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2010 Allegheny County DHS Local Government Case Competition

RAISING THE BAR AND NARROWING THE GAP: Pittsburgh Public Schools and the Pathway to the Promise

Alexa Seretti, Katie Meehan and Erin Dalton



Allegheny County Department of Human Services

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) is dedicated to meeting the human services needs of county residents, particularly the county's most vulnerable populations, through an extensive range of prevention, early intervention, crisis management and after-care services.

This report was prepared by the Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation (DARE), an office within DHS. DARE supports and publishes research related to the activities of DHS offices, including: Aging; Behavioral Health; Children, Youth and Families; Community Services and Intellectual Disability.

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Table of Contents

Figures	4
Abbreviations.....	5
Contributors.....	6
Executive Summary.....	8
2010 Case Competition	8
Conclusions and Recommendations	9
Background.....	10
DHS Case Competition History	10
Participants	11
Competition Logistics	12
The Case: Raising the Bar and Narrowing the Gap	13
Findings	17
2010 Case Competition Winners	17
Summary of Recommendations	19
Results and Conclusions	32
Survey Results	32
Conclusions	34
Appendix A: Survey Feedback	35

List of Figures & Tables

FIGURES

Figure 1: Homestead Grays' Presentation	18
Figure 2: Pledge to Pittsburgh Initiative: 10 Years of Change (Highland Park)	19
Figure 3: Creating Pathways to Success (Fort Pitt)	20
Figure 4: Raising the Bar (Birmingham)	20
Figure 5: Student First: Fulfilling the Pittsburgh Promise (Rachel Carson)	21
Figure 6: Keeping the Pittsburgh Promise: The Promise Network (Rankin).....	22
Figure 7: Raising the Bar (Birmingham)	22
Figure 8: The State of Pittsburgh Public Schools and its Children in 2020: A 10-Year Retrospective (McKees Rocks)	23
Figure 9: Allegheny County DHS Case Competition (Smithfield)	23
Figure 10: Student First: Fulfilling the Pittsburgh Promise (Rachel Carson)	24
Figure 11: Keeping the Pittsburgh Promise: The Promise Network (Rankin)	25
Figure 12: 2010 Case Competition (Ft. Duquesne)	25
Figure 13: DHS and PPS: Planting the Seeds for Success (West End)	26
Figure 14: Pittsburgh Promise: Pay it Forward (Andy Warhol)	27
Figure 15: Exploring Education Reform (Hot Metal)	27
Figure 16: Exploring Education Reform (Hot Metal)	28
Figure 17: Raising the Bar (Birmingham)	29
Figure 18: Pledge to Pittsburgh Initiative: 10 Years of Change (Highland Park)	30
Figure 19: Keeping the Pittsburgh Promise (Rankin)	30
Figure 20: DHS and PPS: Planting the Seeds for Success (West End)	31

**Glossary of
Abbreviations,
Acronyms & Terms**

CYF	Office of Children, Youth and Families
DHS	Department of Human Services
DARE	Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation
FSC	Family Support Center
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
PAL	Personal Achievement Liaison
PSSA	Pennsylvania System of School Assessment

Contributors

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) would like to thank Amy Malen and Eddy Jones from the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) for their assistance. We would also like to thank the following community stakeholders and DHS staff for their help in facilitating and judging the competition:

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Private sector companies have long held case competitions and invited graduate students to solve problems as a way to recruit both fresh ideas and the best and brightest prospective employees. The Allegheny County DHS launched its Local Government Case Competition in 2007 with the same objectives. It was hoped that the competition would generate interest in local government issues and encourage students to use what they learn in the classroom to assist DHS with some of the challenges inherent in human services delivery.

2010 CASE COMPETITION

Fifty-five students earning degrees in a number of different programs such as social work, public policy and business participated in the 2010 DHS Local Government Case Competition. They assembled at the Human Services building in Pittsburgh on Wednesday, November 10, 2010 for an opening reception, to meet their teams for the first time and to hear the case challenge. Students were asked to think of ways to enhance Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) and DHS strategies to improve educational outcomes and enhance child and family well-being for families in Pittsburgh. The 16 student teams were then given the next two days to develop their ideas and prepare to present to judges from DHS, non-profit organizations, leaders in the foundation community and professors from local universities.

The DHS and PPS Partnership

DHS and PPS have been collaborating to improve educational outcomes for children for some time. Approximately 230,000 Allegheny County residents receive services from DHS, including mental health, child protection, at-risk child development and education, drug and alcohol and housing for the homeless. The majority of individuals receiving these services live in the City of Pittsburgh. A significant percentage of services are administered to school-aged children living within the boundaries of the PPS district.

The overlap of children served by DHS and PPS and the organizations' mutual interest in improving educational outcomes and child well-being in the City of Pittsburgh led to a more formalized partnership in 2009. DHS and PPS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to share data about the children they both serve, which is enabling the organizations to more efficiently develop strategies and interventions to benefit them. DHS and PPS had been collaborating on ways to close the academic achievement gap for this group of children and were looking to Case Competition students for new ideas that challenged current standards and expectations.

Results

The four competition finalists showed an in-depth understanding of both public education and human services. They also clearly identified initiatives and partnerships in the community and schools that were already addressing achievement disparity and went beyond those to address a wider range of developmental needs. Innovative and actionable ideas were provided by many of the teams, which are summarized in the Findings section of this report and have been shared with DHS and PPS administrators.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

DHS solicited opinions about all aspects of the 2010 competition from participants—judges, students and DHS staff—in order to continue to evolve and improve the Case Competition. Feedback was received in surveys distributed and collected the final day of the competition. A summary of these findings is contained in the Results and Conclusions section and actual comments from participants are included in Appendix A.

DHS CASE COMPETITION HISTORY

As part of its 10-year anniversary celebration in 2007, Allegheny County DHS recruited 52 students from local universities pursuing graduate work in public policy and social work to envision DHS as it might look on its 20-year anniversary. Students worked together over two days to research and present their findings and recommendations to a panel of academic and industry judges. Ultimately, one team was chosen as the winner, but innovative ideas were taken from each group.

This was the first DHS Local Government Case Competition, and in subsequent competitions students were asked for their ideas on how to position Allegheny County as a leader in the environmental sustainability movement and assist a new neighborhood collaborative called the Homewood Children's Village with its five-year strategic plan. The Case Competition is an ideal way to engage graduate students in human services issues, make them aware of the Department's reach in the region and urge them to consider future employment opportunities at DHS.

The 2010 competition included students pursuing degrees in a variety of academic disciplines including social work, public policy and business. Again, the competition served as an opportunity to:

- Engage graduate students in local government issues (especially human services)
- Use local talent to provide community leaders with compelling ideas
- Build relationships among local graduate students
- Create a networking opportunity for judges and student participants
- Allow students to apply what they are learning in a tangible way

2010 Case Competition

Students were assigned to teams named for Pittsburgh's bridges and asked to imagine that it was the year 2020 and that they had been part of a team hired in 2010 to devise a plan to narrow the academic achievement gap for students involved in human services and to raise the bar for all students enrolled in the PPS District. After a decade of working on their plan, students had to imagine what their outcomes would look like and present them to community leaders (DHS senior staff, school administrators, funders, etc.)

