

The Consortium for Public Education

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INSIGHTS Just In ...

October 2009

In This Issue

**The Pittsburgh Foundation
plays matchmaker**

Middle-High kick off

**1,000 students crowd into
'town hall' meeting**

Quick Links

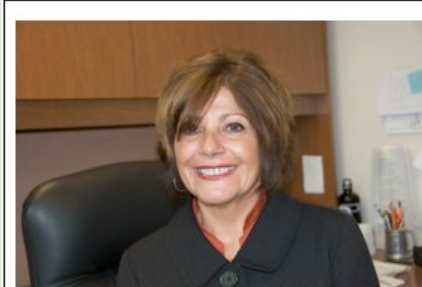


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Matchmaker, matchmaker...

When The Pittsburgh Foundation plays 'matchmaker' on October 28th, we hope you'll help

make us a match. Dr. Catherine Lobaugh hopes so too. She's worked with The Consortium for Public Education as a parent, a teacher, a building principal, and now, as Director of Early Childhood and Elementary Curriculum for her school district. Click the image above and take a minute to listen to what she has to say. Then, so that you're ready to 'make us a match' on October 28th, please take a minute now to register and create your login at [The Pittsburgh Foundation](#). Many thanks for your support.



Click image to play video

Middle-High Forum begins second two-year cohort with 15 districts

School districts participating in the second two-year cohort of The Consortium for Public Education's *Middle-High Forum* kicked off their work in September, identifying problems impeding academic achievement and planning interventions to improve performance.

Although the district teams will focus on projects specific to problems in their individual schools, planning and executing



Middle-High teams compare notes as year begins

those interventions is expected to help all of them achieve structural improvements that the *Forum* promotes. Among them are collaborative leadership; use of data to guide change; increased capacity for planning and implementing change and inclusion of student perspectives.

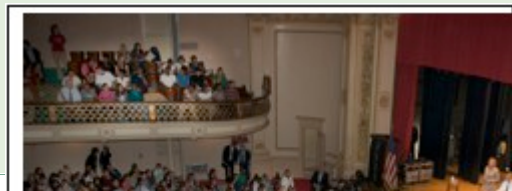
The *Forum* provides the teams with research and support for planning, implementation and evaluation. In addition, it aims to help districts by bringing them together to share ideas and best practices. "The networking among districts proved invaluable for participants in the first cohort," said The Consortium's Director of Initiatives, Mary Kay Babyak, who leads the *Forum* along with John McGrail, Bob Rodrigues, Patti Zapp and Bob Furman. This year, networking that occurs during support sessions will be expanded through a virtual exchange established on the social networking platform, Ning.com.

At the their first planning meeting, Babyak told teams in the second cohort that one of the latest imperatives in education is finding out early whether all students are "on track to graduation." She noted that research shows ninth grade is a key juncture for identifying which kids might not make it to that milestone. Because of the problems that surface for many students as they make the transition from eighth grade to high school, some districts participating in the second cohort will use the *Forum* to bring intense support to those exhibiting early warning signs such as credit deficiencies. Others will reach even further back, to focus on students experiencing problems as early as fifth and sixth grade, another transition when problems often surface.

Fifteen district teams are participating in the *Forum's* current cohort. They have been divided into two groups, each of which will meet five times annually. Special sessions also will be held to bring together teams working on similar issues, including ways to revamp learning for a generation of students who have grown up using technology in their daily lives, the so-called "digital natives." Districts participating include: Albert Gallatin; Allegheny Valley; Bethel Park; Chartiers Valley; Elizabeth Forward; Franklin Regional; Frazier; Greensburg-Salem; Laurel Highlands; Monessen City; Sharon City; Steel Valley; West Mifflin Area; South Allegheny and Upper St. Clair.

The first cohort of teams wrapped up its work in June. Although short-term outcomes of most projects are still in the evaluation stage, some already have recorded improvements such as sharp reductions in tardiness or absenteeism. Longer-term outcomes will take several years to monitor and analyze.

Civics learning and democracy 'come alive' for 1,000 students attending 'town hall' meeting



If kids could implement a few reforms to improve the learning that prepares them for citizenship, they'd introduce civics classes as early as elementary school; give students more freedom to make decisions; take more stock of student views on school policies and put more emphasis on debate and critical thinking.

Students offered those ideas and others at a town hall meeting where Pennsylvania's First Lady and the state Secretary of Education engaged them in a dialogue about democracy and how well they believe they're being prepared for civic responsibilities. With support from The Grable Foundation and the Heinz Endowments, The Consortium for Public Education organized the meeting, which drew nearly 1,000 high school students from 34 districts in six counties across the region. The event kicked off a statewide bus tour during which U.S. Third Circuit Court Judge Marjorie O. Rendell is promoting greater emphasis on civics education and experiences that make democracy "come alive" for students. The Allegheny Intermediate Unit co-hosted the meeting and a luncheon that followed for administrators from participating districts.

"The format gave kids a chance to do exactly what Judge Rendell is encouraging," said The Consortium's Associate Executive Director, Steve Seliy, who orchestrated the event. "They were thoroughly engaged and they rose to the challenge with some really good ideas."

"It is open dialogue on which democracy is based," Judge Rendell told the students at the outset of the discussion, which she guided along with State Secretary of Education, Gerald Zahorchak. Among the questions she raised was what changes in their schools and civics learning might increase student involvement.

"We don't have enough debate," one Baldwin-Whitehall High School student offered. "We're spoon fed too much."

A number said they felt schools didn't solicit student input enough or permit young adults to make enough of their own decisions. Among the most topical examples came from a student who questioned why districts, communities or even parents should have determined whether it was appropriate for him or his peers to watch a presidential address when they're almost, if not already, voting age. He was referring to the decision in some districts not to air President Obama's recent televised talk about education because of political messages they thought it might convey. Judge Rendell encouraged the student to make his views known in a time-honored democratic way: by writing an Op-Ed for a local newspaper or a letter to the editor.



1,000 students gathered for a 'town hall' meeting with Pennsylvania's First Lady and the Secretary of Education

Some students also said they faced too many restrictions in school. Others countered that view, including a young woman from Allegheny Valley School District's Springdale Junior Senior High School who suggested that staying within boundaries that schools set is practice for living in a democracy. "I feel so blessed to have the rights we do," she said. "We can't just go out into the world and have no rules. That would be chaos. We need rules too."

Nor was Judge Rendell's give-and-take with students confined to criticism or defense of their learning experiences. Among other highpoints, she shared a personal reflection on the moment in her judicial career that impassioned her about promoting civics education and invited students to relate turning points in their own views of democracy. For Judge Rendell, the profound meaning of the freedoms our country enjoys came when she presided over a naturalization ceremony for immigrants, some of whom had no doubt fled oppression.

One Ringgold High School student said he'd taken no interest in civic learning or engagement until last year's presidential race. "When Obama was elected, it pushed me to make that step. It made me proud to be a black American," he said.

A young man from Moon Area High School said, "It was actually coming here today, hearing other students, that I realized my opinion matters."

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