely Important |
|--|---------------|--------------------|-----------|----------------|---------------------|
| a.) Art, drama, music, dance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b.) Athletics | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c.) SAT prep classes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d.) Academic extra help | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e.) Mentoring | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f.) Clubs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| g.) Cultural affinity group (students of a single background meet and unite) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| h.) Cross-cultural affinity group (students of different backgrounds meet and unite) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| i.) Student government | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| j.) OTHER: _____ | | | | | |
-

2. Which of the following after school activities, classes, and clubs are offered at your high school?
Please circle either yes or no for each:
- | | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a.) Art, drama, music, dance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b.) Athletics | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c.) SAT prep classes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d.) Academic extra help | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e.) Mentoring | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f.) Clubs | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g.) Cultural affinity group (students of a single background meet and unite) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h.) Cross-cultural affinity group (students of different backgrounds meet and unite) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i.) If NO, describe impact: _____ | | | |

X. Your Priorities

Finally, please consider all of the school areas that have been discussed in this survey. Decide how high of an overall priority each is below, in your opinion:

	Not a Priority	Low Priority	Medium Priority	High Priority
a.) Teachers	1	2	3	4
b.) Small class Size	1	2	3	4
c.) Resources (books, libraries, labs, & technology)	1	2	3	4
d.) Facilities	1	2	3	4
e.) Curriculum	1	2	3	4
f.) Safe Environment	1	2	3	4
g.) Parents and Community Involvement	1	2	3	4
h.) School Culture	1	2	3	4
i.) After School Activities	1	2	3	4

APPENDIX D: Descriptive Data for Schools Participating in Survey

18 Participating Public Schools:

School	% African American	% Hispanic	% Caucasian	% Asian	% English Language Learners	% Special Education Part-Time	% Free Lunch	% Passing English Regents	% Passing Math A Regents	Graduation Rate (%)	Attendance Rate (%)	% of Teachers with Masters	% Utilization	Total Enrollment	Similar School Category*
Baruch College Campus High School	6.5	11.7	32.3	49.6	1.2	1.7	41.4	98	98.2	99	96	88.2	145	398	2
Beacon High School	17.8	28.2	46	7.9	2.9	4.4	23.1	74.2	100	91	91.8	83	119	989	6
Benjamin Cardozo High School	19.1	13.5	23.4	44.0	5.6	3.6	13.7	93.3	98.5	82.7	89.9	88.2	138.5	4245	2
Bronx Academy of Letters	38	53.2	1.3	7.6	5.1	2.5	78.5	N/A	N/A	N/A	93.4	50	50.3	75	3
Brooklyn Academy High School	85	13	1	1	2	7	N/A	80	81	N/A	75	58	N/A	327	N/A
Edward R. Murrow High School	26.9	13.2	40.6	19.2	9.5	4.9	31.1	84.4	83	79	89.3	86.7	104.9	3,814	2
Erasmus Hall	84.1	12.3	1.2	2.4	9.3	6.4	66.5	53.4	27.2	38	78.4	80.5	161.5	805	4
FLAGS High School	31.8	63.6	3.1	1.5	7.7	4	83.1	76.1	73.2	94	90.1	95	N/A	309	3
Forest Hills High School	11.1	23.1	43.2	22.6	13.8	3.3	29.7	71.7	85.6	76	90.3	81.8	138.5	3,326	3
Francis Lewis High School	14.5	20.6	20.3	44.6	11.7	3.3	20	94.3	96.5	72.8	91	88.1	169	4345	2
High School for Public Service	14.4	81.8	2.9	1	11.4	7.4	78.4	69	77.5	11.8	82.5	71.1	113.6	625	6
International High School at LaGuardia	2.4	53.5	17.6	26.5	70.9	0.2	75	38.1	0	60	94.7	93.1	264.4	446	7
Louis D. Brandeis High School	38.8	56.9	1.9	2.3	19.5	5.6	82.9	64.3	66.5	N/A	74.9	72.9	123.7	2,400	5
Millennium High School	10.7	18.9	21.4	49	1.5	4.9	65	N/A	92.5	43	95.9	80	119.1	207	2
School of the Future	19.1	23.4	39.2	18.3	0.3	13.6	25.1	99.3	85.6	85	92.1	71.9	74.4	617	1
Thurgood Marshall Academy	79.6	18.8	0.5	1	1	5	70.7	51.4	N/A	58	89	75	60	388	1
Urban Academy Lab	37.4	33.3	26.8	2.4	0.8	3.3	25.2	95	100	46	90.7	88.2	56.2	130	7
William Cullen Bryant High School	8.8	46.1	16.1	29	26.7	4	38.5	67.2	80.4	54	83.8	82.8	125.3	3,536	4
Public School City Average	35	35.7	15.2	14.1	12.9	5.3	53.9	65.5	67.8	58	83.3	77.8	105.9	NA	NA

Data derived from the New York City Department of Education's 2004-2005 Annual School Reports

* The DOE School Report Card notes: "Similar Schools are defined as those schools whose entering ninth and tenth graders have similar characteristics, including percent of ELLs, overage for grade, average daily attendance, and standardized test scores." As category numbers increase so does the level of need.

5 Participating Private Schools:

(Data Not Available) Bishop Ford High School, Collegiate School, Friends Seminary, Horace Mann, Xavier High School

APPENDIX E: Issue Assessment Worksheet

YouthAction NYC

ISSUE AREA:

What do students want from their high school experience in this area?

What do students need most in order to reach their objectives in this area?

What are students getting and not getting (of those things they need and value most)?

What specific consequences result from students' needs going unmet in this area?

What strategies/solutions have students observed or learned bring positive results in this area?

What do students think can be done to better meet their needs in this area?

What role can students play in the improvement process?

**Citizens' Committee for Children of New York is an independent
non-profit organization that works to *Secure Every Child's Birthright*
to be healthy, housed, safe and educated.**

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ABOUT CCC

Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC) has convened, informed and mobilized New Yorkers to make the city a better place for children. CCC's approach to child advocacy is fact-based and combines the best features of public policy advocacy with a tradition of citizen activism. Our focus is on identifying the causes and effects of vulnerability and disadvantage, recommending solutions to problems children face and working to make public policies, budgets, services and benefits more responsive to children. Our mission is to ensure that every New York City child is healthy, housed, educated and safe and to *Secure Every Child's Birthright* to economic, housing and developmental security. Our work aims to:

- Increase Opportunities for Achievement and Success
- Prevent Child and Family Crisis and Displacement
- Shore Up the Safety Net for Children and Families
- Enhance Child Well-Being and Quality of Life
- Advance Policies that Reward and Support Working Families

Casting light on the issues, engaging allies, fueling civic discourse, identifying improvements and envisioning alternatives has helped CCC make children a priority in New York City. CCC is a non-profit organization supported by individuals, foundations and corporations.

CITIZENS' COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN OF NEW YORK, INC.

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