PARTICIPANTS

Students

Fifty-five graduate students, divided among 16 teams, participated in the Case Competition. Participants included students from three local universities and seven programs of study:

- Carnegie Mellon University
 - Heinz College (21)
 - Tepper School of Business (2)
- Duquesne University
 - Graduate Center for Social and Public Policy (6)
 - John F. Donahue Graduate School of Business (4)
- University of Pittsburgh
 - School of Social Work (13)
 - Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (8)
 - Graduate School of Public Health (1)

Students were divided into interdisciplinary teams, based primarily on academic programs, but also on demographic factors such as gender, race and age. A demographic profile of the 2010 competition participants who responded to the DHS optional survey is listed below:

- Age: Students ranged in age from 22 to 45 years old (average age was 26)
- Gender: 29 women and 26 men participated
- Race:
 - Caucasian: 29
 - African American/Black: 10
 - Asian/Pacific-Islander: 10
 - Latino: 2
 - Multiracial: 1
 - Native Hawaiian: 1
 - No response: 2

Judges

The competition was judged by 19 individuals on four panels, representing community organizations, local universities, foundations, DHS staff members and winners from previous years. A subject matter expert from PPS sat on each panel. Organizations represented this year included:

- Allegheny County DHS
- Allegheny Intermediate Unit
- Duquesne University
- Hillman Foundation
- Gwen's Girls
- Pittsburgh Foundation
- Richard King Mellon Foundation
- University of Pittsburgh

Thirteen DHS staff members handled logistics and planning, ensuring that the event went smoothly.

COMPETITION LOGISTICS

Opening Reception—Wednesday, November 10, 2010

DHS kicked off the 2010 Case Competition with a catered evening reception held at the Human Services Building in downtown Pittsburgh. DHS staff members introduced the case, announced the pre-assigned teams and answered questions. Each student received a USB/Flash drive loaded with case materials including background information about PPS. Team assignments were given to students when they arrived at the reception so that they had an opportunity to get to know their team members before hearing the case challenge and strategizing over the next 48 hours.

Case Preparation—Thursday, November 11 and Friday, November 12, 2010

Teams had all day Thursday and Friday to independently conduct their research and planning. Presentations had to be e-mailed by 7:00 a.m. Saturday morning to DHS staff and all team members were required to check in by 8:00 a.m. on Saturday at the Human Services Building.

Case Presentations—Saturday, November 13, 2010

Participants and judges enjoyed a continental breakfast while rooms were assigned and presentation order was distributed. All 16 teams conducted their 20-minute presentations in front of one of four judging panels throughout the morning and first round winners were announced at lunch. DHS staff gave each team preliminary feedback that was obtained during judges' deliberations and prior to announcing first round finalists. The four judging panels then came together to hear the final four presentations, deliberate and announce the winning team which received a cash prize of \$3,000. Second and third place winners won cash prizes of \$1,500 and \$500, respectively. Fourth place team members each received a \$25 gift card.

Participants were judged on verbal presentation, technical presentation, content of presentation, scope of presentation, team performance, Q&A, team demeanor and overall impression of presentation.

THE CASE: RAISING THE BAR AND NARROWING THE GAP

PPS and the Pathway to the Promise

PPS is the largest of 43 school districts in Allegheny County and second largest in Pennsylvania. It serves approximately 26,000 students in kindergarten through grade 12 in 64 schools. In addition, early childhood programs serve three- and four-year-olds in classrooms across the city.

PPS is committed to ensuring that at least 80 percent of students complete college or a workforce certification program after graduation. To achieve this ambitious goal, PPS is participating in the Pittsburgh Promise, a program that provides eligible students with up to \$20,000 for post-secondary education. (\$5000/year for 4 years; maximum award is scheduled to increase to \$40,000 in 2012). Eligibility requires four years of attendance at a Pittsburgh Public School, attendance of 90% and a GPA of at least 2.5. More information about the Pittsburgh Promise can be found at <http://pittsburghpromise.org/>. PPS is focused on developing Promise-Ready students at every grade level. Becoming Promise-Ready entails more than

Background

mastering academic content in school. It also means developing behaviors and habits that are consistent with success in college or a career as well as exploring ambitions and dreams regarding life after high school.

The work of preparing students for success after graduation must begin early and should be reinforced at each grade level. That is why PPS launched Pathways to the Promise™, a series of steps to ensure that every student is Promise-Ready. In each school, and at all grade levels, there are a growing number of programs in place for students, parents, teachers, counselors and principals to understand how a student is progressing and to provide additional support and enrichment when needed.

A 2010 analysis of the educational outcomes for students enrolled in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) who were served by DHS showed that these students were underperforming relative to their peers. They had lower attendance, achievement on state assessments and grade point averages. DHS and PPS sought a way to close this achievement gap.

There is also a need for the bar to be raised for all children in PPS so they can successfully take advantage of Pittsburgh Promise scholarship funds and complete post-secondary education. PPS is striving to reach the goal of having at least 85 percent of students graduate and 80 percent complete college or a workforce certification program after graduation. Preliminary results indicate that the Pittsburgh Promise is having a positive effect on student attendance, graduation rates and college retention. In 2010, PPS came close to the first part of this goal with a graduation rate of more than 82 percent; although the first Promise class is not set to graduate until spring of 2012, retention rates for Promise students at four-year universities are on par with those of students nationally, hovering between 75 percent and 80 percent.

The Challenge

Students were asked to imagine that it was the year 2020 and that their team had been hired in 2010 to devise and implement a plan to narrow the academic achievement gap for students involved in human services and to raise the bar for all students who are enrolled in the PPS District. After a decade of hard work, students had to present the results of their ten-year effort to community leaders. Students were given a number of questions and considerations to address in their presentations.

Background

Questions:

- What were the major goals of your effort?
- Identify how PPS and DHS collaborated to achieve your identified goals. Did they utilize:
 - New interventions or programming?
 - Service coordination?
 - Communication/engagement strategies?
 - Technology?
- This effort had the potential to affect many different stakeholders. How did your plan address the ways in which each of these groups could be involved in planning, implementation, programming, and sustainability?
- Because resources (financial, human capital, etc.) were limited, what were your priorities for this project, both in the short- and long-term?
- What challenges did you face during implementation, and how did you respond to them?
- Funders frequently require their grantees to report on measurable outcomes. What were your outcome measures and how did you monitor them?

Considerations:

- Do **not** redesign the school system. Think about how DHS and PPS can better integrate services, extend or enhance interventions already underway and/or implement innovative strategies and programs to improve outcomes for youth.
- You may narrow the scope of your project (by demographics, geography, etc.) in order to focus your efforts, but be sure to still address all of the key questions.
- Among the concerns DHS and PPS expressed at project initiation was the need for new and innovative ideas that challenged current standards and expectations. Your team should not be afraid to think creatively and to propose far-reaching change.

