



Philadelphia Education Fund

## SECONDARY EDUCATION PLANNING

### What the Research Shows: Student Engagement

Over the past two decades, Philadelphia has placed neighborhood high schools at the center of secondary education reform. One of the most ambitious urban education reforms nationwide began right here, with the creation of the Philadelphia High Schools Collaborative in 1988.

Eight years into the reforms, in 1996, the Philadelphia Educational Longitudinal Study (PELS) was created to better understand the student experience in urban high schools. PELS follows more than 2,000 students (about 10% of the 1995-96 8<sup>th</sup> grade cohort) in our public schools through to 2003-04, three years past ‘on-time’ graduation.

That same year, Research for Action released the *Five School Study: Restructuring Philadelphia’s Comprehensive High Schools*, documenting the city’s reform effort. The study shows that one of the most striking features in classrooms was the **lack of opportunity for student engagement**. The value that students place on engagement is explicit and persuasive.

Taken together, this research—PELS and the *Five School Study*—remain vital to our effort to keep urban youth on track to graduate and achieve post-secondary success. Here, PELS affords us another look at student engagement in 1998, ten years into the reform process.

*Here’s what 10<sup>th</sup> graders said about their classroom experience, by region<sup>i</sup>:*

#### Instruction

*Students report equal amounts of lecture and discussion in math class. In all but two regions, over half of the students said that their math teacher lectures for most of the period almost every day. Students reported with almost the same frequency that they participate in class discussion regularly.*

Teacher lectures for most of class almost every day		Rich student discussion in class almost every day	
CEO	65%	Central East	24%
EMO	59%	Central	23%
East	58%	Northeast	23%
Northwest	58%	Northwest	21%
Central	55%	North	20%
Northeast	55%	EMO	18%
West	51%	South	18%
North	51%	Southwest	17%
Southwest	47%	East	16%
South	45%	Center City	15%
Center City	43%	West	14%
Central East	43%	CEO	12%



## Teacher Expectations

Students feel that they should try hard, but they are not necessarily expected to go to college. Across regions, the majority of students said that their teachers expect them to do their best. Fewer students (in some regions, about one-third) report that teachers expected them to go to college.

My teachers expect me to do my best		My teachers expect me to do go to college	
Northeast	85%	Northwest	60%
Northwest	83%	Central	55%
East	81%	Central East	55%
Central East	79%	West	51%
Central	78%	Center City	50%
West	78%	North	50%
South	77%	Southwest	43%
North	73%	South	40%
Center City	73%	CEO	38%
EMO	73%	Northeast	38%
Southwest	67%	EMO	36%
CEO	65%	East	29%

## Rigor

Students feel challenged in class but don't always seek help. In most regions, at least half of the students feel challenged in math class. However, for those students who needed help, few report getting help through school-based programs.

I was challenged in math almost every day		I attended programs for help with schoolwork	
EMO	65%	Central East	24%
Northeast	59%	Central	23%
Northwest	58%	Northeast	23%
South	58%	Northwest	21%
Center City	55%	North	20%
Central	55%	EMO	18%
Central East	51%	South	18%
East	51%	Southwest	17%
West	47%	East	16%
Southwest	45%	Center City	15%
North	43%	West	14%
CEO	43%	CEO	12%

## School Community

Students feel they are known and cared about. Across the District, over two-thirds of students said that most teachers know who they are. Equally encouraging, few students felt that no one at school cared about them.

Teachers know me by name		Nobody at school really cares about me	
Center City	87%	CEO	20%
Southwest	79%	South	14%
South	77%	Center City	14%
CEO	75%	Southwest	14%
East	75%	North	13%
EMO	75%	Central	12%
Central	74%	Northeast	12%
Central East	74%	West	11%
West	66%	Central East	10%
North	65%	Northwest	8%
Northwest	61%	EMO	7%
Northeast	55%	East	7%

<sup>i</sup> It is important to note that at the time of PELS (1997-98 to 2003-04), some regions were yet to be created or were just coming into existence. For the purposes of this Brief, we grouped schools into their 2006-07 regions.