Background

- Remember that children receiving services from DHS face significant life challenges that impact their ability to perform well in school. Both DHS and PPS believe in the critical role families and community play in a child's success and well-being.
- Preparing children for academic success means more than mastering content in school. It also means developing behaviors and habits that are consistent with success in college or a career as well as exploring ambitions and dreams regarding life after high school.
- When attempting to "raise the bar" don't be limited to the current Pittsburgh Promise criteria of a 2.5 GPA and 90 percent attendance. Exceeding these targets will better prepare students for post secondary education and increase their chances of attending top schools.
- The Pittsburgh Promise is just one of many potential tools that may be used to improve outcomes for students in PPS.

2010 CASE COMPETITION WINNERS

The Homestead Grays team captured first place in the 2010 competition because they capitalized on the strengths of existing institutions and programs and weaved innovative approaches into them. They figured out what was working and what was not and addressed factors that contributed to student underperformance such as instability at home and lack of early intervention. By evaluating their initial plan at five years and at ten years, they proved their ability to work toward realistic and quantifiable outcomes. The judges found the following aspects of their presentation particularly unique:

- Encouraging parental involvement through existing strong institutions such as Family Support Centers (FSC) (Data shows that youth involved in FSC programming are Promise-Ready at much higher rates.)
- Ensuring that distressed neighborhoods are Wireless Neighborhoods
- Partnering with local cellular telephone companies to give DHS-involved families access to reliable mobile technology
- Fostering connections and/or strengthening ties with cultural and religious institutions

Findings

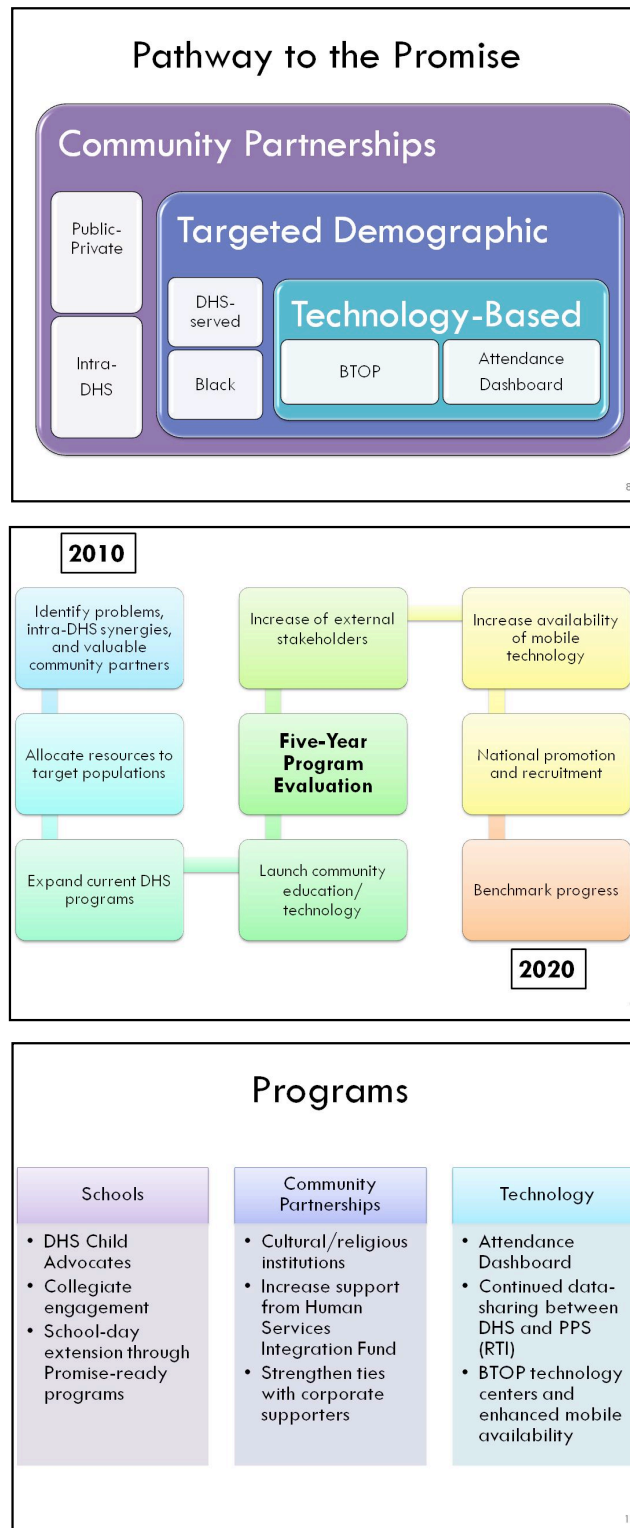


Figure 1: Homestead Grays' Presentation

The Homestead Grays' presentation can be found in its entirety at <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/search.aspx>

Findings

Rankin, Fort Pitt and Rachel Carson took second, third and fourth place, respectively. These teams proposed ideas such as forming a completely new non-profit organization, using social media to engage PPS students and more closely aligning with local universities. The remaining teams also made recommendations that judges thought were noteworthy. Those ideas are summarized in the next section.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

New ways to collect and share data

DHS and PPS have already committed to sharing data derived from their independent data systems to benefit the children they both serve. Several Case Competition teams thought this could be best achieved by creating a completely new and integrated content management system. One team made focus groups a cornerstone of their data gathering methods.

- The E-Profile and Integrated Case Management System
 - Academic progress reports can be accessed for each child
 - Managed and updated by DHS caseworkers in every school
 - All information is accessible to both DHS and schools
 - Includes community forums and news feeds and links to other resources
 - Tracks DHS services that the family receives

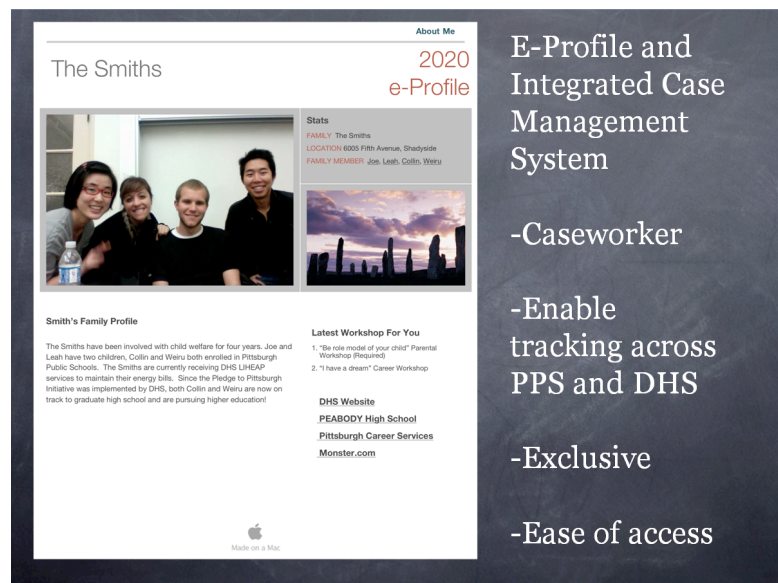


Figure 2: Pledge to Pittsburgh Initiative: 10 Years of Change (Highland Park)

Findings

- The TRACKER
 - An easy, accessible way to view student data
 - Create profile reports that track each student's GPA and attendance records and compare them to the average

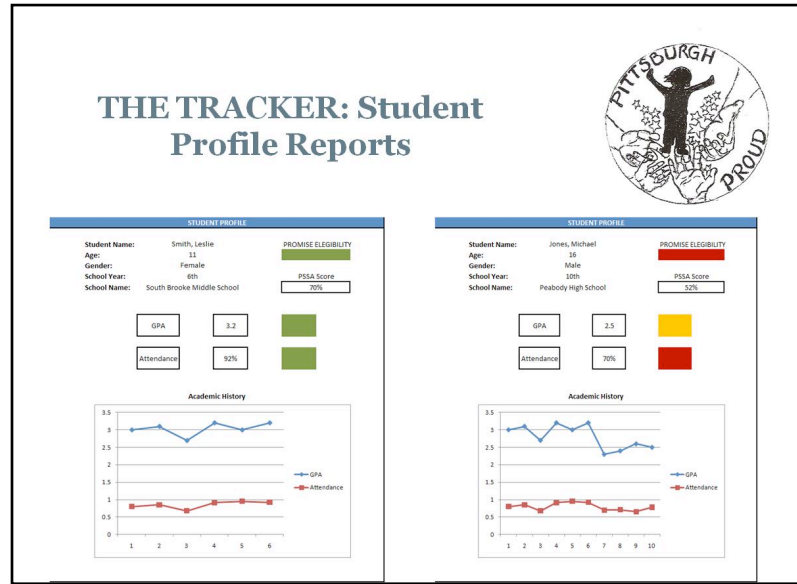


Figure 3: Creating Pathways to Success (Fort Pitt)

- Focus Groups
 - Student focus groups
 - Include groups of both high-achieving students and students not performing to potential
 - Community stakeholder focus group

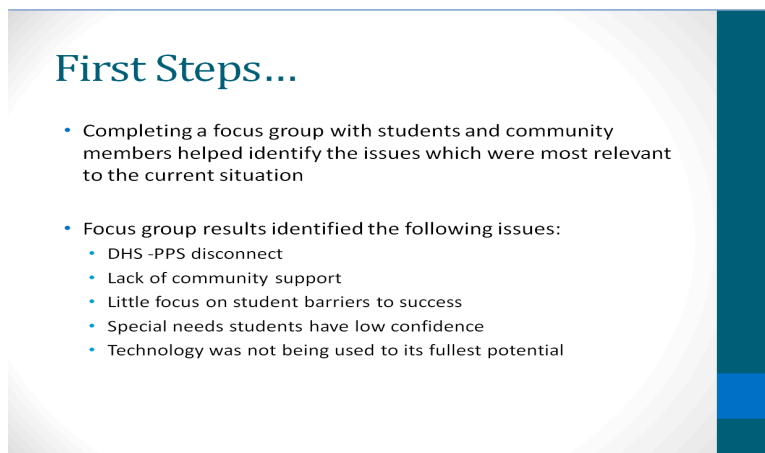


Figure 4: Raising the Bar (Birmingham)

Findings

A phased approach

Several student teams established concrete phases for their plans from the outset and assessed progress after each phase. Phases were defined in various ways. Some teams identified a specific group (e.g., elementary school students or teachers) and started implementation of their plans with those groups. One team identified phases by issues, choosing to address attendance first before moving on to positively impact GPAs and increase Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) scores.

- Successfully implement the plan with elementary school students first before launching it in middle school and high school.

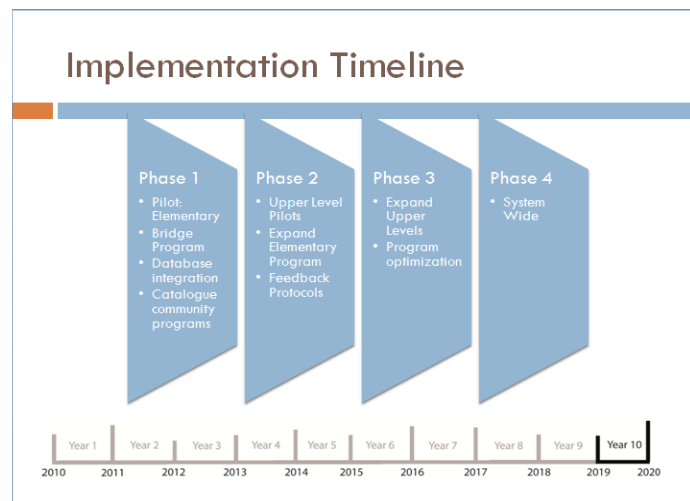


Figure 5: Student First: Fulfilling the Pittsburgh Promise (Rachel Carson)

Findings

- Empower teachers in Phase I before moving on to engage students in Phase II.

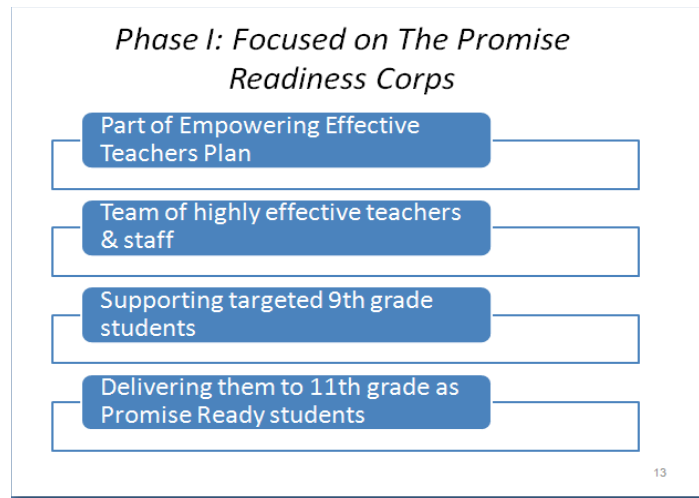


Figure 6: Keeping the Pittsburgh Promise: The Promise Network (Rankin)

- Identify and address a core issue first.

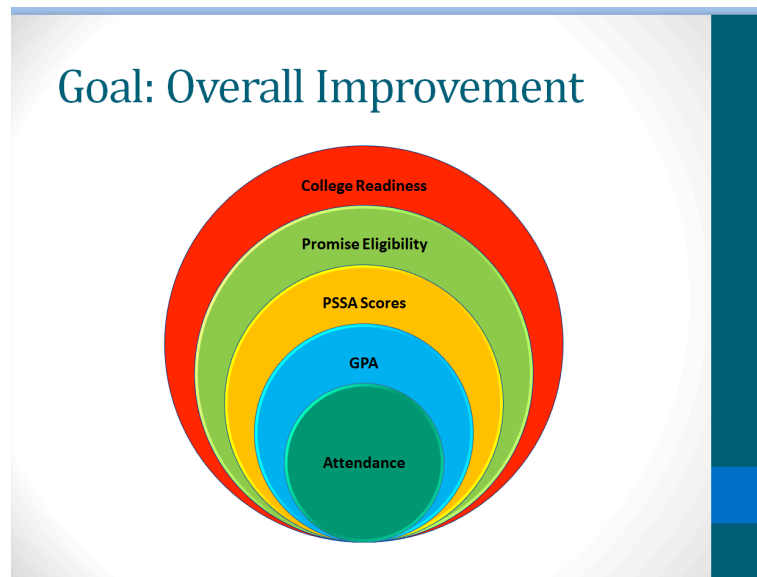


Figure 7: Raising the Bar (Birmingham)

Capitalize on existing programs and institutions

Although one team did suggest starting a completely separate non-profit organization, many teams recommended working with programs and agencies already in place.

Findings

- Rely on FSCs already delivering services in distressed communities to administer new initiatives

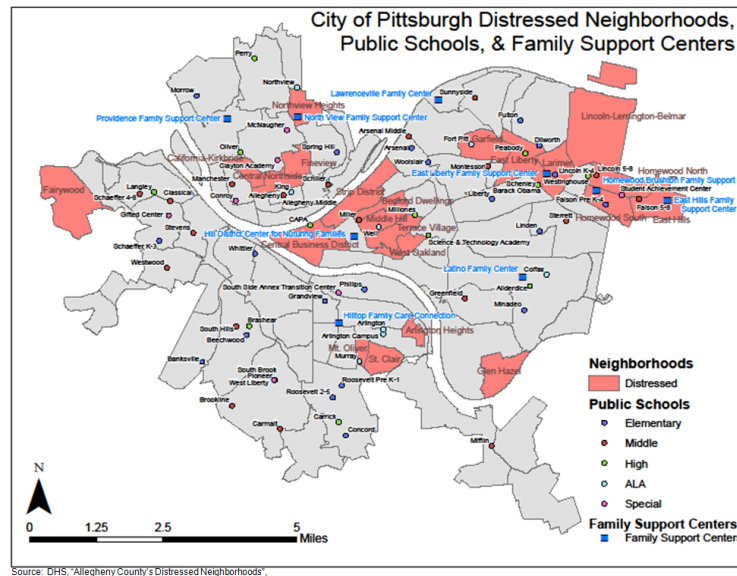


Figure 8: The State of Pittsburgh Public Schools and its Children in 2020: A 10-Year Retrospective (McKees Rocks)

- Implement a full-service community school to make delivering services to children and their families less fragmented. In addition to receiving a quality education at school, children would have access to health screenings, counseling and after-school programs, all under one roof.

PHASE II: FULL-SERVICE SCHOOL DELIVERY MODEL

"The full-service school movement represents a new era in the quest for more effective ways to deliver human services to children."



The Pittsburgh Public Schools Service Delivery Model

- Initiated a community-oriented process whereby members of the community shared responsibility for the development and organization of the FSS initiative.
- Conducted a thorough empirical literature review
- Identified existing services through the community needs assessment
- Considered the mission and vision of PPS and DHS and integrated the guiding principles of the FSS model
- Consulted with professionals, community members, parents, and stakeholders involved with the planning process and develop structures, goals, objectives and operating procedures

Source: Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, McMahon, T. J., Ward, N. L., Pruett, M. K., Davidson, L. and Griffith

Figure 9: Allegheny County DHS Case Competition (Smithfield)

Findings

- Take a more entrepreneurial approach to service delivery and think of students as “customers” who drive how services are allocated. Services would be delivered by organizations and programs already in place.

Team Approach for Efficient Allocation and Delivery of Services

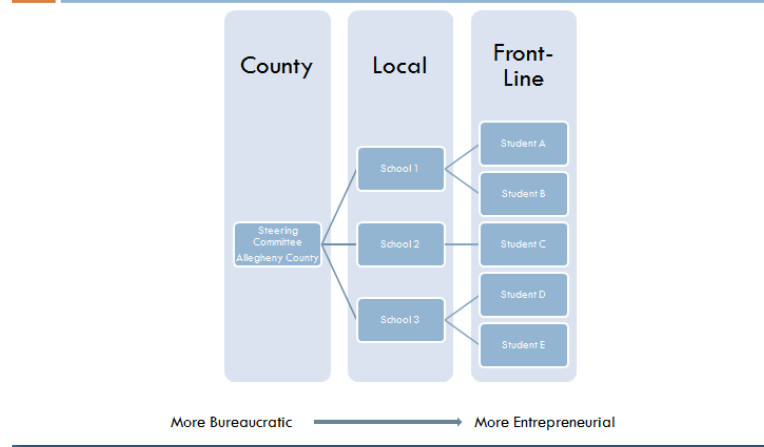


Figure 10: Student First: Fulfilling the Pittsburgh Promise (Rachel Carson)

Use mentors

The majority of student teams incorporated mentors into their plans for bridging the achievement gap and raising the bar for students enrolled in PPS. Two teams suggested requiring Promise grant recipients to perform a certain number of mentoring hours per year while they attend college. Others conceived plans to implement mentoring programs using teachers or DHS staff as mentors.

- The Promise Readiness Core
 - Comprised of a team of highly effective teachers
 - These teachers provide extra support to students in the 9th grade in order to ensure they are Promise-Ready by 11th grade
 - Over time, this consistent and targeted support would allow for Promise eligibility requirements to change (e.g., raise the GPA requirement from 2.0 to 3.0.)

Findings

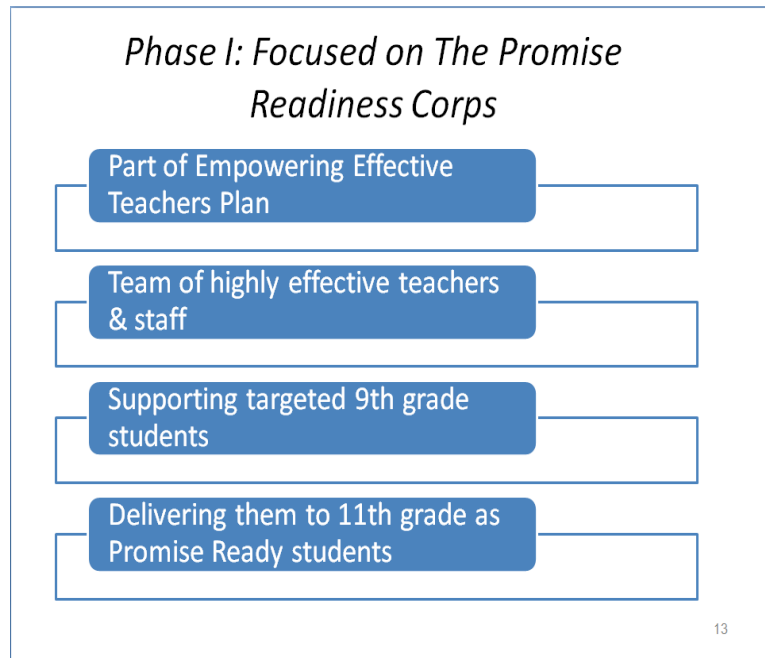


Figure 11: Keeping the Pittsburgh Promise: The Promise Network (Rankin)

- Personal Achievement Liasons (PALs)
 - Modeled after a successful mentoring program developed by the Harlem Children's Zone
 - A teacher or DHS staff member meets with student to track individual academic progress (one teacher or staff member per 30 students)
 - Provides accountability and gives students a reliable, informed person with whom to discuss goals and future plans

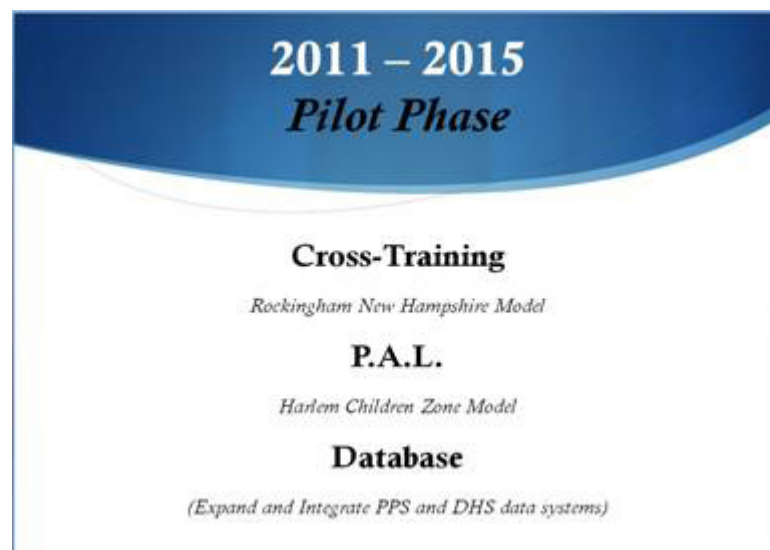


Figure 12: 2010 Case Competition (Ft. Duquesne)

Findings

- DHS Class Aide
 - Incorporate a DHS staff person into each classroom
 - Serves as additional support for teacher
 - Knows what services children are receiving outside of the classroom



Figure 13: DHS and PPS: Planting the Seeds for Success (West End)

Focus on student engagement

Several teams in the competition asserted that getting student buy-in for any plan was just as critical as a commitment from PPS teachers and DHS staff. If students are involved in goal-setting from the outset, they will be more heavily invested in outcomes.

- Target a small group of students for maximum impact.
 - According to some statistics, students with GPAs ranging from 2.0-2.5 have the greatest potential to make gains, so identify those students first.
 - Engage the targeted students with alternative educational programs and mentors.

Findings

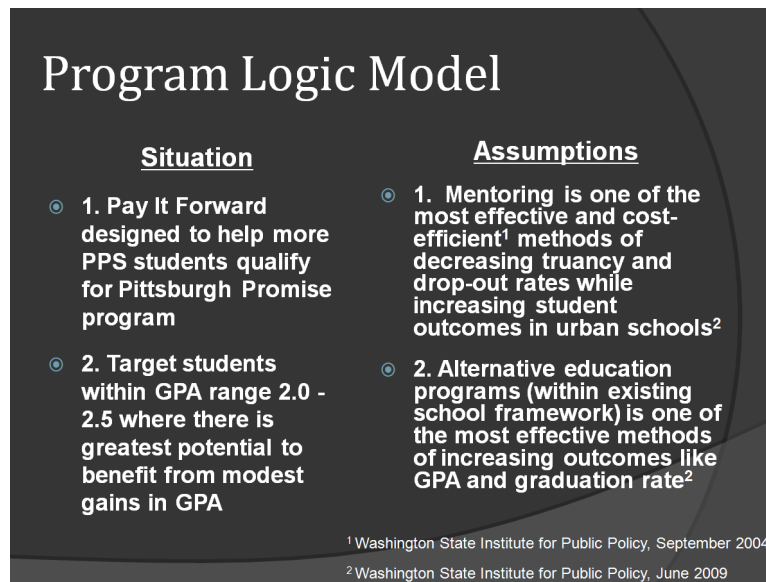


Figure 14: Pittsburgh Promise: Pay it Forward (Andy Warhol)

- Check and Connect intervention
 - Centralized office with a curriculum component
 - Shift in focus from preventing negative outcomes (dropout) to promoting positive outcomes (student competence, school success, school completion)
 - Expanded service: In an effort to improve graduation rates, include Check and Connect intervention (see below) serving all students (6th through 12th grade)

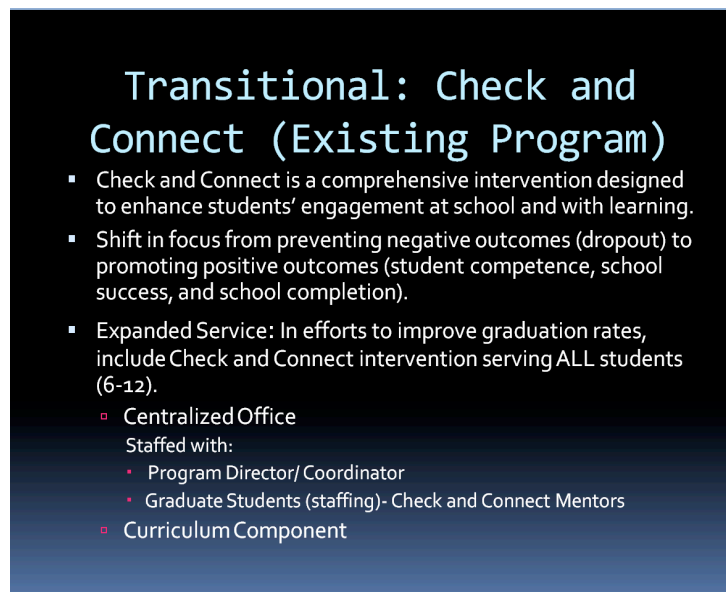


Figure 15: Exploring Educational Reform (Hot Metal)

Findings

- Workforce development program
 - Modeled after the Cristo Rey Network, a group of 24 Catholic college preparatory high schools designed to prepare urban young people, with limited educational options, for college. PPS students would participate in a work study program and work one half day a week for one semester.
- Grades 11 and 12

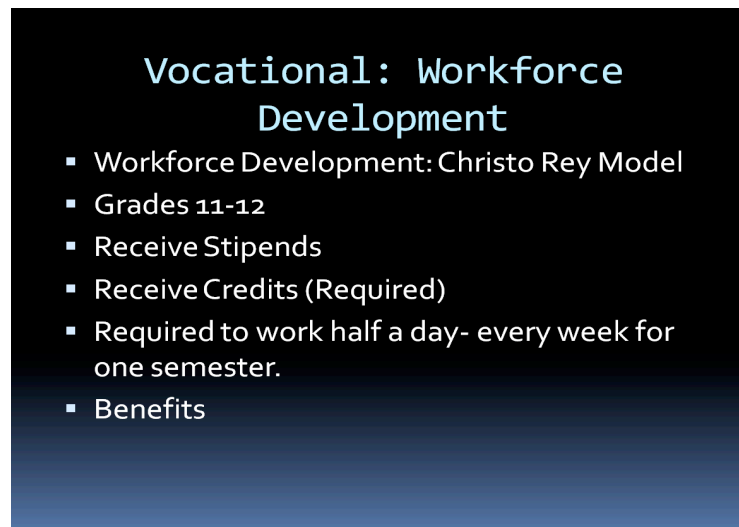


Figure 16: Exploring Educational Reform (Hot Metal)

Conduct more aggressive outreach

Several teams indicated that outreach was a major component of the successful implementation of their plans. A few teams relied on social media (Facebook) as the primary means of communication while others favored engaging stakeholders in more targeted ways.

- Community Outreach Experts
 - Reach out to parents who want to be involved in their child's education, but cannot actually come to the school for a variety of reasons (work conflicts, transportation challenges, caring for other children, language barrier).
 - Outreach experts would go to parents to make involvement more convenient for them.

Findings

- Career Partnerships with Local Businesses
 - Increase collaboration between the local business community and schools.
 - Expose youth to potential career opportunities.

Medium-Term Alternatives

2014 - 2017

Strategies	Stakeholder Benefits	Risks & Response
Empowering Pittsburgh Teachers	Matches neediest kids to teachers with the highest abilities	Cooperation of administration and teachers
Parental Education Programs	Better appreciation for education	Uninterested parents
Community Outreach Experts (Community Liaisons)	Engagement of parents and community	Poor response from the community, language barriers
Shift decision making to the "front line"	Customized solutions	Less control, overlap of resource responsibilities

Long-Term Alternatives

2018 – Present Day

Strategies	Stakeholder Benefits	Risks & Response
Student interests learning programs	Learning opportunities beyond the classroom, maximizes utility	Not enough structure, budgetary constraints
Career partnerships with local businesses	Clear definition of goal for students, increased job potential	Difficult to build relationships, disinterest from the business community, and resource limitations

Figure 17: Raising the Bar (Birmingham)

- Include local law enforcement
 - In addition to families, community stakeholders and DHS staff, one team thought it imperative to engage local law enforcement in their efforts.

Findings

Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder	Goals
Department of Human Services	Effective provision of services, meeting the human services needs of vulnerable families
Pittsburgh Public Schools	Higher graduation rates, higher eligibility for Pittsburgh Promise
Students	Good education for good jobs
Parents	Good education for children
Neighborhoods	Stronger communities
Law Enforcement	Less juvenile delinquency

Figure 18: Pledge to Pittsburgh Initiative: 10 Years of Change (Highland Park)

- Harness the power of social media to reach out to students and keep them engaged beyond their time at PPS. DHS staff and teachers can also be trained to use these tools to stay connected with students and with each other.

Phase II: The Network – Engaging Students in the Pathway to the Promise



Username:

Password:

The Promise Network™

16

Figure 19: Keeping the Pittsburgh Promise (Rankin)

Findings

PHASE 2 YEARS 2-3

- *Coordinate Services*
- *Create Social Networking Site for Stakeholders to Communicate and Coordinate*
- *Train Staff to use Social Networking Site*

Figure 20: DHS and PPS: Planting the Seeds for Success (West End)

SURVEY RESULTS

DHS values input about the Case Competition and regularly solicits feedback from students and judges via surveys. Last year, in addition to the surveys, a focus group of judges, student participants and DHS staff was convened. The feedback provided by the surveys and focus group helped to inform the design of this year's competition.

Surveys completed by this year's participants contained questions about the content and depth of the case, logistics and timing of the competition, team formation, judging criteria and scoring and prizes for participants. DHS will use the feedback to capitalize on the strengths of the 2010 competition and make improvements in some of the areas where survey respondents identified a need.

Students' Feedback

Overall, students reported a positive experience with the Case Competition:

- 96 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that the experience was positive
- Almost 90 percent liked being assigned to an interdisciplinary team
- 96 percent found the case challenging; 92 percent found the case interesting
- 85 percent agreed that they would participate in another Case Competition

Students thought that the event was well-managed:

- 97 percent believed that DHS staff members were effective in managing the event
- Almost 90 percent found the meeting locations to be adequate
- 98 percent thought that the refreshments were sufficient
- 83 percent felt the prizes were appropriate

Results & Conclusions

Despite generally positive feedback, students identified several ways in which the competition could have been improved:

- 21 percent of students thought their interaction with judges could have been more positive
- Almost 20 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that judges asked relevant and/or challenging questions
- 17 percent did not feel that the prizes were appropriate

Judges' Feedback

Judges were mostly positive when providing feedback about the Case Competition:

- 94 percent of judges agreed or strongly agreed that the experience was positive
- 100 percent found the case challenging for students
- 94 percent agreed that they would participate in the event again
- 84 percent thought students provided creative and compelling solutions to the case
- Almost 90 percent of judges agreed or strongly agreed that the interaction with students was positive

Judges agreed that the event was well-managed:

- 100 percent agreed that DHS staff members were effective in managing the event
- 100 percent felt that the meeting location was adequate
- 94 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the refreshments were sufficient

Although judges appreciated the case challenge enough to participate again and thought it was managed well, they were ambivalent about it as a means to recruit students. Twenty-seven percent neither agreed nor disagreed that this was an effective means of recruitment and six percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Written Comments

In addition to the aforementioned responses, judges provided written comments contained in Appendix A.

CONCLUSION

Judging by this year's positive feedback, the 2010 Case Competition can be considered a success. However, it has been and will continue to be our practice to use the survey results and comments, both positive and negative, to improve next year's experience for students and judges alike.

SURVEY FEEDBACK

Students' Comments

- As an international student, first year at Pittsburgh is a natural disadvantage. That means I can't contribute a lot to group discussion. But the good thing is we are assigned into multidisciplinary groups so that more experienced teammates would greatly enhance my knowledge. And throughout the process I was able to find my position. The competition for me is more like a teaming process than a competition itself. I enjoyed communication with my teammates and really appreciate their scope of knowledge. I would continue to seek opportunities like this.
- Having an extra day was great- I can't image the difficulty groups faced in previous years. I loved the interdisciplinary approach and the opportunity to meet so many new people. I learned new things about myself and how to take a collaborative approach. I loved my team and this has been a wonderful experience.
- Thank you DHS for providing feedback during the process. Also thank you for providing/serving food for our time at DHS- excellent selection!! I appreciated the diversity of participants- interdisciplinary and culturally. Judging panel was balanced- however some questions were not relevant to case study. Allowing an additional day was helpful in the prep process for teams. Perhaps next year- consider holding the competition earlier in the semester.
- Case competition is a team work- each member should try to contribute equally into work. Also, people shouldn't sign in for something they know they won't be able to dedicate sufficient amount of time to. I know our presentation wasn't the best one and I would have done it completely differently if it was an individual work. But it is not. Overall, I'm glad I participated. I just wish people were more responsible, enthusiastic and motivated about the work.
- This experience showed me how difficult coming to consensus on any huge issue can be.
- There should be more days allocated to the case. At least from Tuesday - Saturday.

Students' Comments (cont.)

- At Duquesne, our professors encouraged us in the competition by lightening out course load (slightly)...this was not the case at the other schools. The only critique I would have is somehow related to time expectations and commitments. It would have been much easier if we were all on the same schedule. I think it would level the playing field. Otherwise it was FANTASTIC. Thanks so much for the extra time and effort on your part DHS staff!
- Wonderful experience. Maybe work with teachers to see if they could give some allowances due to the intensive nature of the competition.
- This is an amazing win-win strategy. The participants put their skills and knowledge on the test and they get feedback so they can improve. The institutions get fresh, interesting ideas that can be applied or at least part of them can be feasible. One important thing to mention is that you should consider timing, because having the case at the very end of the semester is dramatically difficult since we are dealing with a lot of finals, projects and assignments. Maybe it could be beneficial to find a middle point in the semester.
- I like that we were all on interdisciplinary teams. And that we had 2 days to come up with the case. I'm hoping we can watch the finalist rounds that would be a suggested improvement.
- This program would be more efficient if students did not have to schedule around classes. Feedback was valuable in order to prepare for possible second round.
- Loved having assigned teams. Getting to know new people was one of the draws for entering the competition. Topic was difficult- team would have suffered greatly without one team member who was very knowledgeable. Liked having 2 days- got to do more research. Food was delicious. Judge asked us about funding, which was not supposed to be allowed. Felt judges were respectful of all the work we did. Thanks for organizing a fun (but exhausting!) weekend!
- It is great experience working collaboratively with students from different schools with different background and working for a same subject case. DHS is a great organizer and coordinator for this competition and very nice to all of us. Thank you!

Students' Comments (cont.)

- Two days preparation is good! More thoughtful process.
- This was my first case competition and it was difficult to know how to approach such an activity. On my own or my university's end, it would have been helpful to know what to expect and what makes an effective presentation and team. It would also be interesting to know what other teams and groups came up with, so I am eager to receive a report or some kind of document that aggregates everyone's work (perhaps making public or allow us to access everyone else's presentations?). I also want to know how feasible the solution that my team proposed is. What are additional barriers to implementing our proposed solution? Thank you for this opportunity! I enjoyed it!
- Allow a five-minute window for groups in order to extend their presentation if needed. Extend the window to plan the presentation. Meaning, extending the DHS competition an additional day to allow more room for preparing the slides and to do outside research at school facilities.
- The case is too general and long-term so that we can't hook the question very well. It makes me feel not that good. I prefer a more specific question. But the experience is very meaningful. Learning from my teammates is good experience for me.
- This was my first ever case competition and I truly enjoyed it. It was great for networking and learning about other disciplines. I really learned about time management and working the intricacies of a diverse group (that I had just met).
- My group and I appreciated immediate feedback. Having the additional day allowed group members to still keep up with their normal schedules. We quickly ran out of regular coffee in the morning. Otherwise, the refreshments were great.
- This case was challenging. The judges' questions were sharp and my teammates and I enjoyed every second of it. Thank you very much and best wishes.

Students' Comments (cont.)

- It was really helpful to have an extra day to prepare. Our group could continue to attend classes this way. Working with an interdisciplinary team ensured a multi-faceted approach to the problem and allowed us to explore different frameworks with which to address the case. It was at a difficult time in the semester but then again no time will work for everyone. Perhaps the beginning of semester 2? Students would be refreshed from break and not loaded down at the end of the semester. Thanks for the opportunity!!
- It was a great opportunity to learn about new areas of policy and to apply a little bit of what we've learned. Staff and judges were all friendly and helpful and gave useful feedback.
- Case is a little bit related to the major. Concerned member with education major may get more benefit from this case.
- The case was really challenging- learned a lot.
- There was not enough information provided on current resources, costs and effectiveness. Judges were asking for specific information on budgets, which had to be very roughly estimated given the lack of detail provided. I did not like the format of reporting on the last 10 years as if we had real data.
- Overall, great competition and well organized. I would recommend it to future graduate students.
- I thoroughly enjoyed the case competition! I feel more literature should have been developed specifically for the competition. Our documents seemed a little "rag-tag." My group cohesion was excellent. Two days of prep was ideal. DHS staff was phenomenal. Reporting from 2010 was a little weird when the judges seemed interested in gains from 2010-2020.
- The scope of this case, immense complexity with both DHS and PPS, made it challenging. We struggled to focus in on specific challenges, leading us to be unsuccessful. Having a theoretical challenge posed another obstacle and resulted in us contemplating whether or not to make up data, which we decided not to do. My team lacked motivation and was not an intellectually stimulating environment, which I had hoped for and was quite disappointing.

Students' Comments (cont.)

- I would like to see the competition take place maybe in January, just because this time period is right before finals. Schools should recognize student involvement due to the time commitment and the ideas produced. So maybe a certificate of some sort?
- Longer period for questions/presentation (maybe 30 presentations, 15 questions). A great distribution of teams between disciplines. I loved working with my team. Maybe some sort of activity/more formal networking aspect during the waiting periods. 4th place should get a prize! If they made it to the top 4 and have to present again, it kind of stinks that they don't win anything.
- There was specific question that seemed inappropriate by a judge. He asked us to "step out of character" and tell him if we had visited those schools and analyzed them during our 48 hour project. We had to answer "no." I think it left a negative perception of us with the other judges. Overall the competition was completely worthwhile and a great experience. Thank you for that! I would suggest that in the application process, it is important to ask how long people have lived in Allegheny County. It was difficult as I am from out of state and another teammate is from another country.
- This is my first year participating in the DHS case competition and I was very satisfied with the format and layout of the program. The most unique characteristic was having the opportunity to work with an interdisciplinary team where each student brought a unique and fresh perspective. I have learned so much by closely working with these students towards a common goal.

Appendix A

Judges' Comments

- Have students skip preliminary data as they can assume reviewers know it. Confer with each panel- some may have had no good cases, other several.
- Tell students not to re-present case data (too much review). Consider capping teams at 10 teams and having all judges view all (one team that was a finalist was worse than our #2 and #3). Limit time to 15 minutes (reviewing data took 5 minutes from every team).
- Presentations should be 5-10 min shorter in the final round.
- Get presentations to use remote slide change. Presentation skills very important to me, many did not have these. Shouldn't schools be teaching this? So many presentations one forgets previous ones which can impact scoring new ones.
- Day was a bit long and a lot of information was given. For the final round it would have been helpful to have hard copies of presentations- things started blending together.
- Not as innovative as I expected.
- Great lunch. Some really good ideas but some just so-so. Good case. Space worked well.
- Very interesting. Good to see such bright young people.
- Need coffee throughout the day.
- Great job by DHS and grad students. Extremely challenging but pertinent issues. Kudos to all who worked to prepare for the activity. Give our thanks to the students.